

Penumbra

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE INQUIRY



Issue 2, Spring 2015

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Penumbra is the official, refereed, scholarly journal of Union Institute & University's Ph.D. Program in Interdisciplinary Studies. The journal is published at regular intervals and dedicated to challenging traditional academic and creative disciplinary boundaries in the context of social change.

Penumbra's purpose is to promote theoretically informed engagements with concrete issues and problems. The journal publishes socially engaged, innovative, creative and critical scholarship with a focus on ethical and political issues in the humanities, public policy, and leadership. *Penumbra* is a peer-edited and peer-reviewed journal committed to spanning the divide between scholarly and creative production, and to fostering work from graduate students, junior scholars and emerging artists, in addition to more established critical and creative voices.

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Penumbra invites scholarship of all kinds, creative nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and visual works that address any aspect of the journal's mission and scope. We seek submissions from graduate students, junior scholars, and emerging artists, in addition to more established critical and creative voices. All submissions undergo double-blind peer review. We do not accept previously published work. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable, but the editors should be notified immediately upon a work's acceptance for publication elsewhere.

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CONTRIBUTORS

JJENNA HUPP ANDREWS is an active studio artist and lecturer in the Department of Communications and Visual Art at University of Michigan-Flint.

THE REV. GREGORY BAILEY is an attorney and an associate pastor at Union Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, where he serves as worship leader, adult educator and clergy support.

RAFFAELE FLORIO is an associate professor of history and the director of graduate studies in the History, World Languages & Cultural Heritage Department at Regis College. He founded and is the current director of the Public Heritage Institute in Weston, MA.

PRAKASH KONA is a writer, teacher and researcher working as Associate Professor at the Department of English Literature, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. He is the author of the poetry collection *Conjurer of Nights* (Waterloo Press, 2012), among other books.

GARIOT PIERRE LOUIMA is a writer and college administrator. His fiction has been published or is forthcoming in *carte blanche*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora*, and *Crossing Borders*.

ERIN R. MCCOY is an assistant professor of English and liberal studies at the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

CHRISTOPHER MULROONEY is the author of *Grimaldi* (Fowlpox Press) and *jamboree* (Turf Lane Press).

REGINA NELSON is the author of *Theorist-at-Large: One Woman's Ambiguous Journey Into Medical Cannabis* (Cannabis Patient Network Institute, 2015).

DAVID PENDERY is an assistant professor at National Taipei University of Business. He received his B.A. in international relations at San Francisco State University, M.S. in journalism at Boston University, and Ph.D. in English literature at National Chengchi University.

ROBERT RATLIFF is the author of two short novels, *The Dinner Party* and *The Bookmakers at Eden*, both published in 2013.

AIESHA TURMAN is the founder and director of The Black Girl Project, a New York-based grassroots organization that offers workshops, labs, a Leadership Academy, as well as an annual Sisterhood Summit to more than 100 young women from the metropolitan New York and Mid-Atlantic regions.

MERRY RENN VAUGHAN is an assistant professor, director of Theatre And Art Programs, and chair of the Communications And Theatre Department at the College of St. Scholastica.

A Call Against the Dark

The world is full of propensity towards something, tendency towards something, latency of something, and this intended something means fulfillment of the intending. It means a world which is more adequate for us, without degrading suffering, anxiety, self-alienation, nothingness. However, this tendency is in flux, as one that has precisely the Novum in front of it. The Where To of the real only shows in the Novum its most basic Objective determinateness, and it appeals to man who is the arms of the Novum.

—Ernest Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*

In September of 2014, the *Baltimore Sun* revealed that the city had paid more than \$5.7 million to more than 100 people who had won court judgments or settlements related to allegations of brutality and civil rights violations. The city paid another \$5.8 million in legal fees related to those claims. Seven months after the Sun published its report, 25-year-old Freddie Gray was arrested by Baltimore police for allegedly being in illegal possession of a switchblade. Gray fell into a coma while in police custody. He died five days later from injuries to his spinal cord.

News of his death resulted in protests and civil disorder in Baltimore. At

least twenty police officers were injured, at least 250 people have been arrested, and thousands of police and Maryland Army National Guard troops were deployed to bring order to the city.

