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Editor's Note

The College of Arts and Sciences prides itself on being the "heart of the BU experience," and we—the instructors and staff of the Writing Program—pride ourselves on the centrality of our program to that experience: nearly all BU students take at least one class from the diverse offerings of the Writing Program. So, it seems a fitting connection to be reminded of a day last fall, when, hurrying on my way to a writing class, I was captivated by an advertisement on the side of the bus shelter that stands in front of the CAS building on Commonwealth Avenue. The image presented a highly feminized robot—a fembot, no less—with the clever caption "i text, therefore IM." We could dismiss this play on words as nothing more than an amusing advertising ploy, yet I was struck by how neatly the words complemented Descartes' famous proposition, "I think, therefore I am." Serendipitously, the fembot of Comm. Ave. (as Bostonites, local and transplanted, call the street along which BU is situated) gives this statement of consciousness a 21st century gloss, completing the stimulating circle that describes critical thought, communication, and the creation of text.

Let's leave aside the contentious arguments about just what kind of writing is created through the act of technological texting; let's focus instead on the broader meaning of text and extrapolate from the cool quotient of the fembot's aphorism to assert, "I write, therefore I am." But how do students practice this contract between writing and identity within the liberal arts education that BU offers? Let's draw further on the connections that our glossy fembot suggests to consider writing as an affirming and performative act that enables students to enter, with confidence, not only their immediate scholarly communities, but also their vocations and avocations beyond the university experience.

As the fembot proclaims, the art of producing text is a fundamentally affirming act: it pairs thought and identity in the conscious act of writing. In other words, the text has a point of view, or as we would more likely term it, an argument. The twelve student authors represented here have been selected because their work presents compelling and thoughtful points of view, developed out of a passion for inquiry and refined through discussion and revision. Indeed, *WR*—a journal to be produced annually drawing on the strongest works of students within the Writing Program—showcases these individual voices: from Natalie Lam's elegantly wrought discussion of the demanding truth of Kafka's works, to Jenessa Job's meditation on the meaning of autobiography in *The Woman Warrior*, and to Michele Bounanduci's extended explication of a single work by Emily Dickinson, the voices of these student authors ring clear as they engage with texts and sources from their writing seminars in various disciplines. The centrality of this engagement to the writing process is further underscored by the students in their introductory comments: George Brova, the author of "The Emergence of Environmental and Social Sustainability," notes the importance of a "strong passion or even a personal infatuation" for the topic; Perry Schein finds his topic in the meeting place between his professional interests as an engineering student and the poetry of T.S. Eliot; and Patrick Duggan reflects on the "great jumping-off point and lingering question" that inspired him to explore Oscar Wilde's view of aestheticism. These students, as representatives of their peers, give us a timely reminder of the importance of passion to even the most academic modes of unity and argumentation.

Writing is also an act of performance, a notion which the directors of the Writing Program have actively endorsed. First, Professor Michael Prince, the founding director of the program, consistently reminded instructors and students alike of the comparisons between training as an athlete or a musician and the journey of a writer: the quality of the performance rests on the supporting preparation and practice. Now, current director Professor Joseph Bizup reaffirms the vision of writing as an act that moves from cognition to creation in a series of performative movements: our students imagine and envision the intellectual conversation through the readings of texts, rehearse the academic argument in class discussion, and create their own contributions to this scholarly perfor-

mance through the process of writing and revision. Many of the students whose essays are included in this inaugural edition of *WR* reflect on these aspects of their work: Aneesh Acharya gives us a lighthearted glimpse of the preparation and revision behind his timely analysis of financial institutions; Rachel Fogley explains the painstaking process of annotation and argument-development; and other students similarly highlight the importance of peer revision, instructor feedback, and presentation of their ideas to a wider audience as a means of refining their arguments.

Our Comm. Ave. fembot also reminds us that text is embedded in networks. In their comments the student authors presented here bring this notion into the university context: writing is not only a way to express an individual voice, but is also a means to enter an intellectual conversation. These students, whose work represents much of the gamut of Writing Program topics from the humanities to the social and natural sciences, are inspired (as Chris Meyer, the author of "The FSA Photographs" writes) by the views of significant authors in relevant fields to pursue their own intellectual investigations. The students—as Gordon Towne in "Peak Oil" and Militza Zikatanova in "Legend of King Cormac and King Conn" so ably demonstrate—engage with relevant thinkers, ideas, and texts in the formation of their own arguments. They draw, as Mariah Sondergard shows in "Identity in *Ulysses*," on critical scholarly sources to illuminate their own discussions, and in so doing, learn the conventions of the academic conversation: engaging with texts, whether these are factual, exhibit, argument or theory sources; finding a question that can be meaningfully pursued; identifying gaps in drafts; and working with the feedback of colleagues to produce a stronger, more compelling argument.

It takes courage to join these active and frequently intimidating conversations, and as we present these essays, I reflect on the Comm. Ave. fembot's final lesson: that writing now, more than ever, takes place in the domain of technology. *WR*, as a new online journal, is evidence of that shift. Far more significant, though, is the way in which students now create and store their work in cyberspace: they post and revise their work via Blackboard folders; create communal spaces where they collaborate on writing projects; and upload portfolios with illustrations and links to other technologically enhanced sites. This confluence of technology and the public performance of writing means that students now contribute to the

scholarly community far earlier, and in a far more transparent way, than previous generations. These essays are a courageous foray into that community, and we, as readers, should engage with the authors in a conversation that is as encouraging as it is critical.

On behalf of the editorial board, which in turn represents the instructors who teach the great diversity of classes in the Writing Program at Boston University, I welcome the student authors whose work is presented in this first issue of *WR*. They enter the scholarly conversation knowing that what they have to say perhaps represents a beginning, rather than a final position. Indeed, several of the authors reflected just this wish as part of their comments: if only they could write or revise a little more! Instead, the essays have been lightly copy edited, and most are presented here in the same version that students submitted to their instructors. To draw on Natalie Lam's reflection of Kafka, writers must confront the "paradox and struggle" inherent in any act of writing. *WR* celebrates the work of these twelve students who have so ably recognized and taken up the struggle of the act of writing.

— Deborah Breen

Acknowledgement

This online journal is a new venture for the CAS Writing Program, but it follows in the footsteps of an earlier collection of students' work, the *Journal of Exemplary Writing*, edited by Allison Adair in 2006.

From the Writer

For this paper, my professor asked the class to write an essay centered on an Emily Dickinson poem that "pulls you in different directions." My approach for this essay, and I have my professor to thank for this, was to write it in several steps. The paper started with a simple assignment: choose a poem which can be read in more than one way, or which seems to have more than one meaning, and write a page or two about it. With the poem itself analyzed, it then became a matter of linking this analysis to Dickinson's works as a whole—using her hundreds of poems, her personal letters, and her manuscripts to build a larger argument incorporating the original poem.

I chose "The Angle of a Landscape—" because of the way Dickinson's own perspective changes drastically in one instant within the poem, when she awakens and mistakes a bough of apples outside her bedroom window for an angled landscape. It struck me that Dickinson was commenting on how the entire scale and nature of an object depends entirely on one's viewpoint, and how, in a larger sense, this might relate to poetry itself as well as Dickinson's dedication to poetry as an art form. The most difficult part of this assignment for me was to avoid creating an argument that was too broad or vague. I had developed an idea—that poetry, for Dickinson, combines her need for both the changing and unchanging elements in her life. In order to make the most concrete argument possible, I searched through her poems, letters, and manuscripts to find textual proof to back up each of my claims along the way. In the end, I believe it was the multi-layered approach I took, as well as my professor's guidance and encouragement, which enabled me to create such a strong final product.

— Michele Buonanduci

Michele Buonanduci

Prize Essay Winner

"These—never stir at all—": The Static and Dynamic in Dickinson

"The Angle of a Landscape—" (#578) brings together two of the most prominent themes in Emily Dickinson's poetry—the variability of nature in the outside world, and the constancy of her own domestic surroundings. These take their form in the steadfast landmarks and changing seasons, viewed daily from Dickinson's own bedroom window. Dickinson often fluctuates in her poetic works between a desire for confinement and an affinity for the boundless natural world. This particular poem, which encapsulates these two converse and seemingly irreconcilable extremes, implies that Dickinson may have found a way to rectify her indecision through her own self-expression. The nature of poetry itself and Dickinson's own poetic form enable her to combine the static and the dynamic, without choosing between the two.

Upon waking, Dickinson's "open eye" is "Accost[ed]" by "The Angle of a Landscape—," which, presumably when she rights herself, turns out to be "just a Bough of Apples— / Held slanting, in the Sky—." What is implied in this scenario is the importance of perspective and its effect on how one views both the nature of an object (or a person, or a place, or an idea), and its scale. Just by a "slant" of her head, which can also be taken as a "slant" in thought, what initially appeared to be a vast landscape is reduced to something else entirely—something much smaller in scale and closer in distance—a branch of apples, quite nearly within reach.

Dickinson plays with similar themes of perspective and scale, as well as passing time and constancy, throughout the poem. As time goes on, she views the landscape change. One day, the tree outside her window

has "Emerald Bough[s]," and then, upon wakening, she finds these to be replaced by the "Diamonds" of snow. It seems both natural and fluid, the way "The Seasons—shift—[her] Picture—," like a slideshow or a reel of film, and yet markedly, some things remain unaffected by the continuous cycle of nature— landmarks such as "The Chimney—and the Hill—" "never stir at all—." All of this, meanwhile—the turning of the seasons (the passing of time) and the vast landscape (the outside world) she sees—fit, it seems, "Between [her] Curtain and the Wall," what she calls "an ample Crack." Thus, the expansive scale of the passing seasons and the landscape she describes, fill, to her eyes, the mere inches between where her curtain ends and her wall begins.

This, then, leads one to shift his or her own perspective on what the poem itself is saying. The poem, which emphasizes the importance of perspective, must itself be looked at from more than one "angle." It is one thing to look at it through Dickinson's own eyes—looking out through her window onto a branch, or a landscape, or the changing seasons. However, this viewpoint can make a distinctive turn, looking instead *in* on the bedroom in which Dickinson literally passed her life away. It may well be noticed that among the landmarks that "never stir at all—," her own "Curtain" and "Wall" may very well be included. For as time and seasons pass, it is still in her same bed that she "wake[s]" to mark these changes, and through the same window that they appear to her eyes.

Dickinson wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a lifelong correspondent: "I do not cross my Father's ground to any House or town" (Johnson 461). When asked whether she ever felt a "want of employment," being confined so, she replied, "I never thought of conceiving that I could ever have the slightest approach to such a want in all future time," adding, "I feel that I have not expressed myself strongly enough" (474). Within this context, it seems an understatement to say that Dickinson was content to pass her life away within the walls of her childhood home. Indeed, there is certainly something to be said for the value of security such unchanging familiarity provides her, and this can be read through the lines of her poetry. In "The Wind begun to rock the Grass" (#796), Dickinson writes of a gathering storm. The "livid Claw" of lightning and the rains which "wrecked the Sky," violent forces of nature, in the final lines "overlooked [her] Father's House." Thus, her father's house is safe from the chaotic

forces of the outside world. The house is untouched by the unpredictability of nature, which can be read as life beyond her father's grounds, of which it seems she holds some intangible fear.

Dickinson struggles with this seeming need for physical confinement in poem #456, "A Prison gets to be a friend—." She writes of a "Kinsmanship" which develops between the prison and its inmate. Further, the one held captive comes to "look with gratitude" towards it, and to regard as "sweet" those features which "Day and Night— / Are present to us—as Our Own—." Again, its familiarity, its certainty, its predictability—these are the things which make a prison a source of comfort to Dickinson. Her "Prison," which we can assume is her house, has all of these features. However, while in this instance it is a prison in which Dickinson dwells, a mere ten poems later it is within "Possibility" (#466). It seems that she wavers between a desire for the unchanging (her lifelong home) and the dynamic (nature and the outside world), unable to choose between the two.

For Dickinson, nothing breaches this gap better than poetry, which combines both the changing and the unchanging—elements which diametrically oppose one another yet seem to be simultaneously necessary in her mind (and occur very nearly next to one another in her poetry, separated by mere sheets of paper). In the most literal sense, words are unchanging. Once written, they are permanent. Dickinson's poems, recorded in her tediously copied fascicle sheets, were sure to remain unchanged unless edited by her own hand. Yet at the same time, there is nothing as dynamic and mutable as language, which can be read in countless ways and is capable of expressing the enormity of both time and space. There is no limit to poetry in this sense, even while it can be physically contained within several folded sheets of paper. Poem #278 expresses this very sentiment. Dickinson writes that while some claim that "A word is dead, when it is said," she herself insists that "it just begins to live / That day." Again, this reflects the static versus the dynamic nature of poetry.

Dickinson wrote her first letter to T. W. Higginson in 1862, asking him to tell her "if [her] Verse is alive" (403). For Dickinson, the life and limitless nature of poetry was its ultimate appeal. In poem #1491, she states simply, "To see the Summer Sky / Is Poetry, though never in a Book it lie— / True Poems flee—." Two things are emphasized here. First, the scale of the poem is expansive. The entirety of the summer sky is impos-

sible to contain even within our range of vision. Yet here it is expressed within a mere three lines. Second, it states that poems are never motionless—they are unpredictable and dynamic. "True Poems flee—," and cannot truly be tied down, even to the page.

Dickinson's unresolved desire for both the familiarity of her unchanging home as well as the unpredictability and freedom found in the natural world finds an outlet in her poetry. These elements exist together in her poem "The Angle of a Landscape—." In the final stanzas, she begins to describe the "shift[ing]" of the scenery outside her window and wakes to find unexpected changes in the seasons. In other words, the "Picture" begins to move and change before her more rapidly. Interestingly, it is then that the poem ends, with Dickinson's final remark, "These—never stir at all—." Dickinson's punctuation is ambiguous here, as it is throughout most of her poetry; only dashes are used to separate groupings of words. It makes sense for this final statement to refer to the previous two lines, which mention the few motionless landmarks (and, by extension, her own bedroom window), the unchanging features in her life. However, if taken out of context, what could be inferred from its meaning is that *all* of the preceding words Dickinson has written, words that speak of passing time and changing landscapes, are in fact the objects that "never stir at all," being fixed onto a page by her own hand. Notably, Dickinson wrote only one version for this poem, without any alternative readings. Again, she seems to be insisting on the constancy of her words even while their nuances are ever-changing and expanding.

On a more structural level, also, Dickinson's poetry is able to resolve this "cleaving in [her] mind" (#867) that seems to pull her at once in two opposite directions. It is common for her stanzas to contain four lines, a regular pattern of beats, and ABCB rhyme schemes. However, Dickinson will often vary the pattern of beats in one stanza as well as use slant-rhyme rather than exact rhyme. In other words, while the general formula of her poetry remains consistent, she gives herself the ability to diverge from the regularity she sets for herself. Her poems are uniform yet fluctuate in their form. "The Angle of a Landscape—" of course is no exception. Composed of four-lined stanzas, each line contains three beats, with the exception of only two—line 3, which has four beats, and line 20, which can be read with either three or four. Interestingly, these lines are "Between my Curtain and

the Wall" and "These—never stir at all—." Thus, it is the line that depicts her unchanging bedroom window as well as the line that declares its own constancy that, in fact, *vary* from the rest of the poem. Furthermore, none of the B lines in the poem's ABCB rhyme scheme are exact rhymes except for two—lines 6 and 8—which end in "eye" and "Sky." It is interesting, also, how this singular exact rhyme seems to link the two words, as if emphasizing how the expanse of the sky is within her sight and thus within her mind.

If, then, the elements of this poem emulate poetry itself in their static yet dynamic nature, the themes of perspective cannot be ignored. Just as the expansive landscape outside Dickinson's window somehow fits, in her eyes, between the crack offered by her curtain and wall, so too does the expansive nature of poetry, with all of its limitless and uncontained possibility, fit into a few lines. The changing perspective offered by a tilt of her head that transforms a landscape into a branch of apples can be applied to poetry as well. The meaning of a poem depends entirely on the "angle" from which it is viewed, and a simple tilt of the head has the ability to open up infinitely many new possibilities for interpretations of the scale, substance, and very nature of the poem itself. Furthermore, the poem's insistence on the importance of perspective correlates to Dickinson's vacillation between imprisonment and freedom; a "slant" of the head, and what was once a "Prison" becomes instead a "friend" (#456).

Dickinson depicts in "The Angle of a Landscape—" what it is to be looking out on the world from her bedroom window, from which vantage point she enjoys the dynamic views of nature while herself being contained within the comfort and familiarity of four unchanging walls—a different experience entirely from the person who is outside looking in. Likewise, the art form of poetry allows Dickinson the best (in her own mind) of both worlds—a medium that has regularity in its structure and form, yet is infinitely mutable, and, in its "true[st]" sense, "flee[s]" from the page in a way that Dickinson herself would ultimately never be willing to "flee" from her father's homestead (#1491).

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Natalie Lam

Prize Essay Winner

Reaching for the Axe: Kafka and the Language of Power

"Kafka makes novelists nervous," (33) writes the celebrated novelist Zadie Smith. As if looking over her shoulder, Smith notes that "either [Kafka] is too good for the novel or the novel is not quite good enough for him—whichever it is, his imitators are very few" (33). Smith's uneasiness, her sense, however understated, that Kafka does not quite fit within conventional literary boundaries, reflects a critical discomfort felt not only by Kafka's professional peers but the writer himself during his lifetime. In his own diary, Kafka lamented "the dependency of writing" on the everyday, the "helpless" nature of his work (*Tagebücher* 551).[1] Yet Kafka continued to write, producing literature of a sort—a literature by nature a-literary, a literature that contained within itself its own undoing. Conventional novelists have a right to be nervous.

In his early career, Kafka wrote that literature was meant to convey to the reader a truth so demanding that its mode of transmission was necessarily violent: books were to be "the axe that destroyed the frozen sea within us" (*Briefe*).[2] This statement evidences literary idealism of a sort, assuming first that literature is capable of communication at all, and also that this communication may transcend limitations of space, time, and culture. A common view of literature would append to this manifesto the idea of universal and accessible communication, transmitted from author to reader without struggle. However, Kafka effectively denies this last assumption through his choice of metaphor. The figure of the axe suggests not peace but a sword: Kafka's message brings paradox and struggle, rather than literary gospel. It is a violent transmission with the power to unsettle

and alienate. Kafka's writing does not settle easily with the reader any more than it did with the author.

Other literary works "assume at least some kind of rational relationship between the individual and the world" (Smith 33). Kafka is different. Though novelistic in form, Kafka's *Trial* features multi-level chaos—the inherent confusion of surface-level events, the lack of traditional plot structure, the apparent madness of its conclusion—that suggests that Kafka's version of the individual-world relationship is either wildly irrational, or possibly non-existent. The casual reader does not understand. Persistently frustrated in his search for a rational explanation of his arrest, the protagonist K. effectively learns that he *cannot* understand. Thrown into contact with a host of minor characters and events, he does not even know where to fix his attention in order to gain understanding. Kafka himself declares that writing is "a joke and a despair" (*Tagebücher* 551). How, then, is one to extract the truth from a work that turns its own insides out in a search for meaning and apparently ends with none?

Meaning, in Kafka's works, cannot be assumed or positively defined. Viewed through the typical literary paradigm of rational relationships between character and surroundings, with its supposed intent of making truth more accessible to the reader—viewed through these expectations, *The Trial* is essentially meaningless, a world in which the Law perverts rather than represents assumptions of order. *In the Penal Colony* is not only meaningless, but ghastly: a world in which communication, in the form of a sentence, is literally etched into condemned men's bodies. Care, of course, is taken to "keep the inscription clear" (*Penal Colony* 147). Kafka's works fail to fit the conventional mold, which associates literature with communication, law with justice, words with meaning. If such a mold even exists, Kafka dismantles and inverts it, leaving behind a great uneasiness, a sense of displacement: a central disquiet.

True to this disquiet, the worlds of *The Trial* and *Penal Colony* are bureaucracies notable for their perplexing limits, their mindless adherence to process. Events do not yield increasing meaning, either within or without the stories. Instead, events and supporting characters proceed inscrutably, yet with self-assurance; it is as if the laws of these worlds are apparent to every inhabitant except the protagonist. At the moment of his arrest, K. becomes suddenly aware of a hidden bureaucracy, complete

with tiers of magistrates, judges, and a high court. His subsequent search for understanding constantly encounters limitations, complex rules and procedures by which everyone abides, but no one can explain. When asked, the man who initially appears in his room to arrest him answers only, "We are not authorized to tell you that. [. . .] Proceedings have been instituted against you, and you will be informed of everything in due course" (*Trial* 3). K.'s search, which concludes only with his violent death, does not shed light on the source of authority that legitimizes his arrest, that authorizes and un-authorizes others. Even the High Court, with its "Judge whom he had never seen" (*Trial* 228), remains hidden from K. The Law, which typically signifies an individual's acceptance and comprehension of authority, remains a perpetual mystery.

In *The Trial*, the concept of law no longer possesses its traditional associations with truth, justice, and political participation. The Judge, in his removal from K.'s situation, fails to judge, whether justly or unjustly. The legal process does not condemn or acquit but, instead, gradually erases the accused. In his growing bewilderment, K the everyman is relocated from his familiar surroundings into a strange new world. It is possible to attribute this displacement to a corresponding shift in language: Thomas Kavanaugh employs the language of semiotics, the construction of signs, to make sense of K.'s apparently nonsensical universe. *The Trial*, Kavanaugh argues, demonstrates a change in the "codes," or constructions of reality, that human beings use to create and convey meaning. K.'s arrest marks the beginning of a long string of "discordant messages" (Kavanaugh 245)—that is, events and statements that contradict and challenge the reality with which K. is familiar. Because he cannot interpret the workings of the world according to his usual "code," K. is reduced to unsuccessful attempts at bare understanding:

> [his] goal is no longer that of expression and manipulation, but that of simple comprehension. The adventure of Joseph K. is an adventure of the mind, the adventure of a semiologist in spite of himself. It is the hope of penetrating the code, of restoring order and meaning to his disintegrating world that most characterizes Kafkaesque man. (245)

According to Kavanaugh, *The Trial* is deceptive, failing to yield the message both K. and the reader expect. The never-ending search for message in

the codes, the attempt to interpret this world where no words mean what they meant yesterday, is only "an act of language founded upon an absence, an irretrievable alienation from all meaning" (253). The message is only mirage. A trial does not guarantee justice, not as K. understands it. Words literally fail here, no longer expressing their expected meanings; they signify not truth but a void, a space of total silence.

This silence is more literally enacted in Kafka's *Penal Colony*: in this short story, the condemned likewise do not receive notice from the sentencing authority. Instead, the sentence is engraved mechanically on their bodies using a needled machine known as "The Harrow" (*Penal Colony* 144). Like Joseph K., the condemned have "had no chance of putting up a defence" (*Penal Colony* 145), and their self-proclaimed judge, the new Commandant, is absent from the scene of punishment. But whereas Joseph K. is subsumed in *der Prozess*, the condemned of Kafka's *Penal Colony* bear witness to its logical end, distinguishing the story from *The Trial*, yet making it a strangely fitting companion piece. In its isolation, the penal colony is a spatial depiction of K.'s internal displacement. Over the colony hangs the sense that words have failed; there is no need anymore for language, too reminiscent of ordered relationships between a term and the entity it actually represents. At the climax of the tale, when the officer in charge of operating The Harrow climbs beneath it himself, having assigned himself the sentence "Be Just," his action is met with total silence. Neither the formerly condemned man nor the explorer utters a word to stop him, and in the operation of the deadly machine "everything was quiet, not even the slightest hum could be heard" (*Penal Colony* 164).

Writing is, as Kafka wrote, helpless, dependent (*Tagebücher* 551). Although Kafka's work depends on language as its means of transmission, it inverts and shatters the relationships—between an object and its descriptor—for which language is typically used. Kafka was keenly aware that language depends upon allusion "for anything outside the sensory world" (Kafka, qtd. *Language* 375), yet readers perpetually encounter non-sensory, abstract ideas in Kafka's writing. Are these merely the appearance of ideas? Is Kafka's use of language, as Kavanaugh claims, simply a front for the absence of all meaning? While works such as *The Trial* and *Penal Colony* certainly subvert traditional meanings of words such as "law" and "guilt," this does not preclude the *substitution* of different meanings

altogether. In these works, Kafka's language belongs to a different universe of meaning and naming, the extra-sensory: it is as if these meanings exist in a hidden space, behind the typical associations of certain language with certain concepts. Kafka's language is that of the void, of the loss of all sensory-dependent meaning in favor of "a very special, non-referential, merely allusive language . . . a means by which human beings may receive an inkling of the invisible, true world" (*Language and Truth* 375).

Where is this invisible and true world in Kafka's work? It lies underneath the world of surface-level events and logical expectations, in strange utterances and parables. In *The Trial*, K.'s constant struggle to understand his arrest does not bring enlightenment, as might be expected; instead, the clearest picture of K.'s situation comes from a short parable near the end of the work, delivered to him by seeming accident. As he waits in an almost-deserted cathedral for a guest who never arrives, K. is summoned to the altar by a strange priest who narrates the parable of a man from the country seeking entrance to the gate of the Law, an ambiguous and powerful force. However, the doorkeeper of the gate prevents the man from entering; and so he gives up his material goods as bribes, his remaining years as proof of his sincerity. As he is dying, withered, and blind, he asks the doorkeeper why no one but himself has ever sought the Law, and the doorkeeper answers that the gate of the Law was once created solely for him, but now it will be shut. Thus the tale ends, and the priest proceeds to relate several contradictory interpretations of its meaning. "Before the Law," while bewildering in itself, clearly applies to K., who is essentially in the same position as the country dweller: he seeks entrance to the courts of the Law in order to understand his arrest, but cannot gain admittance. No amount of time or effort avails him. Like the country dweller, K. is effectively paralyzed "before the Law," unable either to enter into its mysteries or to exit its sphere of influence.

This paralyzing paradox, this invisible no-place created between entry and exit, is addressed by philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his work *Homo Sacer*. Here, Agamben explores the concept of the sovereign exception (13), wherein the sovereign power is both included in the law as law-giver and excluded from it as an individual not subject to the law's authority. This simultaneous inclusion and exclusion can be framed in terms of potentiality, which "maintains itself in relation to actuality in the form of

its suspension; it is capable of the act in not realising it, it is sovereignly capable of its own im-potentiality" (Agamben 32). In the same sense, it is possible to be included in the law through one's own exclusion, exclusion which acts as suspension. Thus Agamben's reading of Kafka's parable, by arguing that in it "law affirms itself with the greatest force precisely at the point in which it no longer prescribes anything" (35), applies these terms of inclusion and exclusion to the sovereignty of the Law. It does not make positive demands, yet its authority is compelling—a law "in force without significance" (36).

The Law makes no demands upon the country dweller who attempts to enter its gate, yet for the rest of his life he never leaves the gate from which it exercises this negative power over him. He cannot enter (be included), and is thus excluded from the law. However, in his exclusion, he takes on a relation to the law and is thus included (one might say "entrapped") in the law. He is the inverse of the sovereign authority, who is included in the law as the source of authority, yet not bound by the law—ultimately, excluded (one might say "freed") from the law. Later in his work, Agamben discusses this concept of the *homo sacer*, an individual who is the sovereign's symmetric opposite. Originating from a facet of Roman law, which states that this man may be "killed, but not sacrificed" (60), the *homo sacer* is literally "sacred": he is not "holy" in the traditional sense, but actually a man "set apart," the sovereign's counterpart in no-place. Where the sovereign is excluded from the law in order to be above it, the *homo sacer* is outside the law so that he may be killed. This is an expression of bare life: as Agamben argues, "the first foundation of political life is a life that may be killed, which is politicized through its very capacity to be killed" (59). Therefore, because the *homo sacer* is outside the law and can be killed, he cannot be sacrificed from within the law. The law does not include him, though it is the law that allows any man to kill him; and thus, in a sense, he is still under the law. This paradigm fits the parable of the country dweller, who is not included in the law and must die outside it, unable to leave its sphere of influence yet unable to enter.

It is not difficult to extrapolate this concept of *homo sacer* to Kafka's larger works outside the parable. In its immediate context, "Before the Law" clearly reflects K.'s own story: though K. is left free to move about in the physical sense, his greater being is paralysed in no-place by a law

which apparently demands nothing from him, yet which does not let him go. Like the country dweller—which is to say, like the *homo sacer*—K. is not included in the Law, and the Law asks nothing of him. It only accuses, and that accusation remains "in force without significance" (Agamben 36) with all the force of the door of the Law figured in the parable. The initial accusation draws K. into the Law's sphere of influence, the no-place of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. The Law holds the sovereign position here, and the unseen Judge is inaccessible through the Law, placing him both inside and outside it. In relation to the sovereign authority, K. plays the role of *homo sacer*, the man whose position cannot be resolved from within the law, who may be killed outside it but not sacrificed.

Kafka's *Penal Colony*, by contrast, locates the *homo sacer* in his proper sphere: the camp. Unlike *The Trial*, which centers on K. as the figure subject to yet not partaking in sovereign authority, *Penal Colony* reveals the space for this state of inclusion and exclusion, rather than focusing on the *homo sacer* figure itself. Here, the everyman observer is not the figure of *homo sacer*. Although the explorer who witnesses the executions is simultaneously included and excluded from the actual proceedings as "neither a member of the penal colony nor a citizen of the state to which it belonged" (151), he ultimately escapes the colony's confines and does not suffer under its "sovereign" authorities. Instead, those who suffer are the colony's inhabitants. The colony itself serves as the space of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, the camp as according to Agamben: the "structure in which the state of exception—the possibility of deciding on which founds sovereign power—is realized normally" (Agamben 109). In other words, this is a place where power has no limit, in which potentiality (the unlimited "possibility of deciding") is made concrete.

Inhabitants of the camp represent politicized bare life, a crowd of *homines sacri* who may be killed outside the law but not sacrificed within it. They are excluded from the sphere of law and legal recourse, yet the marks of the law on their bodies denote their subjection to its sovereign authority. This is a subjection stripped of all logic, even the potential justification of language. As the officer states, there is no reason to verbally deliver sentences to a condemned man, for "he'll learn it on his body" (*Penal Colony* 145). The sentence in question? "Honor Thy Superiors" (*Penal Colony* 144). This is bare life, the body deprived even of commu-

nication—for rational communication assigns communally rather than individually mediated meanings to concepts of law and power—and its flesh subjected to the dictates of power.

In the penal colony, not even the semblance of judicial process remains, and the disturbed explorer "had to remind himself that this was . . . a penal colony where extraordinary measures were needed" (*Penal Colony* 146). Such "extraordinary measures" mark a transition away from a communally understood law into the arbitrary actions of the individual in power, actions which the exercise of power effectively legitimizes as law. In Agamben's camp, this transition perpetually recurs, until law no longer signifies itself, simply the sovereign action; and the sovereign action signifies law. This transition, in itself a loss of meaning, marks the camp as the "threshold in which law constantly passes over into fact, and fact into law, and in which the two planes become indistinguishable" (Agamben 110). In short, this is the place of no-place, an "invisible, true" world (*Language and Truth* 375), the source and container of the central disquiet.

And thus the shifting of the codes, the subversion of language, does open up into nothingness, a hidden interplay between life and law and power. However, this is no deceptive mirage. As Walter Sokel argues, Kafka's perception of the "debasement of language [i.e., its dependence on the sensory and forced allusive quality in speaking of the non-sensory] . . . allows a substantial elevation of the status of literature" (*Language and Truth* 375). Through his work, Kafka sought to convey a message that defies and destroys the means of its own transmission: a message that is by nature a-literary. Unlike typical literature, which wisely serves to convey only manageable truths of which its conventions are capable, Kafka's work enacts the incommunicability of certain truths—in *The Trial* and *In the Penal Colony*, truths about the nature of law and power—by insisting on their communication. These are truths of the no-space, hardly nameable in ordinary language, hardly comfortable. Kafka's axe, a precise and unsettling communication from the "enormous world" in his head (*Tagebücher* 306), does shatter and startle the frozen sea within. It shakes and disquiets the reader's expectations, associations, and very world. This is what enables Kafka to claim, beyond adherence to language or convention, "I *am* literature," and Zadie Smith to respond with entirely appropriate consternation, "Bloody *hell*" (3).

Notes

1. In quoting Kafka's diaries, I have used the translations given by Walter Sokel in his article "Language and Truth in the Two Worlds of Franz Kafka." (*The German Quarterly*, 1979: 364–84), as Sokel's choice of words is relevant to the argument presented. To preserve the original references, page numbers have been given from Kafka's "Tagebücher."

2. Translation quoted from Walter Sokel's essay, "Frozen Sea and River of Narration" (*New Literary History*, Vol. 17.2, 351–363). Sokel's emphasis on Kafka's ideal literature as transcendent and communicative provides a foundation for discussion about the medium and goal of communication in Kafka's Trial.

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This essay was written for Michael Degener's WR150: Kafka! Monstrous Modernity.

From the Writer

My essay was inspired by discussions in my WR 150 section about an article by Michael Carlebach in which he argued, as I later would, that the FSA photographs were both propaganda and legitimate political communication. As we discussed Carlebach's thesis, two things struck me: first, that the question depended largely on what propaganda is to begin with, and second, that this was more something to decide (within reasonable bounds) than to discover.

I consulted a couple of dictionaries and used the information therein to form a working definition that I thought conformed to the word's everyday use and provided clear conditions for its satisfaction. Another question emerged from the fact that my definition contained words like "information" and "deceptive," which are associated with saying things, whereas an image cannot literally say anything. I set out to determine how photographs communicate information, and under what conditions they can be considered propaganda.

Then it remained to use historical evidence to show whether the FSA photographs met these conditions; this was the step that required the most actual research. By carefully analyzing the main points of my argument, I was able to ensure that I made a convincing case, and that my essay would have a coherent structure (since I simply had to address each issue in turn). Finally, I was enormously helped by the mandatory first draft, which forced me to think about, research, and begin writing my essay early, counteracting my strong tendencies toward laziness and procrastination and helping me produce a complete essay on time.

— Chris Meyer

Chris Meyer

Prize Essay Winner

The FSA Photographs: Information, or Propaganda?

During Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency, the Farm Security Administration, a part of his New Deal bureaucracy, produced a multitude of well-known photographs documenting the impact of the Great Depression on rural America. This photographic record of the Depression, which provided work for photographers as well as illustrated the need for often vigorously opposed New Deal programs, has been the subject of substantial controversy regarding its objectivity: was it simply information, a mirror in which America could have a look at itself, or did it constitute propaganda? This question was particularly crucial during the 1930s, when two world powers—Germany and the Soviet Union—were increasingly infamous for their governments' efforts to control the flow of information. To answer it, it is necessary first to clarify exactly what propaganda is, then to examine the FSA photographers' methods and products, as well as their historical context. Because the issue is partly a semantic one, and reasonable people can disagree on the meanings of words, it is difficult to provide a conclusive answer; however, given the combination of the FSA photographers' documentary methodology with the manner in which the photographs were used, it is safe to say that they were propaganda. But they were not *just* propaganda; that is to say, they bore the identifying marks of propaganda, but they were not in the same class as totalitarian propaganda. Rather, they were a legitimate form of political communication.

What is propaganda? Especially because it is a fairly abstract and contentious concept, it is helpful to know what the word means before deciding whether it applies to any particular historical campaign. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word originally referred to an

assembly of cardinals in the Roman Catholic Church that was responsible for the *propagation* of the faith, and carried no negative connotations. But it has evolved into the modern sense, which is "the systematic dissemination of information, esp. in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view" or "information disseminated in this way" ("Propaganda, *n*."). So it is necessary not only for the information to have political content, but also for it to be circulated with the intent of bringing about a political effect. And in accordance with common usage and the word's reputation, it is an important part of the concept of propaganda that it is in some way deceptive.

But these standards apply most naturally to statements, which convey information and can be true or false. What does it mean for an *image* to be propaganda? While an image is not itself a statement, images often imply or express statements. In particular, there are three statements that a photograph can express, and whereby it can communicate a political message:

1. This really happened;
2. This happened independent of the photographer;
3. This scene is representative.

"This really happened": Because of the way a photograph is produced, it, unlike a drawing, painting, or verbal description, generally depicts a scene that actually existed at some point. This is not always the case, since photographs can be altered; but when alteration is not either obvious or made explicit, a photograph is expected to depict reality. *"This happened independent of the photographer"*: For a photograph to effectively communicate a political message, it is not enough for it merely to claim to portray a scene that actually existed; the point is that the scene naturally occurred. Not every photograph makes this claim—a portrait, for example, depicts a transparently contrived situation—but in similar manner to (1), when manipulation is not overt, it is expected that a photograph's content did not originate in the photographer's mind. *"This scene is representative"*: This last statement has less to do with the content and production of photographs than the way they are used, but it is crucially important to their political effects. Photographs intended to bring about some governmental action to combat a social ill must be presented in such a way as to

give the impression that the events they depict are widespread. Given all this, an organization can use photographs to accomplish a political goal by creating and disseminating images whose content is favorable to its cause in such as way as to assert these three statements of those images. When at least one of the statements is actually false, the photographs qualify as propaganda.

In light of these considerations, the most important questions about the FSA photographs concern how they were made—whether they were altered or their subjects manipulated—and how they were used—whether and to what extent political considerations overrode factual considerations in their selection and presentation. They were part of the tradition of documentary photography, which began in the late nineteenth century and disdained "photographic tricks" and "gimmicks," aiming "to record real life without artifice" (Carlebach 11). This did not mean, however, that the documentary style was neutral or apolitical. In fact, from the movement's inception, documentary photographers attempted to expose social ills so as to bring about reform. For example, John Grierson, who was the first to use the term "documentary" (in 1926, referring to film rather than still photography), "found in the documentary approach a way to directly connect the human experience with personal compassion" (Szto 95). Similarly, Lewis Hine, an influential early documentary photographer, intended that his work would "influence public opinion in order to induce corrections to a flawed system gone amok" (Szto 100). Documentary was such a useful tool for social change because of Americans' increasing receptiveness to scientific evidence at the turn of the twentieth century. "The Progressive Era (1890–1920) increasingly embraced science as the basis for social reform and solving social problems," which "positioned photography to affect [*sic*] change because of its straightforward and truth-telling qualities" (Szto 95). Because of this scientific perspective, it was precisely the honesty of documentary photography that gave it its persuasive power.

Like earlier documentarians, the Farm Security Administration photographers had a political mission. According to Michael Carlebach, the program was "conceived as a means of illustrating the necessity and effectiveness of New Deal agricultural programs" (10). They were not isolated in this regard, but were part of the Roosevelt administration's larger-scale efforts to sway public opinion in favor of his economic

recovery programs. In fact, "the disposition to form public opinion and a keen sense of how this might be done were integral parts of [Roosevelt's] political outlook" (Steele 5). Thus the photographs met the first criterion of propaganda, being information spread systematically for a political purpose. But the documentary adherence to factual photography was also an important part of the FSA work. The program's photographers "were warned repeatedly not to manipulate their subjects in order to get more dramatic images, and their pictures were almost always printed without cropping or retouching" (Carlebach 20). Of course, overt manipulation is not the only way a photographer can affect the content of his or her work. The very presence of a camera can influence subjects' behavior – especially if the subjects know that producing a particularly down-and-out-looking image could improve their well-being by promoting a program that will give them economic aid. But according to a 1977 interview with Arthur Rothstein, one of the FSA photographers, the photographers were constrained by necessity to minimize their conspicuousness. Rothstein called the technique he developed "the unobtrusive camera" and described it as "becoming a part of the environment that people are in to such an extent that they're not even aware that pictures are being taken" (Doud and Rothstein 20). As a result of these scruples, the FSA photographs, on the whole, satisfied statements (1) and (2) of the above criteria.

However, in one notable controversy, critics alleged the opposite—that the FSA photographers manipulated their surroundings for political effect. This concerned a photograph taken by Rothstein, *The Bleached Skull of a Steer on the Dry Sun-baked Earth of the South Dakota Bad Lands* (see Figure 1). According to Rothstein, the photograph was one of a series he made as exercises, experimenting with "the texture of the skull, the texture of the earth, cracks in the soil, the lighting, how the lighting changed from the east to the west as the sun went down" (Doud and Rothstein 21–22). The picture went into the FSA files, and an Associated Press editor later ignorantly published it, believing it to illustrate a severe drought that was going on at the time. (In fact, according to Rothstein, the scene is a common one in the West regardless of drought conditions.) A newspaper editor saw the picture, and, not knowing "that there was a caption on it that [Rothstein] hadn't contributed, that it was sent out by the Associated Press, not the government," determined that it was "a real

example of fakery" (Doud and Rothstein 22). The other pictures Rothstein had taken of the skull, in some of which he had moved it around in his immediate vicinity, were made public, and news of the apparent fake spread to the point that cartoons were published portraying Rothstein "wandering all over the United States with a skull, planting it here and planting it there" (Doud and Rothstein 22). This example demonstrates how some of the harsher accusations against the FSA photographs came into being, as well as how the use of an image can introduce deception as easily as its production (even if this particular case seems to have been an honest mistake).

Figure 1. Arthur Rothstein. The Bleached Skull of a Steer on the Dry Sun-baked Earth of the South Dakota Bad Lands. May, 1936.

Although the above extreme allegations were false, assuming Rothstein's account is accurate, there was another kind of deception involved in the FSA photographs. This did not concern individual photographs, which realistically depicted true events, but the higher-level decisions of what pictures would be taken, and what pictures published. For example, as the 1930s wore on, the guidelines for what material the photographers were to focus on changed as the government moved the focus of its public-relations campaigns. "Emphasize the idea of abundance – the 'horn of plenty' and pour maple syrup over it," Roy Stryker, the head of the FSA's Information Division, said as the impending war turned the government's attention to projecting America's rebounding prosperity (Carlebach 23). This change was not entirely disconnected from reality—"Farm conditions were improving in the late thirties, and . . . to some extent the new FSA

guidelines reflected the changes"—but, crucially, the decision of what to include and what to omit was guided by politics, and was therefore misleading (Carlebach 22). Thus, strictly interpreted, statement (3) fails for the FSA photographs—and not just the later ones, for Stryker and his superiors exerted politically motivated editorial control throughout the program's existence—and hence they were, in fact, propaganda.

The Farm Security Administration's graphic record of the Great Depression was produced and disseminated by the Roosevelt administration in order to advance its political goals; the information contained in it was significantly, if not dramatically, misleading, as a result of the politically motivated editorial control exercised by those who led the program. From this it follows, given the stipulated definitions, that it did constitute propaganda. However, as is apparent from the nature and extent of the deception involved, it was a mild form of propaganda, containing no outright lies. Furthermore, the political goal it was meant to advance was not a particularly odious one. Whether or not it was good policy, the Farm Security Administration threatened neither Americans' lives nor their liberty; the same cannot be said for the regimes Roosevelt's critics compared him to. (Whether some of the president's other policies were more insidious is irrelevant, since these were not the purpose of this particular propaganda campaign.) As one of many sources of information available in a democratic society, the FSA photography campaign was an acceptable form of government publicity.