A medical examiner ruled Gray's death a homicide, and the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office filed charges against six police officers.

"[P]eace has lost its credibility," Baltimore resident Abdullah Moaney, an information technology worker from East Baltimore, told the *New York Times*. "If it wasn't for the riot," Moaney told the *Times* reporter, charges would not have been filed.

We could not have predicted Freddie Gray's death at the hands of Baltimore police or the unrest that followed when we began planning for this issue last summer. We agreed then that our second issue of *Penumbra* would follow the theme of the January conference of the PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies program at the Union Institute & University: "Insurrection, Subversion, Rebellion." The subject was very much inspired by the words of Fanon, who wrote in his 1961 *The Wretched of the Earth* that the liberation and re-awakening of a people after colonization "is always a violent event."

We were interested in papers that addressed the role of insurrection, subversion and rebellion in the pursuit of social justice, work that examined physical confrontations as well as the tensions that drive social practice and the arts.

And then in July, Eric Garner died in Staten Island, New York, after a police officer put him in a choke-hold for 15 seconds. A month later a police officer shot and killed an unarmed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Freddie Gray died on April 15, 2015.

All of these cases resulted in protests and civil unrest that brought national and international attention and sparked debates about the tense relationship between law enforcement agencies and African Americans.

A day after a New York grand jury decided not to indict the officers responsible for Garner's death, "[t]housands of demonstrators poured out in cities across the country ... in a show of outrage," the

Boston Globe reported.

We saw outrage on the streets of Ferguson. A state of emergency was declared in Baltimore.

§§

In this issue of *Penumbra*, we publish scholars who live in the United States, China, and India. Some are well-established and others are newly published. Their critical perspectives are diverse, yet they are all equally concerned with what Bloch described as the "philosophy of the new," that is the belief that the human condition can and should be improved, that as scholars our work is to wrestle against the psycho-intellectual violence that, according to Fanon, holds "people in its grip."

Merry Renn Vaughan examines the ways in which the author known as Dr. Seuss uses techniques he learned in advertising, as well as through the creation of political cartoons and military propaganda, to critique consumerism and classism. David Pendery writes of "an American artist-moralist tradition," a tradition that he describes as a coalescence of aesthetic and moral stimuli that has conditioned American arts for decades. Erin McCoy revisits the 1960s and 1970s anti-Vietnam protests and investigates the ways in which the anti-war movement intersects with the fight for an independent Puerto Rico. Also writing about the civil rights movement, Gregory Bailey chronicles Dr. Martin Luther King's persistent endeavor to address the flaws inherent in capitalism. In his work, the historian Raffaele Florio uses the Virgin of Guadalupe to demonstrate a mediation between two colliding

cultures, the Catholic friars and the Maya people. Regina Nelson shares a personal story in order to demystify cannabis use.

The creative work in this issue moves from the whimsical (the poetry of Christopher Mulrooney) to the existential (Prakash Kona's short fiction). Jjenna Hupp Andrews's visual series "Nomadic Borderlands" explores "the relationships between our bodies and our exterior world, focusing of the shifting edges of where our body (interior) ends and the outside (exterior) world begins."

In her review of Koala Boof's *The Sexy Part of the Bible*, Aiesha Turman writes that the novel "begins with the individual Black woman, allows her to be at the center of herself, but then pushes against barriers of gender and race to create a new world."

§§

The violence that spilled onto the streets of Baltimore following Gray's death has many antecedents. There were the draft riots in New York City in 1863; the December 1915 public rape and lynching Cordella Stevenson; the Memphis 1866 riots in which white rioters—law enforcement among them—killed 46 black people, raped five black women, and burned hundreds of black-owned homes, schools, and churches. What I mean to suggest here is there was nothing new in the violence that took the lives of Freddie Gray, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Walter Scott.

Victims, all of them, of centuries-old systems of violence. The authors in this issue, like Bloch, write toward "the Novum in front." Their work considers that, per-

haps, our societies can be remade, that they can be made better than they are presently. None of the authors published in this issue provide simple solutions. What they provide are possibilities—for interrogating our assumptions (see Florio), for finding in literature lessons on doing good and making a good life (see Pendery, Turman, and Vaughan), and the power of art to say what cannot be said otherwise (Mulrooney, Bonecek, Andrews).

The Sneetches: Dr. Seuss's Critique of Consumer Culture and Classism

Much has been written about the ways in which “The Sneetches” by Dr. Seuss critiques antisemitism and racism. Philip Nel notes that Seuss, whose legal name was Theodor Seuss Geisel, had been sketching out what was to become the Sneetches as early as 1953, when a single illustration of the Sneetches appeared with three paragraphs of text in the pages of *Redbook* (Annotated 164). The story’s message: “And, really, it’s sort of a shame, For except for those stars, every Sneetch is the same” (Seuss, *Redbook* 77). The story was published two years before Rosa Parks refused to yield her seat on the bus and in the summer between the two Supreme Court hearings on *Brown v. Board of Education*. “The Sneetches,” along with *Horton Hears a Who!*, as Charles Cohen notes, was “the blade [Seuss] had learned to wield against intolerance, and he was as much ahead of his fellow Americans as he had been in urging them to enter World War II” (221). In the essay “No Matter How Small’: The Democratic Imagination of Dr. Seuss,” Henry Jenkins writes that the story “rendered the whole logic of racism absurd” (200). Donald E. Pease notes that “when *The Sneetches and Other Stories* appeared [...] critics saw its antiracist theme as an elaboration of the critique of anti-Semitism that Geisel had directed against Nazi Germany in his work at *PM*” (118). And according to Walter C. Metz, the story “The Sneetches” represents a “compelling” indictment against the Holocaust. Metz claims the bird appearing in 1941 cartoon “I am Part Jewish” is

an early figure for the Sneetches—he looks exactly like a Sneetch ... Dr. Seuss may have been surprised by his friend’s observation that the 1961 Sneetches were reminiscent of war-time Jewish victims of the Holocaust, but at some un-

Merry Renn Vaughan is an assistant professor at the College of St. Scholastica and serves as the director of the Theatre and Art Programs and is the chair of the Communication and Theatre Arts Department. She holds a BFA in Theatre and an MA in Theatre Arts, both from University of Wisconsin-Superior, and a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies from the Union Institute & University. She is a founding board member of Twin Ports Stage, a professional, non-profit theatre company.

conscious level, he had merely returned to his own allegorical tradition of representing Jewish-Americans using his Uncle Sam bird, 20 years prior. (31)

The bird in the cartoon does indeed resemble a Sneetch, but I contend it is instead Seuss's version of the American eagle. The beard, as well as the stars and striped hat, are allusions to Uncle Sam; it makes more sense for the bird to be our national symbol than the beach bird that would not be created for over a decade.

What has received little scholarly attention in Seuss's work, however, are the ways in which "The Sneetches" directly comments on consumer culture and emergent classism – all of which Seuss deemed detrimental to American democracy and his vision of civil society. In this article, I discuss Seuss's earlier work, particularly the work he produced for the newspaper *PM* during World War II and the editorial cartoons he produced for the Dartmouth student newspaper *Jack-O-Lantern*. I suggest that while Seuss's political perspectives were not without complications – where he offers eviscerating critiques of racism and antisemitism, his perspectives at times included xenophobic, stereotypical, and racist images – "The Sneetches" offers a greater indictment of American consumerism and prejudices based on class status.

§§

In the early 1940s, Dr. Seuss used his political cartoons, most published in the newspaper *PM*, to speak out against Jim Crow laws, antisemitism, and other forms of discrimination. In a September 18, 1941 cartoon, for instance, he depicts Charles Lindbergh atop a huge pile of "Nazi Anti-Semite Stink." Lindbergh, who gave his first openly anti-Semitic speech in Des Moines, Iowa, on September 11, 1941, is shown spreading the filth of Nazi thought across American soil. In "What This County Needs Is A Good Mental Insecticide," an essay published on June 11, 1942, Seuss shows Uncle Sam using a Flit-like insecticide gun to eject a "racial prejudice bug" from the heads of American citizens. And in a cartoon that appeared on August 19, 1942, Seuss draws Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge, a divided state of Georgia, and Talmadge's own "national" bird named "Racial Hatred." These are just three examples of the many cartoons Seuss published about intolerance during his tenure at the newspaper. *PM* prided itself on being "against people who push other people around" (Minear 13). Seuss developed "the confrontational style later used to great effect in his children's books – especially the overtly political ones" while publishing with *PM* (Nel 41-2).