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CHRIS MEYER is a member of the CAS class of 2011 from Boxford, Massachusetts, a Wasilla-sized town full of squirrels and trees to the north of Boston. He is studying math and philosophy, and minoring in German. He was originally in the Core Curriculum, but switched into WR 150 due to a scheduling conflict, and enrolled in the art and politics section out of interest in both and a desire to learn more about their interaction. This essay was written for Amy Chmielewski's WR 150: Art and Politics in the Twentieth Century.

From the Writer

I initially became interested in the issue of peak oil after reading a magazine article on the topic several years ago. The evidence for an imminent oil peak seemed quite convincing, and the projected consequences both realistic and dire. In the face of this, I recall being shocked that it is not an issue to which more attention is given, particularly in a social climate where energy use relative to global warming is seemingly of paramount concern. I decided to explore peak oil in more depth in a research paper, hoping to shed light on the importance of considering the problem of peak oil in constructing a plan for future energy-use models.

I began my research by reading *Beyond Oil: The View from Hubbert's Peak* by Kenneth S. Deffeys, which provided a useful overview of the science behind oil exploration and development, as well as further evidence that current production models will soon be insufficient to meet oil demand. Armed with more knowledge in the area, I continued research in both academic and popular publications. I constructed a draft, which, with input from my writing professor, I molded through several revisions into the final paper. I am pleased with the result, although because of the limitations of scope I am afraid it may seem overly pessimistic, presenting problems without complete solutions. Given the opportunity, I would like to complete a complementary paper in which I discuss possible solutions to the energy crisis.

— Gordon Towne

Gordon Towne

Prize Essay Winner

Peak Oil: Priorities in Alternative Energy Development

If Americans, as it is popular to suggest, are "addicted to oil," it would appear that they are increasingly in danger of overdosing on the hydrocarbon drug. America's reliance on oil is staggering. In 2006, the United States consumed 20.6 million barrels of petroleum per day,[1] two thirds of which went to fuel the transportation sector.[2] This figure accounts for a total of 97.8 percent of the fuel used for transportation in the United States,[3] making the contribution of all other alternatives appear essentially negligible. However, the U.S. is not alone in its addiction, as similarly astronomical statistics exist for much of the developed world, and these figures are projected to rise. Industrialization of developing nations, and particularly China and India, is driving world oil demand ever higher. Current projections forecast a 50 percent increase in worldwide oil demand within the next decade.[4] It is universally recognized that petroleum is a finite resource, and this reliance cannot continue indefinitely. However, the largest concern is not depleting the oil supply entirely, but having demand outstrip the maximum quantity of oil that is economically feasible to produce. This watershed is likely to occur at the global oil peak, the point at which diminishing reserves cause year-over-year production to reach a maximum and decline thereafter, an event projected to occur in the near future.[5] The impending arrival of the global peak in world oil production represents the most pressing threat to the current energy model. The feasibility of alternative fuels should be evaluated primarily based on their ability to adhere to the time frame and challenges presented by limited oil supply, and greater awareness of peak oil must be promoted to speed the diffusion of petroleum replacements.

The existence of a peak in oil production follows from patterns of oil extraction. Petroleum geologists recognize that levels of production necessarily follow a logistic, or bell-shaped, curve (see Figure 1). That is, over time, oil production increases until it levels off at a maximum, and then decreases symmetrically. Regional production has been observed to follow

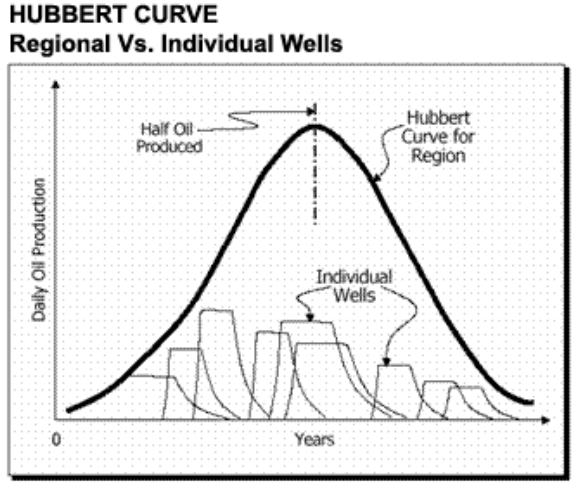

Figure 1. Source: Energy Bulletin, "Peak Oil Primer," http://energybulletin.net/primer, accessed April 2009.

this logistic curve in a number of instances, including total United States domestic output. This model extends from the pattern of lifetime output from any one oil well, as oil production for any region can be seen as the aggregate of all of the wells therein.[6] Conventional petroleum extraction techniques follow a fairly set method. Primary extraction begins when an oil well is first tapped. At this point, underground pressure causes oil to flow freely to the surface. As this pressure is normalized, pumpjacks are used to extract oil from the ground until this process becomes more costly to maintain than the value of oil that it produces.[7] Thereafter, secondary extraction begins, typically with a process known as a "waterflood."[8] A number of wells in an oil field are sacrificed and used to pump water into the ground, increasing the underground pressure so that oil can be more readily maintained from the remaining pumpjacks.[9] As a consequence of this process, over the life of a well, it becomes increasingly more costly to produce decreasing quantities of oil. Production continues until returns

diminish to the point where it becomes economically infeasible to extract the remaining reserves. On average, even after secondary extraction, half of the original supply of oil remains in the ground "in isolated droplets in the reservoir rock" that are impossible to extract efficiently.[10]

As more oil is extracted from existing wells, it also becomes more difficult to locate the remaining oil deposits. Newly discovered oil fields generally contain significantly lower quantities of oil than past discoveries, based on the principle that the bigger deposits are easiest to find, and thus were found and harvested first. Thus, the problem of diminishing oil production from a single field over time is compounded by the fact that it becomes increasingly costly to locate progressively smaller oil deposits. Modern oil exploration is conducted using seismic detectors aboard large trucks or ocean-going ships.[11] These oil-prospecting vehicles have high operating costs per unit area explored, so as oil becomes more scarce, the overhead cost for locating any one deposit increases. When oil becomes sufficiently scarce and expensive to locate and extract, the amount that can be produced will begin to decline year over year. The point of transition from increasing to decreasing production is known as the oil peak.

The economic, political, and sociocultural implications of peak oil, when it occurs, will be dramatic and pervasive. At the peak and immediately thereafter, burgeoning world oil demand will surpass the quantity that can possibly be supplied. This discrepancy will cause the cost of oil to skyrocket, which will be readily visible in the price at the pump. Because transportation is embedded in the cost of nearly all goods and services, rising fuel costs will place direct pressure on a broad range of businesses. This effect will manifest itself in increasing unemployment, along with rising consumer costs in everything from food to clothing and electronics. Domestically, the resulting ripple effect will be sufficient to set the economy on a cycle of stagflation, that is, simultaneous economic recession and monetary inflation. On its surface, this is not dissimilar from the effects of previous oil shortages, most notably that resulting from the OPEC embargo of the early 1970s.[12][13] In this instance, a temporary, artificial supply shortage was sufficient on its own to catalyze a cycle of stagflation, sending the U.S. economy into recession. In the case of peak oil, however, once this cycle begins, oil production will only continue a downward trend. In an unmitigated situation, this will cause the supply-and-demand

discrepancy to grow ever wider. Where previous fluctuations in oil supply have triggered cyclic rises and falls in domestic economic health, problems spawned by falling oil supply will only worsen as production continues to decrease.

Beyond the strict economics, peaking of world oil will necessarily cause sweeping changes in the American way of life and that of most other developed countries. As production falls sufficiently on the back side of the peak, fuel shortages will become an unavoidable reality. Here, again, we can look to the oil crisis of the early 1970s as a model. Under pressure of diminished oil supply, the United States government passed mandatory petroleum rationing legislation, including enactment of a national 55 mile-per-hour speed limit to conserve fuel.[14] In the case of peak oil, consumers would likely be forced to face similar conservation measures. Again, however, it is important to note that unlike previous energy crises these measures could not be enacted on a temporary basis. Indeed, conservation efforts would have to escalate over time proportional to the decrease in world oil supply if oil were to remain a primary fuel source. The American car culture would need to reconcile itself with the new realities of petroleum scarcity, and consumers would need to sacrifice much of the mobility to which they have become accustomed.

On a global scale, an increased potential for violence and conflict will also emerge on the back side of the peak. As economist Daniel Yergin notes, the inherent nature of oil's distribution leads it to be "intimately intertwined with nationalism and national power, and subject to political and military struggles for its control."[15] Nowhere is this as prevalent as the oil producing regions of the Middle East. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), led by its principal member, Saudi Arabia, represents the single largest petroleum exporting conglomerate in the world.[16] Exports by Saudi Aramco, Saudi Arabia's nationalized oil producing company, contribute 90 percent to the country's total earnings.[17] An upset to such a heavily rooted industry would likely dislodge the balance of power and interfere with the livelihoods of a large proportion of the population. The resulting political and economic instability will offer terrorist organizations an opportunity to seize greater control and gain favor with the disenfranchised citizenry. These developments will only increase the turmoil in an already precarious environment.

Because of these worrisome consequences of an unmitigated peak in oil production, an accurate forecast of when the peak is likely to occur is crucial. Research in this area was pioneered in the mid twentieth century by oil industry geologist M. King Hubbert. In 1956 Hubbert predicted through mathematical analysis that domestic U.S. oil production would peak in the early 1970s. Hubbert's analysis was based on the assertion that the overwhelming factor determining the quantity of oil that can be produced is the quantity remaining in the ground. Fellow geologist Kenneth Deffeys clarifies this notion by analogizing that "the ease of catching fish depends mostly on how many fish remain in the pond."[18] Hubbert leveraged data on yearly U.S. oil production and accurate estimates of total U.S. petroleum reserves to predict that production would reach its zenith when half of the total quantity of oil available had been extracted.[1920] History shows Hubbert's analysis to be surprisingly accurate, as domestic oil production did in fact peak in 1970, and continued down the logistic curve thereafter.[21]

Hubbert's methods for predicting the U.S. peak can be extrapolated upon to forecast the world peak. Doing so, however, involves difficulties related to uncertain world oil supply data. Hubbert benefitted from a standard set by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission on how reserve data are calculated, but there is no such international standard.[22] There are also short term economic benefits for international oil producers in artificially inflating the reserve numbers, promoting confidence in oil as a sustainable investment. Deffeys suggests that OPEC has been releasing these inflated numbers for years.[23] In practice, this means that there is a certain amount of conjecture required to synthesize international reserve data to get a clear picture of how much oil is left in the ground. Also, due to the interconnectedness of oil production to the larger geopolitical sphere, local peaks and valleys in the production data are inevitable and can disguise the apex of the smooth logistic peak. Thus the idealized point of maximum output may not be evident until after it has occurred.[24] As a result, there is some variation in projections of the world oil peak. Despite this, many experts forecast a world peak sometime before 2010,[25] while some suggest that production has already peaked.[26]

In addition to Hubbert's method of leveraging production data, patterns of changes in oil prices can also be used to forecast the arrival of the

oil peak. Indeed, some experts choose to ignore production data entirely. Economist Stephen P. Holland published a paper in 2008 in which he concluded that "prices are a better indicator of impending oil scarcity than are peaks in production" and "focusing attention on peak production is misguided since focusing attention on price would give an earlier predictor of impending resources scarcity."[27] Price-based analyses are likely to result in similarly dire conclusions, however, as current fluctuations in oil price are indicative of instability likely to occur around the global peak. This price volatility is especially apparent in OPEC exports. From 1983 through 2002, OPEC was able to regulate the price of oil between $22 and $28 per barrel, varying rates of supply accordingly to maintain this level. In fact, price stabilization was a primary impetus for formation of the cartel in the first place. However, in recent years OPEC has been unable to control prices, operating at maximum production levels while prices skyrocketed past $100 per barrel.[28] This pervasive price instability indicates that oil peaking may be occurring now or will occur in the immediate future.

There is also additional anecdotal evidence that the world peak is imminent. For example, the government of Saudi Arabia, responsible for the largest proven quantity of reserve oil remaining on the planet,[29] announced in 2003 that their "production had maxed out at 9.2 or 9.5 million barrels per day."[30] Such apparent admissions of defeat by oil producers have become increasingly prevalent in recent years. Even the most conservative estimates by western oil companies forecast a peak within the next two decades.[31] Shell Oil, for instance, has published data that show a world oil peak in 2025 or immediately thereafter. Adding more credence to these figures is the 2006 admission of John Hofmeister, president of Shell Oil, that "the easy stuff is running out."[32] The fact that even those within the oil industry are breaking the traditional silence and beginning to publicly recognize that the current energy model is unsustainable is indicative of the fast-approaching peak.

Many factors, including the threat of peak oil, price increases and volatility, geopolitical concerns, and consideration of the environment and climate change, have resulted in a recent popular recognition of the need to restructure the prevalent energy-use model. It is natural to seek an "ideal" fuel source, which simultaneously meets current demands

for environmentalism, sustainability, and economic feasibility. In 1994, economist Richard England wrote on the need for alternative energies to be developed expediently so that when the crucial moment came when society would have to choose a new fuel source, we would have several fully developed, feasible options. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that we have missed the vital window to develop such an ideal source, as implementation of a replacement fuel will prove time-consuming. A 2005 study commissioned by the Department of Energy on the topic[33] concludes that, because large development projects typically progress slowly through the bureaucratic governmental approval process, it will likely take over ten years for a viable infrastructure to be established around an alternative fuel.[34] Absent special government intervention, it is unlikely that alternative fuel processing plants and distribution facilities would be operational anytime within the next decade. However, development of this infrastructure poses only the first step in the transition process. Currently, the average automobile on American roadways is nine years old.[35] At current rates of turnover, it would take an additional decade after alternative fuels become broadly viable for just half of the American automobiles to transition from traditional petroleum. This time frame extends reliance on petroleum as a majority fuel source for another twenty years to come, well past even conservative estimates for a world oil peak.

If significant measures are not taken immediately to expedite a transition to a non-petroleum-based transportation model, the drastic consequences of a world peak in oil production may be unavoidable. The slower this transition, the longer the period during which we must rely on dwindling oil supply, and the more drastic the economic and sociopolitical consequences. Based on these concerns, it becomes clear that speed of potential deployment is a primary concern when evaluating the effectiveness of petroleum alternatives. We must limit our discussion of alternative fuels, for the time being, to those which are currently operational, and could be deployed on a national and international scale with minimal additional effort.

Speeding the rate of adoption of alternative-fueled vehicles represents a canonical innovation diffusion problem. Research on innovation diffusion presented by Everett M. Rogers suggests that this process must begin with the common recognition of a problem or need.[36] Unfortunately,

in today's climate, there is little consensus as to the primary problems alternative fuels should address. Due to lack of knowledge or secondary concern over the dwindling oil supply, many choose to evaluate alternative fuels with an eye toward climate change and environmentalism. In order for any alternative fuel to be adopted efficiently by the national and global market, there must be a consensus on the problems the technology is meant to address. Because alternative fuels can be seen as a preventative innovation, in that adoption is intended to mitigate the negative consequences of oil peaking, their diffusion is likely to be slow unless consumers are able to see a short term individual advantage in addition to the long term collective benefits.[37] The consequences of oil peaking will likely help in this regard, as rising oil prices are likely to drive consumers to look toward more economical alternatives. However, waiting for rising oil prices to drive consumers away from petroleum will only exacerbate the problems related to peak oil by extending reliance further into the future. In order to speed diffusion of alternative fuels, greater awareness must be created about the consequences of an unmitigated oil peak and the urgency with which this problem must be addressed.

Data and expert opinions are mustering in support of peak oil. The debate no longer centers on whether oil will run out as a viable resource in our lifetimes, but rather when in the span of the next few years it will occur. The consequences of allowing oil peaking to occur without dramatic attempts at mitigation will likely result in an unprecedented change to the way of life our culture has grown around. Faced with these challenges, it will prove necessary to prioritize and make sacrifices in alternative energy development with the goal of ending reliance on petroleum as quickly as possible.

Notes

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6. See Figure 1.
7. Kenneth S. Deffeys, *Beyond Oil: The View from Hubbert's Peak* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 27.
8. Ibid., 27.
9. Ibid., 27.
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20. See Figure 1.
21. Alexandria Witze, "Energy: That's Oil Folks..." *Nature*, January 4, 2007, 15.
22. Ibid. 17.
23. Deffeys, *Beyond Oil*, 47.
24. Ibid., 3.
25. Hirsch, Bezdek and Wendling, Peaking of World Oil.
26. Witze, "That's Oil Folks," 14.
27. Holland, "Modeling Peak Oil," Pg.
28. Deffeys, Beyond Oil, 33.
29. Energy Information Administration, "Saudi Arabia Energy Data, Statistics and Analysis."

30. Deffeys, *Beyond Oil,* 44.
31. Hirsch, Bezdek and Wendling, *Peaking of World Oil.*
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33. The so-called "Hirsch Report" is considered a comprehensive analysis of peak oil, and is used extensively in this paper. See bibliography for full citation.
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GORDON TOWNE is currently a Junior in the College of Arts and Sciences majoring in Computer Science. He came to Boston University after living in the upper peninsula of Michigan and central Massachusetts. He is also currently a competitive member of the reigning national intercollegiate champion BU Figure Skating Team. This essay was written for Deborah Breen's WR150: Innovation in Technology and Science: Historical Perspectives.

From the Writer

Unfortunately, as an aspiring engineer, my experience with writing extended pieces that are not prefaced with a hypothesis and detailed experimental protocol is limited, to say the least; therefore, I'd like to begin this commentary with a preemptive apology. Formalities aside, for my essay, I decided to pick a topic straight from the front-page of the news for a purely selfish reason: I wanted to learn more about why America, and much of the world, has found itself in a deep recession. After a bit of research and background reading, I settled on Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac as the centerpieces of my paper.

As for the writing process itself, suffice it to say that it's usually a labored process for any engineer, student or professional, and this time proved no different. I started with what's comfortable for me: I made an outline of the essay using the "House" model popular among elementary schools around the country. In short, the foundation is the thesis, the pillars represent the argument, and the roof symbolizes the conclusions drawn. Needless to say, conceptualizing these sections of the essay was every bit as helpful as the drawing and coloring of the house itself (I still take great pride in coloring inside the lines).

After getting the skeleton of the essay down, I read through the paper several times, making additions and changes in an iterative manner. I do find it extremely helpful to have absolutely everybody else read through what I've written because I'm never able to pick out every mistake or awkward phrasing, so peer-review sessions were a huge bonus. However, it wouldn't be fair to conclude this commentary without mentioning that this seemingly smooth process occurred over an entire semester and was packed with crucial ingredients, such as frustration, fleeting relief, and procrastination. Regardless, taking just two writing courses at BU helped me refine my writing process, and I hope this recount of my personal experience is helpful, cogent, and coherent enough to justify its length to you, the (hopefully) kind and (without a doubt) good-looking reader.

— Aneesh Acharya

Aneesh Acharya

Rampant Corruption Plagues Washington: Why Fannie and Freddie Are Not Completely to Blame for the Credit Crisis[1]

"Housing finance," ex-Treasury Secretary John Snow commented in 2003, "is so important to our national economy that we need a strong, world-class regulatory agency to oversee the prudential operations."[2] This call for stronger regulation went relatively unheard, however. As political infighting dogged priceless Congressional session time, regulatory matters were simply further delayed. As proven over the past few months especially, the Federal National Mortgage Association and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, better known as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, suffered massively from bipartisan politics. What Snow, and others who shared his point of view, perhaps did not foresee is that what began as a domestic economic slump has now evolved into a global financial crisis of massive proportions. However, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, other government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs), and large investment banks did not cause the current crisis by themselves. Politicians were involved in the vicious circle that caused the capitulation of the credit market; they clearly stood to benefit from large donations, or else change would have occurred. Although it is easy and perhaps understandable to place the blame squarely upon GSEs like Fannie and Freddie, reducing corruption in politics is just as crucial a strategy as financial regulation for ensuring that this crisis does not recur.

First, some key background information can set up the context for the recent failures of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. On June 27, 1934, as one of several measures taken to combat the Great Depression, the National Housing Act was enacted. This historic moment paved the way for the creation of the National Mortgage Association of Washington in

1938, which later became the Federal National Mortgage Association.[3] The initial intent behind Fannie Mae's creation was to encourage the growth of a secondary mortgage market, which could stabilize the primary mortgage market and maintain credit flow to private business, homebuyers, and other individuals in American society. This GSE, which began as an arm of the federal government used to exert some influence upon the secondary mortgage market, eventually became a crucial component in enabling citizens to participate in a large aspect of the American dream: homeownership.

However, Fannie Mae's role in the American economy has warped since then. The deregulation of Fannie Mae began thirty years after its inauguration, when, in 1968, a Congress mandate split and privatized the corporation. As a result, the Government National Mortgage Association (Ginnie Mae) was created, taking a few of the responsibilities of the pre-1968 Fannie Mae. Nevertheless, the new, privately owned Fannie Mae still held most of its original responsibilities and powers. A major cause for Fannie Mae, as well as other GSEs, growing beyond control can be attributed to the new role that it was given. Although it was privatized and then traded on the New York Stock Exchange, it still essentially possessed the U.S. Treasury as a financier.[4] Fannie Mae grew rapidly and consistently in the years leading up to the turn of the century. The greed established by this expansion is one of many causes of the corruption that occurred as the millennium ended.

From the moment Congress partially privatized them, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac grew with breathtaking speed. They retained their ability to borrow money from the government at low interest rates, and then reap the income from higher interest rate loans for mortgages. In 2005, Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve Chairman at the time, proclaimed that the GSE business model hinged on "a big, fat gap."[5] By declaring this, Greenspan was referring to the gap between the cost of funds and earnings. The cost of funding has a low interest rate due to the perceived government backing that GSEs have, and the large earnings are generated from their sizable portfolios. Although this does not immediately seem to be a large enough profit margin to really spur on such growth, these interest rates had grown far apart during the early 2000s in the American housing

boom. The housing boom was just one of the few causes that allowed Fannie and Freddie to grow so wildly.

From this note it can be argued that Fannie Mae, and to a lesser extent, Freddie Mac, used two major mechanisms to preserve their dominance of the secondary mortgage market: they maintained highly pervasive lobbying networks and a firm stance that they enabled a rapidly-growing housing market. Their major concern throughout the years leading up to their recent capitulations was ensuring that the government did not end their special statuses. As a result, both companies spent millions of dollars to gain political leverage. In 1999, Franklin Raines, the CEO of Fannie said, "We manage our political risk with the same intensity that we manage our credit and interest rate risks."[6] They accomplished this through a variety of means, including giving high-paying positions to government officials. At Fannie Mae, chief executives had clauses written in their contracts that listed their severance benefits if they left specifically for a federal position.

As a result, GSEs pose a massive risk to taxpayers. When asked about the "special benefits" Fannie receives over the rest of the housing-finance industry during a congressional hearing in 2001, Fannie's CFO Tim Howard responded, "We are given different opportunities from those which our competition's been given."[7] Fannie and Freddie have ties to the U.S. Treasury, which essentially guarantee they will not be allowed to fail. This system makes taxpayers not only their customers, but also their financiers, since a government rescue is funded by taxpayer money. This fact, coupled with the multi-trillion dollar portfolios that each GSE holds, poses an interesting dilemma: if Fannie and Freddie survive, they will continue to profit from American citizens, whereas if they fail, they would take rescue funds also from the citizens.

On the other hand, Fannie and Freddie catered to politicians to bolster their enhanced statuses through their network of highly developed lobbyists. Fannie Mae possessed an intricate bipartisan network of lobbyists, which it used to suppress any unfavorable legislation. In the fall of 1999, as President Clinton's term was ending, officials within his administration, for the first time in history, made public comments warning about the risks that Fannie and Freddie could pose. Lawrence Summers, the Treasury Secretary of the administration, warned, "Debates about systemic

risk should also now include government-sponsored enterprises, which are large and growing rapidly."[8] These comments failed to spark sufficient Congressional action, and Fannie and Freddie were allowed to grow unabashedly.

As a strategy to protect the powers that enabled them to grow to such an astonishing level, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac leveraged much of their power and influence in Washington politics. In 2005, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac together spent about $23 million on lobbying, during a period of time when Congress was considering legislation that would tighten oversight. Annys Shin, a staff writer for *The Washington Post*, gives more accurate numbers for the amount of money spent by these two corporations: "Freddie Mac spent $12.6 million on lobbying, down from $15.44 million in 2004 but still enough to place it 11th among corporations that have so far filed . . . Fannie Mae was 15th."[9] Even with such high spending, Fannie Mae's spending increased almost $2 million from 2004 to 2005, rising from $8.78 million to $10.1 million.[10] According to reports released by the corporation, Fannie did indeed reduce spending on outside lobbyists by roughly 24%, but in-house lobbying costs increased by about 67%.[11] Critics have long argued that Fannie and Freddie have lobbied too much against tighter regulation, favoring stockholders rather than the majority of American citizens.

In addition, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac donated generously to the political campaigns of favorable candidates. In 2008 alone, Fannie and Freddie donated about $4.8 million to Congress members. Although Barack Obama bucked the trend, most of the top recipients were members of the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, from both major political parties.[12] The large donation that Obama's campaign received can be accounted for considering that Raines worked on his campaign. Fannie and Freddie lobbied both parties in order to get the most influence. They also lobbied representatives in the appropriate regulatory groups of Congress. By doing so, they created strong bipartisanship and tension between the two parties. It is ironic to note that by campaigning both parties, they also polarized them to each other.

Fannie Mae's unique ability to hinder threatening legislation was enabled by corruption in Washington politics. Politicians were directly or indirectly influenced by money, and this is what ultimately prevented

the necessary oversight from being implemented. Although a few corrupt politicians did benefit in the short-term, this fraudulent behavior was the root cause of the recent near-collapse of the entire financial system. This is not to say that there were no attempts to enact legislation that would have put some restrictions on how recklessly the GSEs would have been able to act. There were politicians who did try to act in the best interest of their constituents, but they were suppressed through many tactics used by lobbyists employed by both Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

For example, one freshly exposed lobbying scandal showed that, in 2005, Freddie Mac secretly paid a Republican consulting firm about $2 million to put an end to potential legislation that would have regulated Fannie Mae. The legislation, put forth by a Republican Senator, Chuck Hagel, would have overhauled the regulatory system currently in place.[13] At the time, most Republican senators supported the bill. Unknown to Hagel and the senators who supported his plan, DCI, the consulting firm, was undermining his efforts by targeting and convincing various Republican senators to drop support for Hagel's bill. In the end, there was not enough Republican support to warrant even bringing it to the floor for a vote, since Democrats were all against the bill due to the divisive politics that plagued, and continue to plague, Washington. Hagel and his supporters wrote to the Senate majority leader, Bill Frist, saying, "If effective regulatory reform legislation . . . is not enacted this year, American taxpayers will continue to be exposed to the enormous risk that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac pose to the . . . financial system and the economy as a whole."[14] This statement proved to be ominously accurate, as retrospective observation proves.

Furthermore, in March of 2000, Gary Gensler, an undersecretary of the Treasury, testified in favor of a bill that would have imposed tighter regulations upon Fannie and Freddie. David Hilzenrath, a staff writer for *The Washington Post*, wrote that, "Gensler and other Treasury officials feared that the companies had grown so large that, if they stumbled, the damage to the U.S. economy could be staggering." However, at this point, a Fannie Mae spokesperson announced that Gensler's remarks had cost 206,000 Americans the chance to buy homes. As expected, the Treasury folded under public pressure, the bill was rejected, and as a result, the companies continued to grow. This idea that Fannie and Freddie were

inexplicably linked to homeownership began to permeate throughout Washington. Gradually, the GSEs became impervious to even the mildest of regulations.[15]

Just a few months ago, the federal government seized control of both Fannie and Freddie in an attempt to stabilize the secondary mortgage market. The cost to the taxpayers will now run up to at least $700 billion. Because of their quasi-government status, which gave them the advantages of being a private corporation as well as those associated with government institutions, both corporations were able to forge close political ties with the institutions designed to control them. This conflict of interest meant that regulation remained loose, so that Fannie and Freddie's shareholders reaped the rewards. Hilzenrath writes that, ". . . the companies were protected by the belief . . . that their success was inseparable from the expansion of homeownership in America."[16] Political spin was used to drive this unfounded belief that restrictions placed upon Fannie or Freddie would equal restrictions placed upon American homebuyers.

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have become very easy scapegoats for the current global credit crisis, and while they have played a major role in the financial meltdown, it is critical to recognize the large role corrupt politics also played in bringing the global economy into recession. Fannie and Freddie are capitalist corporations and can be expected to try and manipulate every law to their own advantage. Even though this is an extremely cynical view of Fannie and Freddie, given their historic role and founding mission statements, there is still no reason for lobbyists having as much influence in Washington politics as they clearly have had in the decades leading up to this year. Politicians derive power from their constituents, and the corruption that was widespread throughout Congress represents a failure to even adequately represent the desires of these constituents. They acted selfishly and will be remembered for their contributions to the largest-scale recession since the Great Depression. While one crucial component of recovery is the implementation of a strong regulatory agency to oversee the actions of enablers like Fannie and Freddie, strong political action must also be taken to remove the persuasive powers of lobbyists. Legislation must be passed to rid politics of lobbying, at least to the degree it is today. Bribery and graft have replaced feelings of nationalism

and integrity throughout much of Washington, and this represents a major area that cries out for swift reform.

Notes

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From the Writer

I find non-fictional writing most appealing to read when it discusses a topic with passion and offers a fresh perspective, all this in a clear and concise format. Integrating these characteristics into a strong and cohesive essay is far from trivial and, to this end, having a strong passion or even a personal infatuation for the topic helps tremendously. I chose to analyze the increasing prevalence of sustainable processes around the world, as this is a subject very relevant to today's changing times. Additionally, the issue is particularly relevant to my Economics coursework, and it posed a personal interest to me as an international student. Most importantly, the topic could be condensed to a set of questions, making the scope narrow enough to allow a focused analysis, yet broad enough to stimulate individual research and leave room for further questions.

Although I often find deciding upon a facet of the topic the most difficult step in writing a research paper, synthesizing various sources of information and weaving my own voice into coherent prose also poses a considerable challenge. For this, I found going through several write-revise-rewrite cycles inevitable, and the final draft differed considerably in structure to my initial outline. This editing process also underlined the importance of writing in a dense, non-redundant style at both the sentence and paragraph levels in order to express complex ideas while bound by the prescribed word limit.

In this vein, I feel that I could have improved upon increasing the readability of my essay somewhat, particularly by outlining its structure in a concise and straightforward manner before diving into the main arguments or providing definitions. The challenge, then, would have been to write a more comprehensive introduction while not repeating ideas in different sections. Additionally, quoting material from outside the three principal sources may have allowed for a broader scope. In particular, the political context of environmental and social sustainability may have contributed to the discussion.

— George Brova

George Brova

The Emergence of Environmental and Social Sustainability

The concept of sustainable development has drawn considerable attention over the past half-century, proving very controversial in discussions of definition, scope, and possible means of realization. Numerous authors have written on the topic, each expressing unique ideas of where sustainability might lead society, of whether it is beneficial overall, and of how different entities might achieve it. David Henderson expresses a critical view of the current trend towards enforcing sustainable development, adamantly refuting the idea that sustainability is even desirable in "The Case Against Corporate Social Responsibility"; on the other end of the spectrum, the UN "Rio Declaration on Environment and Development" asserts that humans have a wide range of intrinsic rights, of which the right to an unsullied environment is pivotal. The International Forum on Globalization, "A Better World Is Possible!," assumes the middle ground, conceding that a strict policy of sustainability will not necessarily solve all problems, but nevertheless promulgating it as a necessary, albeit incomplete, first step. Upon scrutinizing these various positions, this paper concludes that despite the ostensible lack of desirability to implement sustainable means of social and environmental development, the collective action of individuals, corporations, and governments will ultimately increase sustainability at both the local and international levels.

The phrase "sustainable development" is decidedly overused, thus necessitating a more specific and rigorous definition. In its simplest form, a process such as logging, driving, or hiring manual workers is deemed sustainable if it can be continued indefinitely without depleting the resources on which it relies. While measuring the rates of consumption and

replenishment is difficult and often ambiguous in practical contexts, the peculiarities of measurement are mostly irrelevant in considering the macroscopic trend of establishing patterns of development. Although sustainable development can refer to a wide range of societal actions or processes, environmental and social decisions are those most often scrutinized.

The notion of environmental sustainability is essentially very simple, its core condition being that processes replenish all the resources they consume (or that the said resources are naturally replenished in the time required for the process to run). Ecological sustainability needs to be achieved through economic activity that enables us to "meet humans' genuine needs in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, and without diminishing the natural diversity of life on Earth" (Intl. Forum on Globalization 488). Logging offers a simple example, whereby sustainability is achieved if the number of trees cut is smaller than the number of trees replanted. Similarly, harnessing solar or wind energy is sustainable in that the process can occur indefinitely and without affecting the source. However, determining whether a pollution-causing process is sustainable presents a separate challenge, as the exact type and quantity of pollution must be considered. While processes are often favored for being "carbon-neutral," they are not implicitly sustainable, as other factors may not fully balance out. Despite these difficulties in precisely delineating the line between partial and total sustainability, the difference between the two is minimal and irrelevant to a large extent, given the large number of distinct processes that may help to counterbalance each other.

Social sustainability is slightly more ambiguous; however, one of its more common contexts is that of providing international aid in the form of manufactured goods (principally food, clothing, and occasional aid to reconstruct) to impoverished or disaster-stricken regions. Is this approach the most effective way to help alleviate the devastation? The model of alleviating immediate problems is not sustainable and may therefore not be the best way to provide effective aid. The better alternative would be to use the aid money to invest in infrastructure: that is, to create the means to enable local manufacture of necessary goods (or other goods tradable for the necessary goods).

Another issue in the social sustainability debate is that of employing workers, especially in developing countries, at minimal wages and in dismal working conditions. Such "sweatshops" have been discredited widely, and the moral argument is indeed a compelling one. The International Forum on Globalization maintains that sustainable societies must actively protect the rights and livelihoods of workers in both the formal and informal sectors, as well as those who are unemployed or underemployed (488). However, an analysis of the precise effects and influences created by such jobs must take account of the fact that they merely provide the opportunity to work and do not forcibly conscript workers. That is, although the conditions characterizing such jobs are not ideal, they are better than the next best available alternative—if they weren't, nobody would accept these jobs. In any case, determining what policies would best serve the interests of those disadvantaged has caused passionate debate.

The danger of running an unsustainable process, then, appears obvious: eventually, the necessary resources are exhausted and the process must either readjust to consume different resources (or the same resources in different proportions) or perish. Altering a process in this way is inefficient and creates a counterproductive period of adjustment during which the products are either unavailable or artificially expensive. Choosing to gradually redesign a process in cycles of research, development, and testing seems to be a better approach, far more efficient and immensely less complicated than suddenly realizing the need to radically change or terminate it. The UN Declaration decrees that states must play a role in "cooperat[ing] to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding" in its 9th Principle (412). To lend a contemporary example, the demand for hybrid and other fuel-efficient cars rose in response to higher gas prices. Since unsustainable processes by definition cannot occur forever, such transitions to increasingly sustainable processes must eventually take place—the only question is when. Henderson argues that the timing should be left entirely to the market and warns of the dangers of "over-regulating the world economy" (206). At the same time, it may seem intuitively obvious that sooner is better: the earlier we decrease consumption of a resource (be it coal or clean air), the more of it will be left over for our future enjoyment, whereas the advantages of postponement are virtually inexistent.

Unfortunately, a manager has ample incentive to postpone such expensive transitions. Why make the economically unpopular decision to conduct research and development or make expensive capital investments given that the competition seeks short-term profit? Although sustainable development is eventually necessary even from an economic standpoint, the long-term benefits are not attractive to many individual managers, who are compensated for their ability to maximize short-term performance. On a purely managerial basis, little incentive exists to switch to alternative processes until this change is necessary, despite the economic benefits of switching early and minimizing costs and down time. As the International Forum on Globalization affirms, the leadership in many global corporations is an "undemocratic, inefficient, and ultimately destructive way of organizing human affairs" (484).

Our sense of social responsibility, on the other hand, may provide incentive to consider the long-term implications of societal actions, be they environmental or social, when corporate greed fails. Unhindered by differences in price or convenience, all rational consumers would prefer environmentally and socially responsible practices. When bringing price into the equation (remembering that convenience is simply the cost of time), we must keep in mind that any decision to purchase a good carries more than a dollar cost; it also carries the environmental and social costs of producing that good. Consumers must be mindful of the repercussions of dumping pollutants into the air or creating unjust and inhumane working conditions across the world when deciding what to purchase—after all, these are pollutants that we eventually inhale, and groups of people that are unjustly subjugated as a result of our decisions. For these reasons, rational consumers would demand that environmental and social factors are taken into account when companies operate. An obvious and very real problem in this model is that many consumers are ignorant of these hidden costs, and instilling a sense of awareness and responsibility is therefore a necessary step. Ideally, our society will evolve such that consumers vote with their wallets for the best value, where the seemingly transparent environmental and social costs are minimized, even if doing so entails paying a premium.

Such a change in preference explains the emergence of corporate social responsibility. Given the demand for goods produced in a socially responsible way, some corporations will adjust their means of supply in

order to satisfy this new niche. Whether to interpret the advent of this market force as a welcome shift towards sustainable development or a "misguided . . . false view of the world [with] damaging consequences for people in general" (Henderson 203) remains in the eyes of the beholder. Of course the model is not perfect, since problems arise when trying to quantify the invisible tribulations against difference in dollar costs, in order to determine which product has the greater value. Clearly, individuals will each assign their own value to abstract and very public resources such as the environment or social well-being, and the acceptable thresholds will therefore differ drastically.

The economic implementation of this mentality fathered the notion of corporate social responsibility. There is no question that corporations have a grand role to play, for they are members of society and indisputably influential ones at that! The debate of corporate social responsibility centers around the rules and regulations to which corporations should be held accountable, as well as the extent to which governmental regulation must play a role in instilling this sense of responsibility. Henderson argues that being socially responsible not only detracts from a company's profits but also undercuts society, noting that complying with regulations introduces unnecessary and wasteful overheads in addition to undermining the economic process (205). This detriment may be real, but unfortunately, markets tend to operate in short-term time frames, whereas the notion of corporate social responsibility is a result of enduring factors. As such, the emergence of a long-term market factor carries benefits for society in the long term, despite a slight rise in short-term inefficiency.

Henderson also condemns society's ostensibly frequent and impetuous reactions to inequality, drawing attention to a perceived sense of "global salvationism" and claiming that it holds a "distorted view of globalization and its effects" (204). Henderson may or may not be correct in claiming that globalization has not marginalized poor countries, and he is certainly right in arguing that markets are now more open and competitive; however, the very shift of power from government to private corporations carries with it a similar transfer of responsibility. As the UN Declaration affirms in its 16th Principle, the polluter should bear the cost of pollution (413). In other words, corporations are now more empow-

ered than ever to influence our world, and the notion of corporate social responsibility decrees that they should wield this power conscientiously and in a sustainable manner.

As we have seen briefly, governments have a responsibility to encourage and augment corporate social responsibility. Henderson laments that many governments now endorse the notion of corporate social responsibility (203). At the same time, the UN Declaration emphasizes that states have an equally large role to play in facilitating social wellbeing, and that regulations are therefore often necessary and conducive to making the greatest number of people most well-off—not only today, but for years to come.

Another significant governmental role lies in combating the effect of externalities—actions with repercussions that do not directly affect those making the initial decision, and which are therefore omitted from the executive process. Assessing and controlling the effects of these externalities is a crucial byproduct of encouraging sustainable development. In the case of the environment, for example, our decisions to drive more or not use energy-efficient light bulbs not only affect us, but also everyone else by contributing to the degradation of the environment, the common resource for everything living on this planet. Governments may seek to combat such externalities by assigning explicit costs to communally destructive actions, as through taxation or outright banning of particularly destructive behaviors. These actions can eventually converge in order to "facilitate the cooperative coordination of national policies on matters where the interests of nations are inherently intertwined" (Intl. Forum on Globalization 484). While governmental intervention is always controversial for allegedly causing inefficiency, these measures of combating externalities can in fact increase total social surplus and thus lead to increased efficiency.

All these examples serve to illustrate that moral and economic objectives are inextricably bound. Long-term economic incentives exist to facilitate and encourage sustainable development, and our sense of social responsibility can serve as an equally powerful supporter over the short term, via both direct action and within the economics framework. Thus, corporations can reap economic benefits by instigating sustainability, and individuals profit from a cleaner environment or a better society. Governments can also encourage environmentally and socially friendly measures

by compensating for externalities. As a result of these multiple and interrelated factors, society's actions will inevitably lead to sustainable social and economic development.

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From the Writer

When I first read *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, what struck me most, and what inspired me to write my essay, was the irony that Dorian exhibited in his life. In pursuing aestheticism—a philosophy based in the simplistic beauty of things—the pursuer may, in the end and without notice, emerge uglier than ever before. Dorian, the once wide-eyed innocent, buckles and caves in to depravity while practicing an aesthetic lifestyle, despite the beauty that such a life idea claims. I began to wonder what Oscar Wilde intended to convey with his portrayal of the Aesthetic Movement incarnate and its often harsh consequences, especially given the well-documented involvement of Wilde in promoting aestheticism in his contemporary society. The juxtaposition of Wilde's support for the Aesthetic Movement with Dorian's corruption at the hands of it provided a great jumping-off point and a lingering question with which to begin an essay. What exactly is Wilde's view of aestheticism when one bears in mind the story of Dorian Gray? In writing my essay, I realized Wilde's outlook is not as straightforward as it may first appear.

Throughout the writing process, a difficult task I faced was to encapsulate the aesthetic position when the philosophy often meant different things to different people. In researching the movement, I found that the moral philosophies of various proponents of aestheticism often varied and, thus, it became difficult to nail down the aesthetic tenets and apply them to Dorian Gray. In retrospect, some observations about the philosophy may, consequently, appear too generalized. I was also challenged in the initial formulation of my argument. It was initially difficult trying to broaden the significance of my argument beyond mere observation and to explain its significance, i.e. the reasons for and implications of Wilde's exposition of aestheticism. I hoped not only to tell what Wilde was saying about aestheticism in his novel, but also to prove that what he was saying transcended fiction and profoundly impacted society as well.

— Patrick Duggan

Patrick Duggan

The Conflict Between Aestheticism and Morality in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Oscar Wilde prefaces his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with a reflection on art, the artist, and the utility of both. After careful scrutiny, he concludes: "All art is quite useless" (Wilde 4). In this one sentence, Wilde encapsulates the complete principles of the Aesthetic Movement popular in Victorian England. That is to say, real art takes no part in molding the social or moral identities of society, nor should it. Art should be beautiful and pleasure its observer, but to imply further-reaching influence would be a mistake. The explosion of aesthetic philosophy in *fin-de-siècle* English society, as exemplified by Oscar Wilde, was not confined to merely art, however. Rather, the proponents of this philosophy extended it to life itself. Here, aestheticism advocated whatever behavior was likely to maximize the beauty and happiness in one's life, in the tradition of hedonism. To the aesthete, the ideal life mimics art; it is beautiful, but quite useless beyond its beauty, concerned only with the individual living it. Influences on others, if existent, are trivial at best. Many have read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a novelized sponsor for just this sort of aesthetic lifestyle. However, this story of the rise and fall of Dorian Gray might instead represent an allegory about morality meant to critique, rather than endorse, the obeying of one's impulses as thoughtlessly and dutifully as aestheticism dictates.