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, however, Seuss' "confrontational style" took on a decidedly sinister hue. As fears of a Japanese invasion swept the country, Seuss propagated anti-Japanese messages in his *PM* cartoons and spoke in favor of the internment of Japanese Americans. Seuss' caricatures in his anti-Japan cartoons were

drawn upon longstanding Western stereotypes about the Japanese people. In a cartoon that appeared in March of 1942, as in many similar cartoons of that time, Seuss likens Imperial Japan to Nazi Germany. Given that Japan had signed the Tripartite Pact with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in 1940, Seuss' relating of the two Axis powers seems reasonable. But whereas Nazi Germany is represented by the clearly recognizable figure of Hitler, Japan is rendered as an unspecified individual who seems to stand for the entire Japanese population. Moreover, Seuss' portrays this individual with exaggeratedly slanted eyes and pig-like nose. Even more troubling are his anti-Japanese American cartoons that lent strong support to internment camps. Seuss, who maintained a summer home in California, would have witnessed the racist hype and paranoia directed against Japanese and Japanese Americans living on the West Coast at this time. A cartoon showing a long line of Japanese men running all the way up the western coastline queuing up to collect bricks of TNT was titled "Waiting for the signal from home." The illustration was published less than ten weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor when America's distrust of Japanese and those of Japanese descent was greatly heightened and gave renewed rise to old racial stereotypes. Nel writes that "Seuss's caricatures of the Japanese are no more derogatory than those of his contemporary cartoonists" (Icon 55). But this can hardly exculpate Seuss, not least because many of his contemporaries were just as derogatory in their depictions of Jewish people and African Americans as they were in their depictions of the Japanese. That Seuss resisted stereotyping Jews and Blacks in his *PM* cartoons indicates that he deployed racist images of Japanese and Japanese Americans consciously and purposefully.

But that mind-set would disappear from Seuss' work entirely after the fall of 1953. Jenkins writes that Seuss went on a trip for *Life* magazine, a "fact-finding mission to Japan, researching the American occupation's impact on education and child-rearing practices" (188). In the process of this investigation, Seuss interviewed Japanese school-children and this altered his outlook for life. The experience helped transform Seuss' attitude toward the Japanese people, and his book, *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954) "drew on his recently acquired knowledge of Japan's schools, where individualism was a relatively new concept" (Pease 93). Seuss dedicated *Horton Hears a Who!* to Mitsugi Nakamura, an educator whom he met on this trip, and he never again depicted the Japanese people in a negative light. Additionally, Seuss discovered his books "had been adopted in both Japan and Korea as part of the official post-war re-education curriculum" (Jenkins 188). With this discovery, "Seuss knew *Horton* would be used to train not only American children, but children in emerging democratic cultures around the world" (Jenkins 188).

Seuss deployed the "confrontational style" he developed at *PM* to combat intolerance and racism at home. World War II and the Holocaust had no doubt fueled Seuss' opposition to antisemitism, as did his earlier experience at Dartmouth College, which throughout the first half of the twentieth century had a reputation for limiting the ad-

mittance of Jewish students and whose president, Ernest M. Hopkins, declared as late as 1945 that “Dartmouth is a Christian College founded for the Christianization of its students” (qtd. in Honan 16A). Although he was not Jewish, Seuss experienced anti-Semitic sentiments at New Hampshire Ivy League school. As a freshman he found that not a single fraternity expressed any interest in him. “With my black hair and long nose,” Seuss said, “I was supposed to be Jewish. It took a year and a half before word got around that I wasn’t” (qtd. in Morgan 27). Seuss’s ability to deflect painful jibes with sarcasm and biting humor sparked his interest in joining Dartmouth’s student magazine, *The Dartmouth Jack-O-Lantern*, as a satirical cartoonist.