In the novel, Lord Henry Wotton trumpets the aesthetic philosophy with an elegance and bravado that persuade Dorian to trust in the principles he espouses; the reader is often similarly captivated. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret the novel as a patent recommendation of aestheticism. To the aesthete, there is no distinction between moral and

immoral acts, only between those that increase or decrease one's happiness; yet, *Dorian Gray* refutes this idea, presenting a strong case for the inherent immorality of purely aesthetic lives. Dorian Gray personifies the aesthetic lifestyle in action, pursuing personal gratification with abandon. Yet, while he enjoys these indulgences, his behavior ultimately kills him and others, and he dies unhappier than ever. Rather than an advocate for pure aestheticism, then, *Dorian Gray* is a cautionary tale in which Wilde illustrates the dangers of the aesthetic philosophy when not practiced with prudence. Aestheticism, argues Wilde, too often aligns itself with immorality, resulting in a precarious philosophy that must be practiced deliberately.

Dorian Gray is often read as an explicit proclamation of the worthiness of living life in accordance with aesthetic values. This is due in part to the flourishing Aesthetic Movement of Victorian England at the time of the novel's publication, as well as Oscar Wilde's association with the movement itself (Becker 660). The Aesthetic Movement, which coincided with the Industrial Revolution at the end of the nineteenth century, emphasized the artistic aspect of a man's work in producing a variety of goods, from furniture to machines to literature (Becker 660). Oscar Wilde, however, proposed that the principles of the Aesthetic Movement extend beyond the production of mere commodities. In Joseph Pearce's biography, *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde*, Pearce recalls Wilde's own perspective on the popular movement. Speaking of aestheticism, Wilde is quoted:

> It is indeed to become a part of the people's life . . . I mean a man who works with his hands; and not with his hands merely, but with his head and his heart. The evil that machinery is doing is not merely in the consequence of its work but in the fact that it makes men themselves machines also. Whereas, we wish them to be artists, that is to say men. (qtd. in Pearce 144)

In his exposition of aestheticism, Wilde applies the philosophy in a more universal sense, stressing the positive influences of aestheticism in one's life beyond mere craftsmanship. Just as the machines that mass-produce materials with the intervention of human thought are labeled "evil," Wilde similarly condemns men who act as metaphorical machines, programmed to behave in accordance with society's ideas of propriety rather than allowing themselves to act freely and achieve the greatest

amount of happiness. Wilde's eloquent advocacy of an aesthetic lifestyle is paralleled in his depiction of Lord Henry in *Dorian Gray*. Lord Henry lectured to the impressionable Dorian, "We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. . . . Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden itself" (Wilde 9). Wilde, through Lord Henry, laments the stifling nature of his contemporary Victorian society and how the supposed morality it boasts necessitates self-denial and rejection of life's most beautiful aspects. Lord Henry warns that without an enthusiastic embrace of aestheticism, one will perpetually anguish with the desire of precisely what he must deny himself, all for the sake of propriety. This philosophy espoused by Wilde and Lord Henry often leads, not surprisingly, to the conclusion that *Dorian Gray* is a declaration of Wilde's, promoting the adoption of purely aesthetic lives without qualification. This, however, is too shallow of an interpretation.

Opponents of a purely aesthetic lifestyle will certainly cite what they consider an inevitability: one's desires and impulses, though when acted upon result in a more pleasurable life, will at times be undeniably immoral. It is at these times that the virtues of the wholly aesthetic life become questionable. The ruination of Dorian Gray, the embodiment of unbridled aestheticism, illustrates the immorality of such a lifestyle and gravely demonstrates its consequences. Wilde uses *Dorian Gray* not as an advertisement for aestheticism, but rather, he uses Dorian's life to warn against aestheticism's hostility toward morality when uncontrolled. Wilde himself admits, in a letter to the *St. James's Gazette,* that *Dorian Gray* "is a story with a moral. And the moral is this: All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment" (Wilde 248). Aestheticism does well to condemn the renunciation of desires, but it is an excessive obedience to these desires that is subversively dangerous. Therefore, in the practice of Wilde's aestheticism, forethought and constraint are necessities, yet too often lacking, and without them, one is doomed to suffer the same fate as Dorian Gray.

The character of Dorian Gray and the story of his profound degeneration provide a case study examining the viability of purely aesthetic lives. Dorian lives according to what Lord Henry professes without hesitation, and what Lord Henry inspires Dorian, through persuasive rhetoric,

is an attitude indifferent to consequence and altogether amoral. As Wilde writes, Dorian's newfound position is "never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they may be" (Wilde 125). Under Lord Henry's mentorship, Dorian, once the epitome of wide-eyed youth, behaves with no regard for the ramifications of his actions, diligently pursuing instant gratification without thought of its implications, whether they be "sweet or bitter."

Dorian's relationship with the actress Sibyl Vane plainly illustrates this marked change in personality. Dorian pursues Sibyl from first sights, intent on acquiring her before he ever attempts to truly know her. Indeed, Dorian's love for Sibyl is overtly superficial, as evidenced by Dorian's own description of his infatuation with Sibyl: "I loved you because you were marvelous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art" (Wilde 101). Dorian is not attracted to Sibyl's character of personality, but rather her acting talent and enthralling performances; this is what enchants the aesthetically inclined Dorian. When Sibyl leaves the stage, then, she no longer serves a purpose in Dorian's aesthetic life, and thus, Dorian abandons her unceremoniously. Dorian does not regret informing Sybil that, "Without your art, you are nothing" (Wilde 101). The tragedy of Sybil's later suicide, brought about by utter despair at her desertion, is lost on Dorian, who instead enjoys the dramatic intrigue of the occasion. For Dorian, whose uncontrolled aestheticism rejects the concept of morality, the immorality of his actions goes unrecognized. In fact, Dorian declares excitedly, "It seems to me to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded" (Wilde 114). Here, the adverse consequences of aestheticism surface in Dorian's life. In his pursuit of his own pleasures, a distinctly narcissistic attitude emerges, and the incompatibility of morality and unconditional aestheticism becomes all the more apparent.

The emergence of narcissism in Dorian and its correlation with his newly adopted aesthetic philosophy is integral to Wilde's novel as it emphasizes the frequent hostility between aestheticism and morality that Wilde cautions against. *Dorian Gray* exposes the immorality of self-

absorption, as Dorian's portrait becomes more disfigured with each one of Dorian's selfish acts. This self-absorption, then, appears to be an inevitable consequence of aestheticism. Only a more deliberate practice of aestheticism may harness this egotism and avoid the immorality Dorian embodies. Interestingly, in his essay "Come See About Me: Enchantment of the Double in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," Christopher Craft recognizes a mirroring of the Greek myth of Narcissus in the life of Dorian Gray. According to mythology, Narcissus, upon catching a glimpse of his reflection in a pool, becomes so enraptured by it that he stood and admired it endlessly, unmoving for the rest of his life. As Craft notes, this self-absorption "is a commitment that, like Dorian's, graduates fully until death" (Craft 113). Narcissus becomes so infatuated with himself that the rest of world effectively ceases to exist or affect him and, as Craft argues, "it is into precisely this silent delirium that Dorian unwittingly steps" when he allows Lord Henry's aesthetic philosophy to so dominate him (Craft 113). Dorian enjoys a life of eternal youth, with only his portrait aging in parallel with Dorian's immorality; so, as Dorian sinks into the depths of narcissism, he maintains his external beauty, and his portrait degenerates instead. Eventually, as in the myth of Narcissus, such egotism has its consequences. When Dorian, disgusted with the decrepit picture of the supposedly "real" him, destroys it in a fit of anger, Dorian too is destroyed. Wilde writes that after Dorian's death, "it was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was" (Wilde 220). In the end, as a testament to the purely aesthetic life, the only legacy Dorian leaves behind—everything that identifies him as who he was—is his superficial jewelry.

There is an argument, then, made by Wilde for a new aestheticism, approached with more constraint than Dorian employs. This argument is based not only in the moral obligation of the individual, but with the betterment of all of society in mind. Matthew Arnold, in his essay "Culture and Anarchy," provides reasoning against the ethos of Lord Henry's aestheticism and an unconditional application of it. Arnold focuses on its detrimental effects on society and the possibility for societal improvement when aesthetic tendencies are properly controlled. There appears to be agreement, then, between Wilde and Arnold; Wilde' novel provides a failed example of the purely aesthetic life, and when scaled to a larger society, a similar result is understandably expected. As Arnold views his

contemporary society, it is arranged hierarchically, dividing the aristocrats, the middle-class, and the working-class, all of which, Arnold laments, are inclined to live hedonistically, pursuing pleasure and only what is comfortable and easy. Dorian Gray embodies just his defect in Arnold's society. Arnold argues, however, that "there are born a certain number of natures with a curiosity about their best self with a bend for seeing things as they are . . . for simply concerning themselves with reason and the will of God, and doing their best to make these prevail;—for the pursuit, in a word, of perfection" (Arnold 277). Arnold is optimistic that some may pursue beyond the immediately pleasurable and act to perfect themselves both morally and intellectually. This pursuit of perfection, however, is likely an arduous and uncomfortable task, and is therefore incompatible with pure aestheticism. Some concessions must be made for the absolute aesthete, then, for such transcendence occur.

Dorian Gray, for much of Wilde's novel, fails to embody Arnold's ideal, as in his hedonistic life he is seen "creeping at dawn out of dreadful houses and slinking in disguise in the foulest dens in London," despite being once too honorable for such debauchery (Wilde 118). Dorian exemplifies a regression in social intellect from his beginnings rather than the kind of transcendence hoped for by Arnold. Dorian displays no such pursuit of intellectual perfection as he is slowly corrupted and in turn corrupts others, luring them with him into the slums and opium dens of London. Arnold refers to those able to transcend social classes in society as "aliens," hinting at their rarity to the point of foreignness and to their almost mythical quality (277). The mere existence of these aliens, however, provides hope that the utter hedonists of society may learn to harness their damaging tendencies, and in doing so, better the intellectual and moral state of humankind.

Wilde, too, recognizes this ability to control the hedonistic temptations associated with aestheticism, as demonstrated by the last stages of Dorian's life. Mitsuharu Matsuoka, in his essay "Aestheticism and Social Anxiety in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," notes that, as Dorian's death approaches, "Dorian ultimately reacts against his lifestyle, choking on his New Hedonism," at which point "a great sense of doom hangs over Dorian" (Matsuoka 78). Indeed, Dorian appears to realize the consequences of his unbridled aestheticism; however, he is much too far gone to

salvage. Dorian reveals his epiphany to Lord Henry: "The soul is a terrible reality. It can be bought, and sold, and bartered away. It can be poisoned or made perfect. There is a soul in each one of us. I know it" (Wilde 211). Unfortunately for Dorian, this realization comes too late to save his soul from its degradation, long-nurtured by a purely aesthetic life, and he is destroyed. The realization itself, however, is indicative of Wilde's argument woven throughout *Dorian Gray*. Despite Wilde's publicly advocating the principles of aestheticism, Dorian's demise illustrates Wilde's recognition that aestheticism needs to be properly controlled. While the pursuit of beauty and happiness in life is always Wilde's ideal, he also implies that the consequences of one's actions must be thought out and the impact of one's decisions, beyond oneself, must also be carefully considered before acting on any impulse.

The Aesthetic Movement in *fin-de-siècle* England, as interpreted by Oscar Wilde, revolved around the ideal that the utility of one's actions should be to create the maximal amount of beauty and pleasure in one's life, and nothing more. Wilde's *Dorian Gray* appears, at first glance, to promote this philosophy unequivocally. Indeed, a lifestyle based on this aestheticism is espoused in Wilde's opening preface as well as throughout Lord Henry's professorial lectures. Upon closer inspection, however, Wilde's novel is not as wholly embracing of aestheticism as this implies. Wilde realized and depicted in the life of Dorian Gray, a need for a more controlled and deliberate approach to aestheticism, without which morality will inevitably be elusive. The adoption of unrestrained aestheticism, as exhibited by Dorian, results in a lack of remorse, self-absorption, and intellectual regression. For the sake of preserving morality, a concept proven incompatible with pure aestheticism, more deliberation is necessary from the aesthete in deciding upon action. If, in the pursuit of one's desires and of the beautiful aspects of life, the condition of others' or of one's own intellect is jeopardized, the enjoyment garnered must sometimes be sacrificed for the greater good. As Wilde makes clear, it is only through a more restrained philosophy that aestheticism and morality may eventually align.

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From the Writer

My initial step in the writing process is always to read the novel with a pen in hand. As I read, I underline significant quotes, recurring symbols, ironies, and inconsistencies. I even write questions in the margins. I find I am a less passive reader with a pen, and, when it comes time to choose a topic, I am well prepared, already having a collection of questions I am genuinely curious about. Once I have chosen a topic, I repeat the process with potential sources, marking the authors' main ideas and noting any weaknesses in their arguments. Sometimes, when searching for a topic, it can be just as effective to work backwards, letting the sources spark some initial questions. Such was the case with this paper.

I became interested in religious allusions in *We* after my professor required the class to read Richard Gregg's essay. After a discussion with my professor, I was convinced that I had enough support to argue the role of I-330, and not D-503, as the Christ figure. In my rough draft, I attacked Gregg's essay and provided a list of allusions that supported I-330 in the role of Christ. My professor gave two important criticisms of my draft, and fixing them proved my greatest challenge. First, my argument lost its credibility because it was guilty of the same faults I had attacked in Gregg's essay. I couldn't criticize Gregg for ignoring religious allusions that pointed to I-330 as the Christ figure and simply list those allusions. My argument was equally guilty of ignoring allusions that indicated D-503 was the Christ figure. Rather, I needed to explore why Gregg was wrong, and it was his approach to the novel that I eventually chose to attack. Secondly, my thesis was supported by a list. I learned that paragraphs should not be lists of evidence proving the same point but should each contain smaller arguments that build upon one another. What started out as my rough draft, a list of allusions pointing to I-330 as Christ, in the end was just one point in my final paper.

— Rachel Fogley

Rachel Fogley

I-330: Counterpart of Christ in Zamyatin's *We*

Religious allusions and imagery play a prominent part in Yevgeny Zamyatin's classic dystopian novel, *We*. With characters drawing direct parallels between their "mathematically perfect li[ves]" in OneState and Paradise of the Old Testament, *We,* with its Genesis theme, has been a popular subject of scholarly discussion (Zamyatin 4). Richard Gregg is no exception to this discussion, and, in his essay "Two Adams and Eve in the Crystal Palace: Dostoevsky, the Bible, and *We*," he characterizes D-503's account of OneState as a tragic counterpart to the Biblical tale. Gregg continues to examine another "Biblical pattern" in his essay, the Christ parallel, citing symbols and images to argue the classification of D-503 as the Christ figure; yet, he remains "doubtful whether its artistic integration into the novel as a whole is entirely successful," noting that Zamyatin's "symbolic patterns . . . blur and blunt more than they intensify" (65, 67). However, a conception of the novel as operating on two distinct levels both clarifies these symbolic patterns and suggests that the Christ parallel is a Biblical allusion that has been undervalued. Indeed, a number of allusions and images that Gregg excludes from his discussion reveal a more complete integration of the Christ parallel throughout the novel. These allusions and images interestingly point to I-330, not D-503, as the counterpart of Christ in OneState, consequently relegating D- to the role of what Andrew Barratt has called the "imperfect disciple" (68).

An understanding of the novel as functioning on separate levels helps to categorize its numerous Biblical references and images into two independent patterns: those of Paradise and the life of Christ. The first level concerns the way in which the characters themselves, the Numbers

of OneState, view the series of events in the novel, notably the rebellious actions of I-330. This level is comparable to Paradise, and, as mentioned above, the Numbers go so far as to liken their society to Eden of Genesis: "The old legend of Paradise—that was about us, about right now. . . . We helped God finally overcome the Devil—because that's who it was that pushed people to break the commandment and taste freedom. . . . And we're simple and innocent again, like Adam and Eve" (Zamyatin 61). In light of this first level of interpretation, I-330 is cast in the role of Eve, the seductress who persuades Adam to taste the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (*NRSV Bible*, Gen. 3.1–7). Similar to her Biblical counterpart, I-330 plays the seductress and convinces D-503, Adam, to rebel against OneState by joining the Mephi cause and tasting the freedom of beyond the Green Wall. I-330, like Eve, is responsible for the loss of D-503's innocence and for his rebellious behavior. (During the launch of the INTEGRAL, D-503, under the influence of I-330, attempts to land the spacecraft on the other side of the Green Wall) (Zamyatin 197). Gregg's argument operates on this first level of the novel, citing "a forbidden food, a bite, a figurative fall, and sinful intercourse" as support for the classification of OneState as a tragic Paradise: "If Genesis is tragic because Paradise was lost, and man's happiness forfeited, its modern analogue is tragic because in the end Adam is saved and his 'glass paradise'—putatively at least—preserved" (63, 65).

Gregg's description of the Paradise of OneState as tragic touches upon the second level on which *We* operates: the way in which the reader—and likely Zamyatin—views the events in the novel and the behavior of I-330. While the comparison of OneState to Paradise is appropriate for the Numbers, it is not so from the author's and reader's perspectives. Zamyatin wrote *We* as an imitation of, perhaps even a warning against, the totalitarian tendencies he perceived in the Soviet Union following the Revolution. The novel is dystopian because, while OneState's members perceive their society as operating perfectly, the author's intention was likely to reveal the worst of all situations. Indeed, the novel is tragic—to the reader, not the Numbers of OneState—because D-503, I-330, and her band fail in their revolt for freedom. On this second level, the Christ parallel is a more accurate allusion than that of Paradise; for I-330 develops not as the figure responsible for the condemnation

of humankind but the one responsible for its redemption—or, at least, attempted redemption. The parallel between I-330 and Christ is a connection Gregg overlooks, despite substantial evidence in the novel for its support.

Gregg, rather, argues for the shifting of D-503 between the roles of Adam and Christ. (As mentioned previously, Gregg's analysis does not explore Biblical patterns based on two distinct levels of the novel.) However, Gregg's case for the connection between D-503 and Christ has weaknesses, and some of his central claims may similarly be used to support the argument for the role of I-330 as Christ. Gregg notes that the scene of D-503 before the Benefactor after the attempted rebellion "bears a bizarre yet unmistakable resemblance to that of Christ in the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor": "Silent (like Jesus), [D-503] listens to the stern arraignment by his superior as the latter rejects the concept of freedom" (66). Andrew Barratt has similarly supported this resemblance in his essay "The X-Factor in Zamyatin's *We*," and this case may be argued as an instance where Gregg has claimed Zamyatin's "symbolic patterns . . . blur and blunt" (668; 67). Yet, equally arguably, I-330 maintains silence when facing the questioning of the Benefactor, who demands the names of her cohorts, and suffering the torture of the Bell: "This happened three times, and she still didn't say a word" (Zamyatin 225). Gregg also claims that, in the role of Christ, D-503 has "failed in his endeavor" "to liberate mankind" (66). However, he overlooks an important point: the liberation of the pregnant O-90 through her escape to the other side of the Green Wall. This point supports a triumph of freedom with the help of D-503 and, most notably, I-330, either both acting as parallels to Christ or as parallels to Christ and disciple (a categorization for D- explored later in this paper). Gregg finally makes one fatal assumption in his analysis of D-503 as the Christ figure, noting that paradoxically, as Jesus sacrificed himself so that humankind would be free, D- "submits to the machine," ensuring that OneState will remain enslaved (67). No evidence, in fact, exists to warrant such an assumption, and one could equally argue that, in the moment of his enlightenment—"There where your finite universe ends—what's there . . . beyond?"—, D-503 is "seized" like his neighbor, not self-sacrificed (Zamyatin 224). Zamyatin even provides direct textual evidence in support of this point: "That evening they seized my neighbor . . . and me . . .

and charged us with not having the certificate of the Operation, and took us off to the nearest auditorium" (224). Furthermore, as Gregg admits, the mere idea that D- undergoes the operation to ensure the enslavement of OneState is paradoxical, contradicting the message of freedom surrounding the sacrifice of Christ; conversely, I-330 remains true to her message of freedom through the end, refusing to betray her cause in her state of silence. Thus, though Gregg's case for the classification of D-503 as the Christ figure is rooted in concrete parallels and allusions, therefore possibly complicating the two distinct levels this paper has claimed the novel operates on, it is quite arguable. Nonetheless, the parallel of I-330 with Christ shows a more successful integration throughout the novel than Gregg has claimed for D-503's parallel with Christ and the New Testament symbolic pattern in general.

The complete integration of the connection between I-330 and Christ is supported by the character's actions; the actions that are, in turn, taken against her; and D-503's perceptions and relationship to the events, which are further supported by a series of largely overlooked religious allusions and images. The actions that link I-330 to Christ, and result in her condemnation by OneState, largely concern her rebellious behavior, apparent on both levels of the novel; for, as Eve she threatens the perfect system of OneState and, as Christ, the imperfect system.