§§

The racial climate of the late 1950s and early 1960s in the United States was tumultuous and increasingly galvanized the nation. In 1954, the Supreme Court made the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, stating that state laws that segregated students based on race were unconstitutional and that separate was not equal. Just one year later, Rosa Parks refused to stand on the bus and give her seat to a white man. Each of these situations drew national attention and caused Americans to examine the artificiality of separating people by the color of their skin. In September 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower deployed federal troops to desegregate Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas after Governor Orval Faubus used the Arkansas National Guard to keep nine black students from entering the school. “By the end of the decade,” William and Nancy Young conclude, “the nation found itself poised, reluctantly or not, to enter some of the greatest social changes of the century” (xx, 9). On February 1, 1960 a sit-in at the Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina was the first of what was to become more than a decade of peaceful demonstrations. Inspired by the teachings of Martin Luther King Jr., the activities of civil rights groups such as the Freedom Riders drew increased attention to the discrimination of people based on the color of their skin.

“The Sneetches” tells the story of a society of ostrich-like yellow birds that live on a beach.¹ Some Sneetches have stars on their bellies and some do not. The Star-Belly Sneetches are “a distinct and dominant group,” an elite caste in an “oppressive social structure” (Bracey 83, Klaassen and Klaassen 123). What some critics see as “The Sneetches” generalized condemnation of race and ethnic prejudices appears tied to a

1 Seuss had used the image of the ostrich to represent American isolationism. In light of racial tensions of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the similarity of Sneetches to ostriches seems hardly coincidental and appears to suggest that large segments of the population had buried their heads in the sand, hoping the Civil Rights Movement might somehow disappear.

fairly specific critique of class-based social inequalities. The Sneetch society is completely homogeneous save for the presence or absence of stars on their bellies. As Johann and Mari-Gretta Klaassen explain:

‘Because they had stars,’ the Star-Belly Sneetches (SBSes) refused social contact with Plain-Belly Sneetches (PBSes), and appear to have control over the Poozer’s share of the resources on the beaches—SBS children excluded PBS children from their ball games; SBS adults excluded PBS adults from their ‘frankfurter roasts/Or picnics or parties or marshmallow toasts.’ These exclusionary social practices were systematic and long standing. (122)

In a show of conspicuous consumption, the Star-Belly Sneetches engage in leisure activities such as playing ball (with the ball featuring a star no less) and roasting hot dogs, while the Sneetches who have no stars are left to stand apart and watch. The Sneetches treat the stars as a type of arti-factual communication that is similar to that of wearing name brand clothing. Although wearing brand name clothing affords no legal privileges, it is often perceived as signaling an elevated social status. By wearing distinctive logos, wears intend to let the world know they are well-off enough to afford the brand. The French sportswear company, Lacoste, was among the first to affix a logo – the distinctive green crocodile – to its garments, which quickly became status symbols. In 1952, Lacoste began exporting their apparel to the United States (Lacoste), where the wealthy would wear them during their leisure pursuits. Ads began to appear toting their signature Izod polo with crocodile on the breast as “the shirt of champions.” That the green color of the Lacoste crocodile is of a nearly identical shade of green as the stars on the Sneetches’ bellies further supports a reading that detects a deep strain of consumer culture criticism in “The Sneetches.”

Further evidence of the reading rests in the fact that the Sneetch stars can be removed and replaced for the right price. And the villain who supplies the means comes in a character drawing on ethnic stereotypes. Sylvester McMonkey McBean looks a little like a chimpanzee, wears a green hat and bow-tie, and has a name most definitely has a ring of Irishness to it. He “gives an immediate impression of deviousness” (Bracey 85). Metz notes the racial connections: “[T]he positioning of the Irish capitalist as a subhuman ‘McMonkey’ relies on the same sort of stereotyping that fueled early 20th century antisemitism, a topic that was frequently a major target for the German-American *Geisel*” (28). Though Seuss said “The Sneetches” was “inspired by antisemitism” (qtd. in Fensch, *Sneetches* 118), he was certainly not above making racial slurs of his own.

McBean provides the plain-bellied Sneetches with a “magical” solution in a machine that puts stars on their bellies and make them appear like the Star-Belly Sneetches. Once the plain-bellied Sneetches have stars on their bellies, they want to be treated “exactly like” the star-bellied Sneetches (Seuss, *Sneetches* 12). As Klaassen and Klaassen explain,

“The machine erased the external differences between the PBSes and the SBSes—suddenly, all the Sneetches had stars” (124). The external markers of all the Sneetches were suddenly the same as this had been the only thing differentiating the Sneetches in their minds. According to Klaassens and Klaassen, “The sudden shift that the ‘very peculiar machine’ brought about in Sneetch society presented the PBSes with an option they had never had before: they were able to shift from one group to the other” (124). Once the plain-bellied Sneetches acquire the external symbol of privilege, the presence of “stars upon thars,” those who had been in power, the original star-bellied Sneetches, turn to McBean, who uses another machine to remove stars from their bellies and declare the elitists are Sneetches sans stars. Pretty soon, confusion reigns with Sneetches running in and out of machines until no one is sure who was an original Star-Belly Sneetch and who was not.

McBean’s machines allow the Sneetches “to alter and manipulate caste markers, until nobody can be sure who is elite and who is subordinate” (Jenkins 200). After a while, it is pretty clear the only one coming out ahead is the capitalist and inventor McBean. As Mensch and Freeman note, “the scene turns into an orgy of capitalist exploitation, with constant streams of Sneetches paying to enter one machine to be starred and then to enter another to be un-starred, while McBean stands grinning in the center, in front of an ever-growing mountain of cash” (34). The Sneetches run from one machine to the next and McBean, who stops interacting with them altogether, merely stands by as the birds literally throw their money at him. In the end, the Sneetches are unified by their “shared victimization,” that is, a “complete economic destruction of Sneetch society” when McBean drives away with all of their money. Having been reduced to common economic powerlessness, the Sneetches finally realize a unitary class consciousness” (113). Only total economic destruction brings the two types of Sneetch together. Only absent capital can the Sneetches learn to accept each other.

The enduring value of “The Sneetches” is in the way it seems to link the constructiveness of race and ethnic categories to economic privileges, yet it falls short in offering strategies on how persistent discriminatory practices may be effectively resisted. Shared economic exploitation may result in something like “a unitary class consciousness,” as Mensch and Freeman suggest, but it seems highly unlikely that this will erase racial and ethnic difference as well. In her 2010 article “Emerging Themes on Aspects of Social Class and the Discourse of White Privilege,” Jennifer Heller argues that a

more comprehensive understanding of racial advantage is achieved when theorists indicate how whiteness leads to the manifestations of materially based advantages as it interacts with other social features such as race, class and gender, which shape identity and life chances. (112).

“Sneetches” does not wrestle with race or ethnic difference – or multiculturalism or the

political approaches employed by Black, Asian, Native American or Latino people – because the physical differences in the Sneetches are minor and removable; the society is utterly homogeneous save for the salesman McBean and the bird who observes the story but does not interact. As Michael Kazin notes, “The Sneetches” show Seuss as “a typical 1930s/40s Liberal in that he cared less about multiculturalism than he did about the more fundamental American ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality” (qtd. in Wood).

§§

Although he found antisemitism and Jim Crow laws reprehensible (or, perhaps, more accurately, un-American), Seuss had a blind spot when it came to people of Japanese descent, whom he once depicted stereotypically in his political cartoons. A 1953 trip changed his views on the Japanese people. He met educators and children alike and shifted his perspective. He understood that books could be used to educate not only American school children but those in emerging democracies, as well. Seuss’ post-war books therefore include the social and political messages he saw as vital in educating an effective citizen. Although problematic with regard to its apparent endorsement of assimilation and its use of ethnic stereotypes, “The Sneetches” presents a sustained critique of the perils of consumerism and classism, and about the construction of difference and our still very pronounced inability to deal with it. The text is an example of radical children’s literature as it does “not guarantee a better future for American children, but [...] challenge[s] them to think critically and creatively about their choices” (Zipes, *Tales* ix). As Julia Adams notes in “Class Analysis and Culture: What the Sneetches Can Teach Us”: “The ending of “The Sneetches” is a sly vision of utopia, in which the Sneetches decide to be just one big happy mutually indistinguishable group” (11). The Sneetches learn a lesson that Seuss hopes everyone will learn – to be inclusive and accepting of all others in spite of how they look.