Just as Jesus sought to bring a message of God's truth and love—and the possibility of eternal freedom from sin through faith—to the Jewish state, I-330's actions reflect her objective to bring freedom, love, and genuine happiness to the Numbers of OneState. Similarly, as Christ's message of a higher power, God, threatened to undermine the power of the Jewish authorities, so I-330's ambitions for freedom and love endanger the foundation of OneState. I-330's revolt for freedom is most apparent in her plot to destroy the Green Wall and undercut the INTEGRAL mission, which seeks to spread the submissive OneState mentality throughout the universe. Her cry for freedom is heard in her rally with the Mephi beyond the Green Wall: "The day has come when we will demolish this wall, all walls" (Zamyatin 151). The leader's message concerning love and true happiness is communicated through her influence on D-503 and the narrator's resultant transformation from obedient Number to rebel. D-'s diary serves as evidence that the happiness guaranteed by OneState—which the narrator

once glorified—is an empty happiness when compared to the fulfillment I-330 brings him. D-503 explains that OneState has ensured happiness by eliminating "love and hunger" and emphasizing the power of logic over the power of love (21, 23). Yet, after establishing a relationship with I-330, D- writes of a different kind of fulfillment: "How full I am! If only you knew how full I am!" (74). He later remarks that the mere sight of I-330 "fill[s] the empty . . . world" for him (83). Indeed, I-330 literally, through her love, gives D-503 a soul (86). In knowing the true happiness that accompanies love, D-503 looks back on the so-called happiness guaranteed by OneState with doubt. A distinction between the empty happiness of OneState and the true happiness given by I-330 is revealed upon D-503's acceptance of a certificate of illness (which he knows, but will not directly admit, will allow him to meet with I-330 the next day): "I knew that some sort of happiness was waiting for me tomorrow. But what sort?" (89). D-503's questioning the so-called happiness guaranteed by OneState is again directly revealed when he sees a pair of yellow eyes beyond the Green Wall and asks himself, "And what if yellow-eyes, in his stupid, dirty pile of leaves, in his uncalculated life, is happier than us?" (91). Thus, though sexual gratification undoubtedly contributes to D-503's new sense of happiness—an approach that lacks any parallel with Christ's methods—I-330's role as the bearer of a more fulfilling happiness and liberator of the soul has strong connections with the mission of Jesus, as do her aspirations for the freedom of OneS- tate.

The condemnation of I-330 by the Benefactor for her rebellious actions and the Mephi leader's consequent torture under the Bell successfully integrate popular Christian themes of sacrifice, suffering, and hope into the novel. The theme of sacrifice is directly introduced by D-503 when he compares his situation to that of the Old Testament figure Abraham, referring to the Biblical story of the Sacrifice of Isaac. To elaborate, D-503 perceives his feelings upon discovering that S-4711 is an ally of the Mephi as similar to those Abraham must have felt when, in the moment before he took a blade to his son as a sacrifice to God, an angel swooped down from the heavens to stop him. (God allowed Abraham to sacrifice a ram instead of his son (Gen. 22.1–19).) This Biblical allusion proves highly significant, for the story is regarded as an Old Testament parallel to the Lord's sacrifice of his only son: Christ. I-330's own suffering and martyr-

dom are recorded only two pages after D-503's reference to Abraham and Isaac. Another allusion to Christ's sacrifice and suffering concerns D-503's comparison of the Guardians to "thorns" on "the gentle State Flower" of OneState when glorifying the "famous 'Mathematical Rhymes'" taught to schoolchildren (Zamyatin 67). This image cannot simply be regarded as coincidence when one considers the role of the Guardians in capturing I-330 and her band. Indeed, the image of the thorns serves as a Biblical reference; for, just as Jesus was made to suffer under a crown of thorns, I-330 is fated to suffer the torture of the Bell after her capture by the Guardians: the thorns (Mk. 15.17; Zamyatin 225). In the end, one may argue that though I-330 as Christ is the martyred figure, her death brings no salvation, a central theme in the Christian faith. With his imagination removed, D-503 does not even appear to recognize his savior; yet, a trace of I-330's everlasting lay in D-'s statement: "When they started pumping the air out of the Bell, she threw her head back, and half closed her eyes and pressed her lips together, *and this reminded me of something*" (Zamyatin 225, italics added). Perhaps, a more palpable sense of hope for the salvation of OneState's Numbers and the legacy of I-330 lies in the flight of the pregnant O-90, who, with the help of I-330, escapes to the other side of the Green Wall (183–185). Further still, D-503's account does not end with a clear victory for OneState; for, as he writes, "In the western quarters there is still chaos, roaring, corpses, animals, and, unfortunately, quite a lot of Numbers who have betrayed reason" (225). The messages of hope for freedom and the legacy of I-330, though less emphasized than their Biblical counterparts, exist nonetheless, together with the themes of sacrifice and suffering, underscoring the role of I-330 as the Christ-figure.

Finally, D-503's record of his physical perceptions of I-330 and the way in which he relates himself to her at times in the novel supports her role as the counterpart of Christ. Perhaps subconsciously, D-503 links I-330 to the instrument of Jesus' crucifixion and most dominant Christian symbol, the cross, through his physical description of her face. As Barratt notes in his analysis of the transforming X-factor in *We*, the X formed by the dark eyebrows and facial lines of I-330's smile is referred to as a cross by D-503 at two crucial points in the novel: the Mephi leader's vote in opposition to the Benefactor and her revealing of the Mephi plot to D-503 (667). During these two moments when I-330's fateful suffering is

sealed, the narrator writes of a "cross on her brow" (Zamyatin 138–139). Though the instrument of I-330's suffering in the end is not a literal cross, as in the case of Christ, the leader must endure the agony of the Bell three times (225). Unquestionably, I-330's suffering fate and martyrdom, more than any other character in the novel, parallel the fate of Christ, and D-503's physical identification of the character by the image of the cross highlights this connection. An account of D-503's relationship to I-330 in the moment he foresees her suffering not only provides further evidence for the role of I-330 as the Christ figure but also may present readers with indisputable evidence for her categorization. In a conversation when D-503 is summoned to the Benefactor after the failure of the Mephi mission, the ruler of OneState discusses the crucifixion of Christ and the equal roles of executioner and onlooker: "Some are up on the top, bespattered with blood nailing the body to the cross; others are below, bespattered with tears, looking on" (206). When D-503 later foresees the execution of I-330 in a dream—"the Machine of the Benefactor," "a blindingly white pillow," "a reclining head with half closed eyes," and "a sharp, sweet band of teeth"—he remarks: "It must have been raining: my face was wet" (208). Here, the sharp band of teeth clearly indicates I-330 in the moment of her suffering at the hand of the Benefactor and, most importantly, the wetness of D-503's face is a direct reference to the Benefactor's speech, to the wet faces of both executioner and onlooker. If D-'s wet face classifies him as an onlooker, only I-330, the victim of the Bell's torture, can be classified as the object of the "crucifixion." D-503, in describing his relationship to I- at the moment of her martyrdom, therefore secures the parallel between the Mephi leader and Christ by providing a direct, textual connection.

With I-330 strongly established as the Christ-figure, the classification of D-503 as the role of disciple logically follows. This categorization, like that of I-330 as Christ, shows a more successful integration into the novel than Gregg has claimed for that of D-503 as the Christ figure. Indeed, Gregg's claim that D-503 resembles Christ—and D-'s own conception of himself as the martyr—in his attempt to "liberate mankind" seems futile when one considers that, had it not been for I-330, D- would never have joined the Mephi cause to liberate the Numbers of OneState (66). Likewise, it is I-330 who appears as the leader of the rebels, "up high, over the heads, over everybody," when D- visits the other side of the Green

Wall (Zamyatin 150–151). A case for D-503 in the role of disciple is conceivably more accurate. As D-503 in the role of Adam is at first reluctant to submit to I-330 as Eve—"This woman was just as irritating to me as an irrational term"—so D-503 is at first reluctant to follow I-330 as the rebellious Christ. In his analysis of the X-factor, Barratt provides strong support for the role of D-503 as disciple to I-330 (Zamyatin 10). He notes that by divulging the secret Mephi plan to commandeer the INTEGRAL, I-330 forces D-503 "into the position of having to prove himself by making a conscious choice between OneState and the Mephi" (Barratt 667). Consequently, a sense of moral responsibility weighs on D-503, and, as Barratt has asserted, "Like Peter in the gospel story, [his] loyalty [is] put to the severest test, and . . . he [is] found wanting" (667). Indeed, like Peter, who thrice denied Christ after the crucifixion, D-503 betrays the Mephi cause: "The following day I, D-503, reported to the Benefactor and told him all I knew about the enemies of happiness" (Mk. 14.66–72; Zamyatin 224). Barratt observes another betrayal of I-330 by D-503, this time akin to that of Judas. He remarks, however, that "the betrayal occurs by default rather than by [D-503's] design," meaning that the betrayal is not planned but a mistake; D- inadvertently "leav[es] his journal around for the informer Yu- to inspect" (Barratt 668). Similarly, D-'s report of his knowledge of the Mephi to the Benefactor is not a deliberate betrayal but an act beyond his control after he has been subjected to the operation. Yet, by default or design, the reality of D-503's imperfect discipleship still remains, and his relationship to I-330 and the revolt for freedom echoes that of the flawed follower, not the redeeming leader.

In the end, Gregg's failure to understand the complex structure of *We* leads him to judge the novel as an artistic failure; for he asserts that the novel should be appreciated less for its Biblical "symbolic patterns"—which "blur and blunt more than they intensify"—than for the sheer "boldness and ingenuity of its satirical concept" (67). In profound contrast to Gregg's judgment, this paper has revealed the remarkable artistry behind Zamyatin's work. By infusing his work with two distinct and contradictory levels of meaning—a view of Paradise, as observed by the Numbers of OneState and an attempt at redemption, as viewed by the reader—Zamyatin was masterfully able to construct simultaneous Biblical patterns within the framework of one narrative. Ultimately, the patterns

are not intended to confuse but to offer greater meaning to the text. The message, like the structure, is complex; for, to the Numbers of OneState, *We* is the account of an established Paradise threatened by the forces of evil, and, to the reader, it is the account of a fallen world confronted with the hope for redemption.

Notes

1. I-330's silence further supports the theme of her sacrifice (discussed later in this paper); unwilling to name her accomplices, she continually endures the torture of the Bell.

2. Subsidiary allusions that are beyond the scope of this essay include the scales mentioned on page 9, suggesting a reference to Christ as the Last Judge ("[I-330] weighed me with her eyes as if I were on a scales") and the position of I-330 to the right of D-503—which the narrator repeatedly mentions when he imagines himself as the creator of OneState and, therefore, likens himself to the ancients' God on page 8. Christ is said to have ascended into heaven and been seated at the right hand of God the Almighty (Mk. 16.19). In his essay, Barratt discusses another apt allusion, observing the capture of I-330's Mephi cohorts as being "twelve in number" (668). With religious allusions and images woven throughout the novel, Zamyatin's choice of the number twelve can be no mistake. The Bible records that Jesus had twelve apostles, and the capture of twelve Mephi is significant in that it indicates that I-330, their leader, parallels Christ, the leader of the twelve apostles (Mk. 14.17).

3. Another allusion to Christ's sacrifice concerns D-503's journey beyond the Green Wall with I-330, who appears as the leader of the Mephi and speaks of future triumph over OneState. The narrator describes the group as drinking from a communal cup (Zamyatin 150–151). This sharing of the cup may allude to the Last Supper, during which Christ discussed his future sacrifice, symbolized by the shared chalice (Mk. 14.21–25). Further, as Christ perceived his capture, so I-330 knows that her demise is approaching (and possibly sacrifices herself to see D-503 one last time): "They're waiting for me downstairs" (Zamyatin 216).

4. The author's choice of the number three at this critical point in the novel may serve as a reference to the Holy Trinity.

5. Gregg cites D-503's sense of "solitude akin to that of Jesus before His crucifixion: 'And though I were driving the nails in the corpse or being nailed to it (perhaps it is the same), she would hear what no one else could hear'" (67).

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From the Writer

My writing process always begins with prewriting. For me, this step is as simple as taking a piece of paper and writing notes about the exhibit text. Brainstorming helps me generate ideas and stay on topic. Then, I use my notes to formulate the skeleton of my thesis. In this essay, forming a thesis was the most challenging step. Since my writing class focused on works that are (ambiguously) autobiographical, I decided to argue about whether or not my exhibit text was autobiographical. Forming a thesis was difficult for me because I suddenly decided to switch viewpoints; rather than arguing that the exhibit text should be regarded as fiction, I decided to support its value as autobiography. I changed my mind because research for my original thesis was difficult and because I was unable to find any sources to disagree with me. After switching my topic, I was able to use my formerly supportive sources as counterargument material. Also, I knew that my thesis was genuinely debatable since I myself had debated with it.

Next, through research, I uncovered numerous secondary sources relating to the autobiographical nature of my exhibit text—sources that both agreed and disagreed with me. My research helped me to further refine my argument by providing me with forms of motive and counterargument. With both a strong thesis and many valuable secondary sources in hand, I wrote my first draft and then attended office hours to hear my professor's suggestions. I find feedback, from a professor or from my peers, to be extremely beneficial because it alerts me of flaws that I may have overlooked and provides helpful suggestions to correct these flaws. Then, I revise according to feedback. The use of brainstorming, a strong thesis, research for secondary sources, feedback, and careful revision helps me to produce a successful essay.

— Jenessa Job

Jenessa Job

The Woman Warrior: A Question of Genre

In 1975, Maxine Hong Kingston published her critically acclaimed autobiography, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, which describes her experiences and struggles while growing up as a Chinese-American girl in California. The actual genre of *The Woman Warrior*, however, has been widely disputed among critics. In fact, epitomizing the genre debate, the book itself is labeled "Fiction/Literature" on the back cover, while the front cover proclaims the novel's acquisition of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction. Critic Patricia Blinde refers to *The Woman Warrior* as "a collage of genres" and describes the book thus: "It is at once a novel, an autobiography, a series of essays and poems. But while the work capitalizes on the conventions of various genres, it also evades the limitations of any one genre" (qtd. in Lightfoot 58).

In her article "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese-American Autobiographical Controversy," Sau-ling Cynthia Wong collects and discusses criticism from numerous scholars who dismiss *The Woman Warrior* as a work of fiction clumsily disguised as autobiography. For instance, Benjamin Tong describes *The Woman Warrior* as "fiction passing for autobiography" (qtd. in Wong 249), and Jeffery Chan accuses Kingston of "distributing an obvious fiction for fact" (qtd. in Wong 249). One of Kingston's especially vocal critics, Frank Chin, objects to what is possibly the most noticeable fictionalization in *The Woman Warrior*: Kingston's distortion of the Chinese folk story of Fa Mu Lan. Chin accuses Kingston of twisting the Fa Mu Lan story to suit her own stereotypes, and he states that the distortion "is simply a device for destroying history and literature" (3).

In "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour?," Wong writes that, "On the most obvious formal level, [*The Woman Warrior*] violates the popular perception of autobiography as an ordered shaping of life events anchored in the so-called external world" (250). Admittedly, *The Woman Warrior* does not follow the template of traditional autobiography. Even Kingston herself admitted in an interview that, regarding genre, she finds the normal boundaries too confining and prefers to take an unconventional approach:

> I think that in every one of my books I had to create a new way of telling what I had to say. And I feel that I break through pigeonholes of what's fiction and what's nonfiction, of what an autobiography is. My next thought is trying to figure out a way to integrate fiction and nonfiction. (qtd. in Fishkin 791)

It is also interesting to note that it was not Kingston who decided to label *The Woman Warrior* as nonfiction. The decision was actually made by her publisher, who "needed to define a category for *The Woman Warrior*, and suggested that nonfiction was more marketable" (Huntley 24). Kingston only agreed to this when her publisher pointed out that even poetry is categorized as nonfiction (Huntley 24). Despite this, Kingston deliberately placed the word "memoir" directly in the title of her book, which indicates that even though she acknowledges that *The Woman Warrior* is not purely nonfiction, she still considers it autobiographical.

Therefore, even though the critics who argue that *The Woman Warrior* should not be labeled as autobiography do see the elements of fictionalization which Kingston indeed added to the book, they—especially Chin—fail to grasp the reason behind these fabrications: Kingston's exaggerations serve to create an accurate depiction of her thoughts, her feelings, and her experience as a Chinese-American child. Upon examining *The Woman Warrior* and comparing the book to two theories of autobiography, it is clear that although Kingston's work contains numerous elements of fictionalization, at the core it remains an autobiography. Kingston uses embellishments of fiction as mere devices to accurately portray her personality and her confusion during her coming-of-age. Kingston's unusual yet unique strategy and style combine to create an artful whole that beautifully

embodies Maxine's coming-of-age and her childhood struggle to find balance and voice.[1]

The theories presented in the leading chapter of Roy Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography* offer strong support for *The Woman Warrior*'s status as an autobiographical work. First of all, Pascal repeatedly emphasizes that, regardless of the factual accuracy of the details, "The value of an autobiography depends ultimately on the spirit of the writer" (19). In other words, if the autobiography lacks a defined personality behind the words, then it is valueless. In *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine's personality is consistently present: she is imaginative, perceptive, and confused. In the first chapter of the book, Kingston illustrates the imaginative side of Maxine's personality as Maxine speculates about No-Name Woman, the aunt who was obliterated entirely from the memory of her family for committing adultery and subsequently becoming pregnant. Maxine muses:

> Fear at the enormities of the forbidden kept her desires delicate, wire and bone. She looked at a man because she liked the way the hair was tucked behind his ears, or she liked the question-mark line of a long torso curving at the shoulder and straight at the hip. For warm eyes or a soft voice or a slow walk—that's all—a few hairs, a line, a brightness, a sound, a pace, she gave up family. (Kingston 8)

Although Maxine's mother, Brave Orchid, tells her only the basic details of No-Name Woman's story, Maxine uses them as springboard to imagine her aunt into existence. Likewise, the manner in which Maxine responds to Brave Orchid and Brave Orchid's "talk-story"—verbally relayed stories based upon Chinese myth and fact—shows Maxine's perceptivity. For example, Brave Orchid tells Maxine of a helpful slave girl she bought in China for only fifty American dollars, and she complains that she had to pay two hundred American dollars to the hospital for the birth of Maxine. "My mother's enthusiasm for me is duller than for the slave girl" (82), Maxine comments. "And it was important that I do something big and fine, or else my parents would sell me when we made our way back to China. . . . You can't eat straight A's" (46). Yet by adding that straight A's can't be eaten, Maxine admits that as long as she is a girl, her accomplishments, no matter how big or how fine, will never satisfy her parents. Maxine's inability to please her Chinese parents and simultaneously achieve

American success parallels the conflict she faces as China and America play tug-of-war with her cultural identity. She must learn to balance the two extremes, to settle this confused side of her personality.

The above examples show that Kingston indeed weaves personality into all aspects of the book—a critical characteristic of autobiography, according to Pascal. Moreover, Pascal characterizes autobiography as something that "offer[s] an unparalleled insight into the mode of consciousness of other men" (1). *The Woman Warrior* definitely accomplishes this, though perhaps in a way that does not correspond to the typical autobiography. Instead of relaying the events of her life, interpreting them, and explaining their significance, Kingston tells her story in an episodic manner, often jumping from one event to another without overtly clarifying the connection. She also does not always state her thoughts directly. Nevertheless, Kingston's unusual mixing of fact with fantasy and talk-story reveals Maxine's experience rather than obscures it. The reader must sort through the conglomeration of stories and separate fact from fiction, just as Maxine must grapple with the difference between the real and the fake:

> Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand
> what things you are in Chinese, how do you separate
> what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities,
> one family, your mother who marked your growing
> with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese
> tradition and what is the movies? (Kingston 5)

Kingston leaves many questions unanswered to paint Maxine's confusion so vividly that the reader, forced to experience uncertainty alongside Maxine, cannot ignore it. In this way, Kingston unwaveringly exposes the reader to her "mode of consciousness."

Although Pascal's characteristics of autobiography support *The Woman Warrior*'s status as an autobiographical work, they alone are not sufficient to refute the critics who consider the book fictional. This is because Pascal's criteria—a defined personality, insight into "mode of consciousness"—are broad enough to apply to many works of fiction, particularly novels. What, then, distinguishes *The Woman Warrior* from a novel?

If the theories from H. Porter Abbott's article, "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction," are also applied to *The Woman Warrior*, then the book's status as autobiography becomes clearer. One major facet of Abbott's theory states that "autobiography will always lack in its protagonist the kind of crisp identity one finds in characters belonging to the well-made plot. . . . The identity it seeks to express is always blurred" (609). This concept coincides well with *The Woman Warrior*; it reflects Maxine's identity confusion. Less obviously, it explains Kingston's autobiographical strategy. Kingston does not describe her life as a linear progression from birth to adulthood. Instead, she begins with the story of No-Name Woman, continues with a fantasy of herself as the fabled Chinese woman warrior Fa Mu Lan, describes the life of her mother and the advent of Brave Orchid's sister in America, and closes the book with a chapter that is, finally, specifically about herself. Only the last chapter is entirely and exclusively about the life of Maxine. However, all of the chapters relate to her indirectly. In "Hunting the Dragon in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," Marjorie Lightfoot explains the arrangement of Kingston's chapters:

> Kingston presents discrete reminiscences that do not focus directly on her own immediate experience, except in one case. But all the stories have affected her life, necessitating analytical and imaginative responses to a variety of events. (59)

For example, although most of the events in "Shaman" revolve around Brave Orchid and even take place before Maxine's birth, it is appropriate that Brave Orchid have a prominent presence in *The Woman Warrior* because of her enormous influence in Maxine's life:

> To make my waking life American-normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories. Before we can leave our parents, they stuff our heads like the suitcases which they jam-pack with homemade underwear. (Kingston 87)

Maxine's head is "stuffed" with Brave Orchid's talk-stories. During the daytime, she banishes Brave Orchid's tales from her mind. Yet at night, these stories—stories of boxes of ashes next to the birth bed lest the newborn baby is a girl, stories of babies born with defects abandoned in an

outhouse to die—haunt Maxine's dreams. Under Brave Orchid's influence, Maxine carries her suitcase full of Chinese "impossible stories" with her in America; her mother, and China, are always present. Similarly, "At the Western Palace" tells the story of Maxine's aunt, Moon Orchid, and her arrival in America to live with Maxine's family. Not only is Maxine absent during the major confrontation of this chapter, but she also is not even narrating. She slips into a third-person role, shifting the focus from herself to Brave Orchid, Moon Orchid, and the cultural clash which the chapter represents. "At the Western Palace" describes the collision of two extremes: China, in the form of Moon Orchid, and America, represented by Brave Orchid's children. Brave Orchid acts as the mediator between the two, attempting to harmoniously balance the two poles—just as Maxine must learn to do.

Furthermore, in "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction," Abbott stresses that the primary difference between autobiography and fiction is the presence of a distinct ending—or lack thereof: "Standing analytically apart from his narrated self, [the author] is aware that insofar as his narrative is about himself it can have no conclusion to give it final shape" (609). This lack of "final shape," according to Abbott, also explains why the protagonist in an autobiography cannot have an identity as "crisp" as the protagonist in a fictional story. A comparison of the ending of *The Woman Warrior* to Abbott's theory defends an autobiographical reading of the book. Kingston ends the last chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," with talk-story: "Here is a story my mother told me," she writes, "not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk-story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine" (Kingston 206). Talk-story as a conclusion is indefinite simply because talk-story itself is indefinite. Yet, it is an appropriate ending for *The Woman Warrior*, not only because talk-story is a mixture of fact and fiction like the book as a whole, but also because this particular talk-story is partially Brave Orchid's and partially Maxine's. This symbolizes the balance established at the end of the book, as Maxine learns to come to terms with her Chinese-American identity.

Additionally, Kingston's falsification of the Fa Mu Lan story does not disqualify *The Woman Warrior* as an autobiography. Abbott declares, "Historical truth or falsity are important only insofar as they express the

identity of the author" (613). Chin, however, clearly thinks differently and protests strongly to Kingston's alterations to the story:

> Kingston takes a childhood chant, "The Ballad of Mulan," which is as popular today as "London Bridge Is Falling Down," and rewrites the heroine, Fa Mulan, to the specs of the stereotype of the Chinese woman as a pathological white supremacist victimized and trapped in a hideous Chinese civilization. (3)

Undoubtedly, Kingston does embellish the Fa Mu Lan story. She takes the foundation of the ballad and transforms it into a radically different, much more complex story in which Fa Mu Lan spends years learning to become a warrior, has a child, keeps the baby with her during battle in a sling beneath her armor, and allows her parents to physically carve Chinese ideographs into the skin of her back as symbols of revenge. However, according to Abbott, since Kingston's modifications to the story do not obscure her identity, they are tolerable. Contrary to "destroying history and literature" as Chin claims (3), Kingston's version of Fa Mu Lan is highly symbolic, and the "White Tigers" chapter contributes greatly to the overall themes of the book. Rather than appreciating the emblematic success of Kingston's version of Fa Mu Lan, though, Chin misinterprets this rendition, especially the tattooing of Fa Mu Lan, as "ethical male domination or misogynistic cruelty being inflicted on Mulan" (6). This interpretation is flawed: the tattooing is not performed simply because Fa Mu Lan is a woman. Fa Mu Lan's parents say, "We are going to carve revenge on your back. We'll write out oaths and names. . . . Wherever you go, whatever happens to you, people will know our sacrifice" (Kingston 34). Misogyny is entirely absent from this scene. Rather, the carvings represent revenge—as explicitly stated by the parents in the book—in the form of words:

> The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I can return to them. What we have in common are the words on our backs. . . . And I have so many words—"chink" words and "gook" words too—that they do not fit on my skin. (53)

This quote is Maxine's comparison of herself to Fa Mu Lan. Maxine acknowledges that she has the potential to express the words on her skin—an appropriate metaphor because as Maxine struggles to find her

cultural balance throughout *The Woman Warrior*, she also learns to find her voice. Maxine's likening of herself to Fa Mu Lan foreshadows events in the closing chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," when Maxine fights against her own silence. This conflict culminates with an explosive confrontation between Maxine and her mother, in which Maxine finally verbalizes the frustration she feels with Brave Orchid's talk-stories and constant cutting remarks about Maxine's appearance, intelligence, and future. To be able to put her thoughts into words at last is a drastic step which represents the discovery of Maxine's voice—the voice that will strengthen and mature to become Kingston, author of *The Woman Warrior*. By dismissing Fa Mu Lan's words as misogyny, Chin overlooks the symbolic nature of Kingston's version of Fa Mu Lan and its relation to the rest of the book; his interpretation is invalid because he does not realize that Kingston's Fa Mu Lan fantasy actually shows Maxine's desperate desire to break the mold of the typical woman, just as Fa Mu Lan does, and the potential words Maxine carries with her during her silent childhood.

Maxine's potential words eventually become *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston's autobiography. Critics have indeed debated about *The Woman Warrior*'s genre for years, claiming that the book's fictionalizations disqualify it as autobiography. Nevertheless, careful comparisons of Kingston's style, strategy, and passages from the book to the theories of Abbott and Pascal demonstrate that beneath the outer shell of exaggerations and embellishments, *The Woman Warrior* is autobiographical. Kingston's fictionalizations simply serve to strengthen an already powerful tale, transforming a life story into a work of autobiographical art.

Notes

1. In this essay, the name "Maxine" will relate to the protagonist who narrates the story, while the name "Kingston" will refer to the author writing the story.

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From the Writer

In writing my research paper on Eliot's *The Waste Land*, I knew that I wanted to focus primarily on the poem's third section, which I believed to be its turning point. Eliot's image of "the human engine" particularly stood out to me, and I knew that I wanted to incorporate it into my paper. In doing preliminary research, I stumbled upon Suárez's article, and his thesis gave me the idea of exploring the role of technology in *The Waste Land*. Given the volume of published criticism of *The Waste Land*, I found that my biggest difficulty was in finding original lines of argument and analysis, rather than simply summarizing the existing scholarship. I was able to overcome this by returning to the primary text, quoting and interpreting it directly without the aid of secondary sources. Additionally, my revision process helped me to further unify and develop my own ideas in the paper.

— Perry Schein

Perry Schein

"The Human Engine Waits": The Role of Technology in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

First published in 1922, T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* is a major work of modernist literature. Written in the aftermath of the First World War, Eliot's poem describes the disorganization and collapse of society. In recounting this, the poet covers a wide variety of topics, incorporates many different images, and encompasses manifold languages and cultures. One major theme that Eliot treats in detail is the role of technology and industrialization in the downfall of Western civilization. Unlike earlier modern poets such as Walt Whitman, Eliot uses *The Waste Land* to draw connections between the mechanization and technological advancement in everyday life and the degradation of human dignity. In this way, Eliot's poem can be read as a criticism of the Industrial Revolution and its effects on society. As Eliot radically juxtaposes these images of modern industrial society against allusions to mythology, he uses the disjointed and chaotic structure of *The Waste Land* to demonstrate the difficulty of finding meaning in the modern world.

The basic structure of the poem exemplifies this notion that technology has contributed to this fragmentation of society. Critic Juan A. Suárez argues that Eliot tries to mimic a sound recorder in his writing style in *The Waste Land*. Connecting Eliot's poem to sound montages created by experimental artists in which various sounds from radio broadcasts and recordings were spliced together, Suárez writes that "Eliot's poem itself is based on zapping through a sort of prerecorded literary archive which seems to be kept on the air at different frequencies" (757). *The Waste Land's* structure is rooted in machines. The technology subverts the established social order; the frequencies of the high and the low are recorded

side by side without any clear differentiation. As Suárez notes, "Once the channels are open they carry any and all sounds […]" (764). The voices of kings are equated with those of the working class; modern technology has broken down the traditional customs and social barriers. Through this, Eliot links the structure of the poem to its content. The lack of an apparent pattern in the images Eliot incorporates mirrors the lack of a pattern that he sees in his society.

Eliot's views of the contrast between conventional and modern life can be observed through the contrast between the images presented in the first and subsequent sections of the poem. In "The Burial of the Dead," Eliot includes images of life prior to the war. He writes of the prewar upper class, who spend time at the "archduke's, [m]y cousin's […]" and have ordered lives in which they "read, much of the night, and go south in the winter" (Eliot 286). They find meaning in Madame Sosostris' cards and in the mythology of the classical world. Eliot contrasts their lives against the lives of those in the modernized and mechanized world. These include the women at the pub in "A Game of Chess," and the typist in "The Fire Sermon." Compared to the leisure class who enjoy their vacations in the mountains, the typist is "named metonymically for the machine she tends, so merged with it, in fact, that she is called the 'typist' even at home" (North 98). As her mechanical work consumes her identity, the typist represents a figure who has been degraded by mechanization. The monotony of her existence furthers Eliot's commentary on the extent to which the Industrial Revolution has eroded the sense of purpose in human life. The other mechanical images in "The Fire Sermon" further develop this point.

Indeed, "The Fire Sermon" is the section where Eliot makes the degrading effects of mechanization most apparent. The most striking example of this occurs in the lines preceding the introduction of Tiresias: "At the violet hour, when the eyes and back / Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits / Like a taxi throbbing waiting," (Eliot 293). Here, Eliot is directly connecting the modern laborer to a machine. The human becomes the mechanized "human engine," reduced to the point where she is compared to a "throbbing taxi." The continuously repeated tasks carried out by industrial laborers and office workers rob them of their individuality and, as Eliot argues, their humanity. North writes that "the figure of metonymy is used polemically to depict a metonymized society

in which individuals are both dismembered and standardized" (98). In this way, Eliot characterizes the "automatism and machine conditioning" (Suárez 749) of modern life as a contributing factor to the downfall of the modern human. As Tiresias is introduced in the next set of lines, this pessimistic view of modern society is further developed through his observations.

Eliot's notes identify Tiresias as the most important figure in *The Waste Land*, and indeed he plays a key role in the poem as an objective observer. Eliot introduces Tiresias using the first person: "I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives […]" (294). The repetition of the word throbbing links Tiresias to "the human engine"; just as his mythological transgender state allows him to relate to both sexes, Eliot shows that he is also able to bridge both the classical and modern worlds. As Reeves notes, "the first [throbbing] stresses the mechanicalness of the alienated 'human engine' which exists in terms of its parts […] while the second reinvents the human engine with 'throbbing' humanity" (69). In this way, Tiresias is connected to the modern human condition. North agrees with this analysis, writing that "Eliot suggests a link between the reduced conditions of the modern worker and the mythical hermaphrodite who includes all experience" (99). The significance of this is that it brings the degradation of the worker to epic proportions; Eliot is showing that this reduction is of great importance in the poem. The transgendered role of Tiresias also serves to reinforce the theme of emasculation present throughout *The Waste Land*. As Tiresias is emasculated, and he is unified with the modern worker, then the modern worker is also subject to this emasculation. In this way, Eliot shows that the "human engine" has tarnished and emasculated the modern man.

Tiresias also serves an important function as the lens through which the reader observes the typist. The typist, and the automatic and mechanical way that she goes about life, serves as the most notable example in the poem of the loss of meaning in modern life. The unnamed typist is an archetype; Eliot uses her to represent all women in the industrialized society. As North notes, "The typist is horrifying both because she is reduced by the conditions of labor to a mere part and because she is infinitely multiple" (98). In this way, by providing as few details regarding the typist as possible, Eliot generalizes her to show the degradation of all

women. Eliot further emphasizes the differences between the typist's life and the traditional way of living by noting that she "lays out food in tins" (294). As the clerk arrives, exemplifying the modern working class man in much the same way that the typist exemplifies the modern working class woman, Eliot identifies him as "one of the low" (294). Later, Eliot has Tiresias mention how he has "walked among the lowest of the dead" (295). North uses this association to establish Tiresias' relationship to the clerk, but the connection goes both ways; the clerk is also linked to the "lowest of the dead," further reinforcing the notion that modernity has reduced the condition of humanity. The typist's indifferent attitude towards sex further emphasizes the lack of purpose that Eliot sees in modern life. As Smith notes, "The typist is automatic in her job and in her love-making," (114) further highlighting the idea that modern humans have been reduced to living machines. By generalizing the characters, Eliot is demonstrating that the scene between the typist and the clerk is not a unique one; these incidents occur every day in the modern city.

What distinguishes this particular scene from the multitude of similar occurrences in the aftermath of the First World War is the presence of Tiresias. The blind prophet, a character from classic Greek literature and mythology, serves as a major unifying figure in the poem. Having lived as both a man and a woman, Tiresias is able to relate to both the clerk and the typist in this scene. This scene is not, as Suárez summarizes it, "one more vignette of present-day decadence" (749). Tiresias puts this encounter in context; Tiresias who has "sat by Thebes below the wall" (Eliot 294) links the modern and classical worlds. This "build[ing of] a timeless myth in a modern setting" (Smith 110) gives meaning to this encounter. By linking the chaotic present with the traditions of the past, a pattern emerges from the disorder of the poem. The mythological context establishes that *The Waste Land* is not a perpetual state; it has not always existed, and will not always exist. Here, Eliot gives the first indication that it may be possible to find meaning in contemporary life.

While on the surface this glimmer of meaning in the chaos of *The Waste Land* seems contradictory, the poem contains several examples of finding a position in between the extremes. The simplest example of this is Tiresias' position between the male and female genders. Eliot also places several key passages of the poem in the space between night and day. The

typist's scene occurs at the "violet hour" (Eliot 294). Eliot uses the time of day to link this scene to the fall of the "unreal city." The image of the "unreal city" is repeated throughout the poem, and by calling the modern city "unreal," (288, 293, 299) Eliot is differentiating between the modern, degraded human condition, and the true experience of human existence. The final mention of the "unreal city" notes that it is falling, Elliot writes: "Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal" (299). The "violet air" and the "violet light" (Eliot 299) place this scene at the junction of night and day, and link it to the arrival of Tiresias earlier in the poem. In this way, Eliot shows the startling images of human squalor in "The Fire Sermon" to be the turning point in the poem. Suárez notes that "the gramophone's sound closes the poem's bleak, nechromantic first half. Shortly afterward begin the intimations of rebirth and redemption" (750). If the images of "The Fire Sermon" show a pessimistic view of the modern world, Eliot does offer hints that the situation can improve, and that meaning can be found. Through this, Eliot bridges the gap between a pessimistic view of the present and an optimistic view of the future.

While Eliot paints a bleak picture of human life in the modern world, he indicates that meaning can be found in life through the context of mythology. Indeed, the mythological framework gives a great deal of meaning to the poem's most striking example of the purposelessness of modern life. In addition to perspective provided by Tiresias, the typist's sexual encounter with the clerk is foreshadowed by the rape of Philomel alluded to in "A Game of Chess." The repeated image of the Fisher King also provides a mythological context to the poem. Near the end of the poem, the Fisher King asks, "Shall I at last set my lands in order?" (Eliot 301). Maintaining his position between a bleak and desolate view of the present, and hope for a rebirth of civilization, Eliot leaves the answer to this question ambiguous. Just as the Fisher King may one day reclaim his lands, Eliot offers signs that humanity may recover from *The Waste Land*.

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From the Writer

The most intimidating thing for me about writing is choosing a topic and getting started. The final deadline, no matter how far off, looms much higher and scarier when I'm staring at an empty computer screen or ill-defined section of shelf in the library. Conventional wisdom has served me well—just get started. Type your vague fleeting thoughts and inspirations. Grab a book with an interesting title. Gather momentum and, once you find your direction, there will be no stopping you.

I stumbled onto the topic for this paper using this "blindly barreling forward" technique. I knew I wanted to write on *Ulysses*. So I went to the library and found the relevant section. Floor to ceiling, an entire shelf was dedicated to analysis of James Joyce's works, from comparisons to character study to social implications. *Ulysses* claimed a huge cut. I was overwhelmed, but intrigued. I plucked an armful of promising volumes from the shelves and sat myself down on the cold concrete of the narrow aisle.

My selection mainly consisted of thick old books with general titles—at least three were called just *Ulysses*. I began desperately scanning indices and tables of contents. One slender volume called *Sexuality in James Joyce* caught my attention, and I paged through it with more care. An essay called "Gerty MacDowell through the Mutoscope" enthralled me, and I realized I'd spent nearly a half-hour reading it. At first I panicked, eyeing my still-towering stack of books, and decided I needed a break.

While walking to drown my fears in coffee, I mulled over what I'd read so far. After seemingly fruitless hours in the library, my epiphany came crossing the Comm. Ave. T tracks. The distraction I'd reprimanded myself for turned into the crux of my paper. So go ahead. Dive in. Wander around aimlessly. Jot down absolute nonsense. Get distracted (in a good way). Waste time researching before you're sure what you're looking for. You could be gathering fuel for your big Eureka moment.

— Mariah Sondergard

Mariah Sondergard

Identity in *Ulysses*: Sexuality of Gerty MacDowell and Molly Bloom

The characters Gerty MacDowell and Molly Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses* are both represented largely in terms of sexuality. The intricacies and significances of their sexualities, however, are not initially obvious from their thoughts, narratives, and descriptions. These two characters are easily pigeonholed into debased and oversimplified stereotypes of female sexuality that disregard their complex individual motivations and values. Gerty is not merely the silly ingénue that her hyperbolic language and occupation with her appearance suggest, and to condemn Molly as indiscreet, immoral, and simple-mindedly sex-obsessed is to deny the importance of her strong and uninhibited assertion and affirmation of female sexual agency and self-determination. In a world where women are subordinate to male will and desire, these two characters have managed to assert their sexual identities without being enslaved by their own desires. Gerty's and Molly's identities are largely defined by sexuality, but are not simply ruled by men's or their own; they are masters of their strong and unique sexual identities and take skillful advantage of their sexual powers and agencies.

Gerty MacDowell, if hastily judged, is a ridiculous and pathetic creature, a victim of male sexual dominance and definition and her own naïveté that merits no serious character analysis. Her dramatic and overly romanticized musings identify her with a farcical tragic heroine of a romance novel, and it is difficult to take her seriously. She discusses at length and with pride her meticulous attention to her appearance as if it were her chief and all-important concern, adding simple-minded vanity to her limited character repertoire. Finally, she appears dominated by male sexuality, assigning herself worth as a desirable commodity for a wife

and functioning in the plot simply as an object for Leopold Bloom's lust. Gerty's sexuality is understandably misconstrued as weak, pitiable, and only important in reference to the male sexualities that define it.

Gerty's narrative seems dominated by sentimentalism and narcissism, and it is easy to write her off as an uncomplicated and silly character, a mere synthesis of the "fashion pages of the Lady's Pictorial, the heated prose of Victorian sentimental novels, and the advertising pages of the Irish Times" (Henke 132). When we first encounter Gerty she treats us to a lengthy and lyrical description of the scene surrounding her. From the opening moments, when the "last glow of all too fleeting day lingered lovingly on sea and strand" (Joyce 346), we hear the influence of the romance novels she wills her life to resemble in her language. She becomes the tragic heroine in her "self-deluding romantic aspirations . . . or her Reggy Wylie" and her idealistic dreams about marriage (Brown 115). Her narrative also describes the particulars of her appearance in great detail, going on about her natural good looks and the hard work and constant attention she gives them. The majority of her idea of herself appears to stem from her beauty and femininity, and from the husband they might win her; she appears entirely defined by shallow vanity and looking pretty for the opposite sex. She assigns herself worth as "Mrs. Reggie Wylie T. C. D." and then Leopold Bloom's "dear little wifey"—she seems entirely male-dependent. This sexual objectification is magnified in the incident of Gerty's exhibition to Bloom—she is an anonymous visual stimulus for his sexual desire, and she allows herself to be used by the dominant sexuality across the beach.

However, these oversimplified judgments overlook the particulars of Gerty's situation that provide logical reasoning for her quest for a husband. If we analyze Gerty's life and circumstances, we can see past the flowery language and gushing romanticism to the practical goal Gerty is working toward. Katherine Mullin describes in *James Joyce, Sexuality, and Social Purity* how Gerty's less-than-ideal home life is the motivation for her husband-hunting. She grew up in a poor household with an alcoholic father: "Had her father only avoided the clutches of the demon drink . . . she might now be rolling in her carriage, second to none . . . but [alcoholism] had cast its shadow over her childhood" (Joyce 354). Gerty has little prospect of a career outside the home to support herself, and she very prac-

tically aims to secure a brighter financial future than the one before her the only way she can. "Marriage is her most plausible preservation from want" Mullin says, and "[her] desire to attract is blatantly motivated by her bleak financial prospects" (148). Gerty's fantasies about "the day . . . when she could call herself his little wife" prominently feature the fine furnishings of her future home, describing at length particulars of a "drawingroom with pictures and engravings," "chintz covers for the chairs and that silver toastrack" "Like they have in rich houses" (Joyce 352). She specifically favors an older man, "hair slightly flecked with grey," who would be more likely able to support her and, as to fulfill her second objective, more a replacement father-figure to "take her in his sheltering arms" and care for her (351). Gerty seeks a husband, not to validate herself or fulfill her girlish daydreams, but to replace what her alcoholic and abusive father has failed to provide: financial and emotional security. This underlying practicality elevates her from victim of male-defined sexual objectification to shrewd wielder of the limited advantages at her disposal.

Once her quest for a husband shifts from sentimental longing to calculated means to a financial end, Gerty's occupation with her appearance also changes to just that—an occupation. Gerty means to secure her financial future by getting married. Her looks, then, are her most appropriable resource for achieving that goal. She is fighting against steep odds. According to Maria Luddy, the percentage of unmarried women in Ireland at this time is high (Mullin 148). Gerty is crippled, and she is past the age that her coquetry is at its best chance for success, with "the years [still] slipping by for her, one by one" (Joyce 364). She must make efficient use of every possible advantage at her disposal if she is to have any hope of winning a man. Gerty is apparently advantaged in her looks: "She was pronounced beautiful by all who knew her" (348), and "you would have to travel many a mile before you found a head of hair the like of" Gerty's "nutbrown tresses" (360). She doesn't idly rely on nature's favor though; to maximize her chance of success, Gerty manages and capitalizes on her assets with professionalism—as Garry Leonard says in *Advertising and Commodity Culture in Joyce*, her "appearance is her career" (115). "Gerty's extraordinary attention to [her appearance] is not, as has often been suggested, an indication of simple-mindedness, but rather a strategy of increasingly desperate shrewdness whereby she hopes to decisively defeat

other women in terms of her appearance" (Leonard 115). Her hands "of finely veined alabaster" are "as white as lemon juice and queen of ointments could make them" (Joyce 348); she judiciously makes use of innovations like "blushing scientifically cured" and "Madame Vera Verity['s]" suggestion of "eyebrowleine which gave that haunting expression" (349). She is diligent and thorough in her work: "All Tuesday week afternoon she was hunting to match that chenille but at last she found what she wanted" (350). Gerty is industrious and painstaking in her particular occupation, tirelessly focused on achieving her goal of wooing a means of financial security and companionship. Her pride in her looks is not vanity, but necessity and clever opportunity.

Gerty's interaction with Bloom also showcases her expertise and focus in her calculated, deliberate movements and specialized know-how. Gerty conscientiously shows off her "well-turned ankle" (350) and the "bright steel buckles of her shoes" when she "sw[ings] them like that thoughtfully with the toes down" (358). She deliberately removes her hat to show off her "crowning glory," her "daint[y] head of nutbrown tresses" (360). Her exhibitionist display later on, Katherine Mullin points out, is pointedly reminiscent of a new and popular technology in erotica of the time—the mutoscope, a hand-crank individual moving picture device. The moving pictures were most often shots of girls scarcely—or not—clothed, with the pretense of looking through a peephole. The girls presumably were unaware that they were being watched, just as Gerty feigned innocence with her "pathetic little glance of piteous protest, of shy reproach" (Joyce 367). The mutoscope machine is manually operated by a hand-crank that allows the viewer to control the speed at which the pictures move, drawing out and even pausing to fully relish a particularly appealing still. Gerty deliberately makes use of this tableau technique in her innocent statuesque pose at the opening of the narrative and throughout her exhibition. Her pretense of craning back to watch the fireworks and air of "accidentally" revealing herself to Bloom uses the mutoscope's "peeping Tom" technique to add the thrill of opportunistically catching a woman unawares. Gerty's apparent knowledge of current erotic film techniques catapult her from innocent victim to skillful seductress.

So Gerty is not simply a victim to Bloom's sexual desire but a skillful exploiter of it. She willingly participates in and shrewdly steers their

interaction, both maximizing her effect on him and taking pleasure in his reaction. Her calculated performance clearly demonstrates that she is not merely bowing to Bloom's lustful will but basking in his admiration and seizing this potential opportunity to win her prize. While she is fixated on her objective, she doesn't deny herself the pleasure of expressing and sharing romantic passion; she "is not merely a passive object of Bloom's voyeurism or complicit through her coquetry and exhibitionism alone" but to a lesser extent shares in Bloom's physical arousal and gratification (Brown 61). Bloom's "answering flush of admiration" when she removed her hat to display her hair "set her tingling in every nerve," and she replaced the hat so as to be able to watch him watch her (Joyce 360). She "felt a kind of sensation rushing all over her" (361); "the eyes that were fastened upon her set her pulses tingling" and a "tremor went over her" while "his hands and face were working" (365). But Gerty is in control, both of her own desire and of her fulfillment of Bloom's—she is not an innocent victim taken advantage of or a wanton slave to her own passion, but a sovereign actor with sexual drive, yes, but first and foremost agency and purpose.

Molly Bloom's sexuality is very different from Gerty's but is similarly vulnerable to hasty interpretation. Molly is an unashamedly sexual character and is not in danger of being labeled frivolously romantic or trampled and male-identified the way Gerty can be, but her sexuality is prone to judgmental dismissal as crude, wanton, and immoral. Discussion of her character helped to quagmire *Ulysses* in dilemmas of morality, and so came to be dominated by her "25 lovers in 'Ithaca'" rather than "interest in the contentious presentation of sexuality" (Brown 3). Molly's narrative is indeed characterized by an uninhibited description of carnal desire and gratification, but the importance of her sexual agency and self-determination run throughout her memories and musings and is the real hallmark of Molly's unique and strong sexuality.

Molly's assertiveness and autonomy are reflected in the ways that her relationship with Bloom came about; she was the agent in the relationship, and she chose him. In the essay "En-Gendered Choice and Agency in *Ulysses*" in *Ulysses in Critical Perspective*, Kimberly J. Delvin tells how Bloom recalls their meeting at Mat Dillon's party, when he turned the pages of her music while she performed. He asks himself why she chose him; she specifically invited him to "proximity . . . allow[ing] a closer

inspection of her physical charms ("Bosoms I saw, both full" [U,11.732]) and a whiff of her perfume" (Delvin 83). The song she chose to sing that night, Delvin points out, also demonstrates her decisive and active courting of Bloom rather than her gender's typical role of the seduced. The song was called "Waiting," and the lyrics describe the anticipation and proximity of her lover and directing him to come to her; Molly chooses this particular song (which is also performatively difficult and impressive) in order to, "[u]nder the pretext of the socially acceptable party ritual of the parlor performance, . . . [make] clear her attraction to Bloom" (Delvin 84). Molly quotes the last lines of the song in her reverie—"waiting always waiting to guiiiide him toooo me waiting nor speeeed his flying feet" (Joyce 757). She also reminisces about the day on Howth that she and Bloom became engaged—about how she "got him to propose" and made him "ask again" (782–3). Bloom also recalls this day and is the object rather than subject of the verbs he uses: "her hand touched me, caressed," "ravished over her I lay," "she gave me in my mouth the seedcake," "[s]he kissed me. I was kissed. All yielding she tossed my hair. Kissed, she kissed me." He is overwhelmingly acted upon rather than acting, attributing agency primarily to Molly. Both of their memories place her in the typically male role of engineer and conductor of the relationship.

Molly's dominance or at least self-determination in relationships is not limited to Bloom. She also recalls her other lovers as having been chosen and won by her. She congratulates herself on having won Boylan, remembering how she had gone back to the place where she first saw him "for tea 2 days after in the hope but he wasnt" (745), again actively pursuing the man she set her sights on. She also expresses her personal agency when she appraises Boylan's performance and character and compares him to Bloom. This evaluation of the two men asserts her right to determine and contemplate each prospect's qualifications and choose between them. She casually considers the idea of leaving Bloom. She doesn't seriously entertain the idea; it is only a fleeting thought connected with her reflection on her and other last names—"those awful names with bottom in them Mrs Ramsbottom or some other kind of a bottom Mulvey I wouldnt go mad about either or suppose I divorced him Mrs Boylan my mother whoever she was might have given me a nicer name" (761)—but its unrepentant presence in her mind shows that she feels entitled to sexual free-

dom and choice. Obviously the act of having an affair with Boylan asserts her independence from Bloom, but her attitude regarding the rendezvous—her agency in bringing it about and her self-assured authoritative appraisal of the two men—promotes her affair from a "stolen" or "fallen" idea of infidelity to a manifestation of her strong and independent sexuality.

Gerty MacDowell and Molly Bloom are very different characters who share a tendency to be oversimplified and stereotyped. They are easily relegated to the realm of hackneyed, meaningless characters before the complexities of their sexualities and identities are understood. In fact, both characters' sexualities are intricately and interestingly woven into their identities in ways that are missed by their initial impressions. Gerty is not a flighty, vain, hopeless romantic who is swallowed up by the male sexualities that dominate her world, but a skillful opportunist working towards a practical goal in an extremely competitive environment. Molly is not simply indulgent and ruled by her carnal desires, but asserts her own equality by claiming the right to sexual agency and self-determination. Both women's identities are largely defined by their sexualities, but those sexualities are far more intricate and well-developed than the impressions they first elicit.

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From the Writer

For this assignment, I had to analyze the "Legend of King Cormac and King Conn" using the theories of Propp and Levi-Strauss. Propp examines the roles of personages and the sequence of their actions. Levi-Strauss studies the meaning of folk narratives on four layers: geographic, sociological, economic, and cosmological. Thus, the two theories form two models of interpretation, which complement each other. I reproduced the scholars' models to create my essay's structure. I used Levi-Strauss's four layers for my outline: my essay examines the role of nature in each of them. Within each layer, I gave evidence that natural elements (the wolf, the otter) fulfill the functions of characters as defined by Propp. In the process, I came to the idea of a possible flaw in the two systems: the scholars assume that only humans can be characters of a narrative and do not recognize the role of nature. Therefore, I offer my own interpretation of the symbolism of the legend's final scene where nature drives the action. If I were to revise my paper, I would compare this legend to other similar folk narratives from different cultures in order to see whether my interpretations have, or do not have, a universal aspect as those of Propp and Levi-Strauss.

— Militza Zikatanova

Militza Zikatanova

Nature as the Hero in the Legend "King Cormac and King Conn" (Analysis Based on Levi-Strauss and Propp)

According to the folklorist Alan Dundes, his predecessors Vladimir Propp and Claude Levi-Strauss base their systems for analyzing folktales and myths on contrary approaches. While the former describes the tale in terms of its temporal and observable structure, the latter develops a logical, almost "algebraic" formula for the narrative (Dundes 40). According to Propp's theory, every folk tale consists of a set sequence of actions, which he calls functions (Propp 20). Based on his study of Russian tales, he classified these action elements into a limited sequence of thirty-one functions (26-65). These include moments such as the point when the hero is given an interdiction and violates it, when the villain tricks the victim, when the victim unwittingly helps the enemy, and when the hero is tested, acquires a magical object, defeats the villain, and returns home to marry and ascend the throne (26-65). To execute these functions, Propp identified seven universal character roles: the villain, the hero, the helper, the false hero, the princess or king, the donor who gives the hero magical powers or an object, and the dispatcher who summons or sends away the hero (22). Each of these roles does not necessarily correspond directly to a character in the story; thus, a single character could fill both the dispatcher and the donor roles. Thus Propp exclusively categorized the functions of what he called "dramatis personae" and the sequence of their actions (20). This essay does not aim to criticize the theory's limitations in outlining the characters, but rather to demonstrate that the Proppian system does not apply perfectly to all folk narratives.

By contrast, Levi-Strauss aimed to explain the seemingly random and fantastic elements of a "myth" in order to reveal the social functions of folk narratives. Levi-Strauss conducted his anthropological study by examining folk narratives on four levels: geographic, sociological, economic, and cosmological (Levi-Strauss 7-14). His theory revolves around the concept of binary oppositions (14). For Levi-Strauss, the opposition of herbivores and carnivores in many myths is analogous to the opposition between agriculture and hunting, or between (producing) life and (causing) death. With an almost algebraic approach, Levi-Strauss organized the mythological elements into graphic representations called "schemes" in order to demonstrate the relationships between the various binary oppositions (17).

In the mid-twentieth century, Levi-Strauss famously criticized the work of his Russian colleague Propp, stimulating a bitter exchange between the two scholars. Despite this historical debate in the study of folklore, the two techniques prove compatible with each other in the analysis of the Irish legend of "King Cormac and King Conn" from David Thomson's *The People of the Sea*. According to the legend, during a warm summer day at the lake, an otter impregnates the youngest daughter of Cormac, the heirless King of Ireland. Despite the loving care of his grandfather–adopter, the despotic boy turns against Cormac, and with the help of Fionn Mac Cuil and his army, overthrows him, and proclaims himself King Conn. This brings troubles to the people and infertility to the land. Meanwhile, Cormac's young wife, a smith's daughter, gives birth to the true heir, but a guardian wolf takes the baby away. King Cormac's son is later rescued and grows up with a benevolent old king and queen, until he discovers his true identity and sets off to retrieve his throne. He reunites with his mother who explains to him that King Conn, tormented with supernatural insomnia, listens to stories every night and kills the storytellers in the morning. At the palace, King Cormac's son impresses King Conn with his storytelling and earns his trust. In order to overcome his sleeplessness, the young man advises, King Conn has to bring his bed of feathers out into a boat in the middle of the lake where he was conceived. King Conn indeed falls deeply asleep floating on the lake, but on the third night, the otter pulls him under the water and kills him. Thus King Cormac's son takes his place. The features of both Propp's and Levi-Strauss's theories are evident in this legend. Yet a close examination of the multi-

layered function of nature in this narrative points out a major loophole in the folklorists' work. The two scholars' methods for identifying characters are so broad that Propp and Levi-Strauss deliberately neglect some of the results. Although the two scholars stipulate that the active characters in myths are exclusively human, in this text, a careful application of their systems recognizes another key personage, nature.

Both the Proppian and Levi-Straussian systems assume that the hero role must be filled by a human character, but when "King Cormac and King Conn" is divided into layers according to setting, it becomes evident that nature too can drive the action in the legend. For the purpose of this analysis, the term "nature" takes account of weather, environment, and animals. At the geographic level of the legend, according to the Levi-Strauss system, the natural environment and the surroundings of humans form a binary opposition. Traditionally in Irish folklore, nature shelters magical creatures such as the otherworldly and unpredictable fairy folk (Thomson 35). Thus, nature symbolizes people's fear of the unknown. In contrast, man-inhabited areas bring about a sense of security among the human community. This tale has transformed the wild into a place where human fate depends on nature. Thus when people cross the threshold between their world and the (super)natural, the "actions" of nature propel a chain of events. The natural world functions as the Proppian hero in the episodes with the otter and the wolf. When the princess enters the reign of water creatures, an otter fulfills the lack of an heir to the throne. When the smith's daughter brings the son of King Cormac to the forest, a wolf fulfills the child's need for safety and obtains a parent function. In contrast, man-made homes such as King Cormac's castle, Fionn Mac Cuil's court, and the smith's home are places where people act on their own without any paranormal intervention (Thomson 53, 59). From a more scholarly point of view, the distinction among two geographical sublevels in the legend complicates the structure beyond both folklorists' techniques: it turns out that in a natural environment, animals and weather act as the hero, while in man-inhabited locations, people drive the action.

On a sociological level, nature's dualistic role of a villain and a helper associates with the legend's depiction of the accepted course of events in human life: marriage, birth, inheritance. Traditionally, Irish folklore portrays otters as female, playful, and helpful spirits (Thomson 64). However,

in this narrative, this magical animal has an ominous image. The male king otter that catches King Cormac's youngest daughter in the lake represents an abnormal communion between human and nature (50). Levi-Strauss would see a typical binary opposition in the function of the otter, and Propp would simultaneously assign it two different roles. On one hand, according to Propp, the otter is a villain because he complicates the life of the royal family and, eventually, brings anguish to the kingdom through the conceived child (Propp's Function 8, Villainy). On the other hand, the creature fits the definition of a helper who kills the cruel King Conn and thus resolves the task for King Cormac's son (Function 19, Restoration, and Function 26, Solution). Although both analyzing approaches can be adjusted to fit the episode, neither of the folklorists attributes great significance to the otter's appearance. Interpreted from a socially-conscious standpoint, the incident serves as a warning to young women to obey their parents instead of exposing themselves to sexual danger. King Cormac's reaction—". . . you had the look of a maiden in your eye and the bloom of youth in your cheek, but today you look to be carrying a child"—directly reprimands girls for not protecting their innocence and dignity (Thomson 50). From a folklorist's point of view, the legend gives out a warning about the supernatural: the attempt to go against nature's ways in marriage and birth has unwanted consequences for the whole community.

Yet nature not only punishes, but also saves. The wolf and the three cubs, according to Propp, act as helpers to the rightful heir to King Cormac's throne. When the wolf delivers the newly born son of Cormac to a safe shelter, it liquidates the baby's lack of a father and rescues him from potential pursuit (Function 15, Spatial Transference, Function 19, Restoration, and Function 22, Rescue). Simply put, since the wolf replaces a human parent, it indisputably acts as a character. As the sociological layer of the narrative evolves in this episode, nature itself defends the sanctity of birth and inheritance. Unmistakably, the wolf opposes the otter. Several universally symbolic binary oppositions emerge from this confrontation: land–water, father–mother, abuser–savior, which confirm that although dualistic, nature occupies a main role at this structural level.

Even when Levi-Strauss notes the relationship between characters and inanimate nature in connection to a myth's economic context, he avoids acknowledging that nature's role is as active as that of people.

Weather and land undergo several transformations in response to character decisions and vice versa. At first, the natural world conducts itself in unison with the routine of the king, who fulfills his royal duties according to the natural cycles of the seasons: every summer, King Cormac goes on a tour around the palaces in his kingdom (Thomson 50). Day and night alternate without causing discomfort to the king and his daughters: in the sun, the girls indulge in "sports and pleasure," and after dark, they welcome their father with "laughter and kisses" (50). But when the climate suddenly changes, it brings change to the royal family. The paragraph that marks an important alteration from the normal course of events starts with "Things went on like that until a very warm summer" (50). "One very warm day," the three sisters violate their father's order not to swim (50). In the language of Proppian analysis, the unusually warm season drives the king to a longer than his usual Absentation (Function 1). The warmth and the freshness of the lake lure the daughters to violate the interdiction that Cormac had established during "previous" times (Function 3). Therefore, the inanimate nature responds to reversals in the human world and differentiates between periods in the narrative.

The climate once again changes when King Conn unlawfully ascends the throne: during King Cormac's reign, the weather is good and the land gives plenty of food, but when King Conn gains power, the wind changes direction to the north, the farms become infertile, and winter arrives (56). The reversal in nature's phenomena responds to the dramatic change in the royal family. Once again, Levi-Strauss's binary oppositions characterize this response: old king–new king, fertility–infertility, southern wind–northern wind, and summer–winter. Nature mediates between good weather during the reign of a benevolent king and natural disasters in times of a destructive king; it inclines from one extreme to the other depending on the behavior of humans. With Conn's usurpation, the climate aggravates and worsens the conditions for living, farming, and working. This synchrony implies that the whole of nature rebels against the dishonest act and, according to Levi-Strauss, explains the actual harsh weather to the folk audience. This episode demonstrates that nature has a will of its own. It is more than mere landscape. Therefore, although Propp and Levi-Strauss do not exclusively state that nature can act as a character

in response to other characters' behavior, the folklorists' systems clearly give the reader the tools to reach this conclusion.

The analyzing approaches of Levi-Strauss and Propp seem to be inefficient when explaining the role of nature in connection to the cosmological, the farthest from reality, level. The bonds between human beings and supernatural creatures testify for the curious interconnections in the cosmos. Surprisingly, the three families in the legend resemble each other tremendously. The families of King Cormac, the smith, and the wolf all consist of a single parent (at least only one parent appears in the narrative) and three children. This peculiarity of the narrative has no equivalent in the two folklorists' works. The text does not offer a binary opposition or a basis of comparison of the families to a contrasting unit.

A more suitable analytical method, it appears, would be to treat the three families as universal symbols. From this perspective, the legend demonstrates the balance in which man and nature supposedly should live because they are initially the same and share common values: the continuation of life in peace and harmony. When the equilibrium between the worlds of humans and animals breaks, unnatural events, such as the birth of an otter-man, occur. The narrator uses a fictional approach when describing King Conn, who cannot sleep at night (Thomson 61). This insomnia suggests Conn's connection to the sea creatures and the fact that he does not completely belong to the human world (62). He is a deviation from the established order in the universe, which denies him the right to such a natural process as sleep.

Furthermore, the theories of Levi-Strauss and Propp fail to account for the symbolism in King Conn's death scene. An appropriate interpretation would be to consider the lake, the chained-up wooden boat, and the bed of feathers as representations of the three mythological ambiances, water, earth, and air. Since there is no duality or contradiction in this interpretation, it does not match completely Levi Strauss's ideas. The diagram (or schemata, as Levi-Strauss uses the term) of the scene can be represented as three concentric circles (land surrounding a lake with a boat in the middle), which stand for harmony among the elements. The abnormal otter-son, who distorts the harmony between men and animals and throughout the kingdom, in the center of the picture is eventually engulfed by nature. Although it is the climax of the legend, this scene appears to

lack a hero according to Propp and Levi-Strauss (the sleeping King Conn is neither very active nor entirely human). Yet by the laws of both theories, such a major moment must have a hero. In reality, the scene demonstrates that nature holds the key to creation and destruction. The second appearance of the otter closes the frame that encompasses the tale and thus completes another compositional circle. To conclude, in this legend, nature can cause chaos and harmony with equal ease because it drives all the action in the universe; it is the most essential character in the narrative. To use Proppian terms in a counter-Proppian logic, the narrative culminates with the victory of nature, the hero, over the unnatural, the villain (Function 18). In other words, in different situations, nature attains different roles of major characters: a hero, a villain, a helper, and never simply the role of scenery.

The methods of Levi-Strauss and Propp adequately expose the general structure of folktales but fail to account for the function of non-human characters such as nature in "King Cormac and King Conn." Although the animals and the scenery are not personified, their involvement is undeniably driven by reason. Everything about them but the human shape fits the definition of a character, yet Propp and Levi-Strauss deny them this status. The foregoing analysis opens room for the consideration of non-human entities as symbolic characters within the structure of the narrative. Each of these scholars' techniques applies on a micro level when discussing the role of nature in connection to each structural level. In order to appreciate the full complexity of the narrative structure of this legend, scholars should acknowledge the active role of nature as a character.

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