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Correcting Capitalism: King's Critique of Economic Injustice

King's concept of the beloved community formed his ideas about American capitalism, whose excesses he saw as related to the racism and violence he fought against. King embraced Frederick Douglass's passion to correct economic injustice, as well as the fierce self-reliance of Booker T. Washington, both of whom were King's role models. The dignity of every man, woman, and child is the nucleus of King's "beloved community," a concept whose genesis can be found in the works and teachings of Christian theologians Walter Rauschenbusch, Henry George, Henry Fosdick, Howard Thurman, and Paul Tillich, all of whom critiqued the excesses of capitalism that demand the labor of the many to supply the luxuries of the few. It was King's Christianity that led him to believe the God of the Universe had endowed the Earth with enough resources to provide every person with enough to eat, thereby freeing them to use their God-given talents to pursue happiness and live with dignity.

King scholars have identified and developed a framework to meet the burdens of racism, sexism, and sadism, as well as to provide insight into the harm of militarism versus the promise of nonviolence (Burrow 2006). Many studies on King have focused on his attempt to heal the nation of racism, his insistence on remaining nonviolent in the midst of personal threats and intimidation, and his call for pursuing peace between the

The Rev. Gregory Bailey is the first recipient of the Union Institute & University's Dr. Virgil Alexander Wood Dissertation Award for his dissertation, "King's Pursuit of Economic Justice: Correcting Capitalism through a Beloved Economy." The award recognizes Bailey's research of Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy in building a beloved community that confronts racism, war, and poverty. Bailey is the associate pastor at Union Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, where he serves as worship leader, adult educator and clergy support. In his legal practice he represents the poor and underserved. Bailey has a PhD from Union Institute & University, a law degree from The Georgetown University, and Master of Sacred Theology from the Boston University School of Theology, an MDiv from Andover Newton Theological School, and a BS in business administration from the Fairfield University School of Business.

United States and the Soviet Union and Vietnam (Nemeth 2009; Branch 2006). Thus, historians have noted his contributions to ending racism and the Vietnam War but, for the most part, have neglected his contribution to economic justice, limiting his role in the struggle to the last four years of his life. Thomas Jackson (2007) is the exception. He traces King's interest in economic justice to the beginning to his ministry. Although Jackson fills a tremendous void, he fails to provide the context of King's position on capitalism. King believed that capitalism must be disciplined by a beloved economy – that each community member must be treated with dignity and respect. For King, the benefits of capitalism were not the privilege of a few but rather for everyone to enjoy. King sought to end poverty through guaranteeing a minimum annual income for everyone willing to work.

In this article, I will use a chronological approach to examine King's critique of the economic exploitation inherent in capitalism. King's critique of economic justice and the flaws of capitalism evolved as he dug deeper into the roots of social injustice and worked to eradicate poverty. This brief study identifies the salient ethical statements made by King on economic injustice, demonstrating – contrary to the prevailing understanding of most scholars – that King, from the outset of his ministry, concerned himself with the injustices caused by an economic system that privileges a few to the detriment of the majority. In fact, the twin missions of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were to save the soul of America and to end economic exploitation, racism, and militarism. This article, then, retraces how King, by extending the virtues of a beloved community to economic realm, developed his deepening understanding that capitalism needed some type of correction in order to improve the lives of all people.

King's reformist sentiments about capitalism can be found in his sermons, speeches, articles, and other communications, both to organized labor organizations and to other audiences as well, and was inherent in his concept of the beloved community, where all – regardless of their economic station – are treated with dignity. Existing scholarship places the beginnings of King's modifying capitalism agenda just four years before his assassination. But in his 1950 reflections on his journey to a Christian ministry, King relates that seeing the Great Depression's soup lines as a child first ignited his interest in economic exploitation (King, Papers, vol. 1, 1992, 359). Accordingly, King already expresses concern about income and wealth inequality in the early 1950s, as evidenced, for example, in his sermon "Paul's Letter to American Christians" (King, Testament, 1986, 416). Throughout his work, King offered a valuable ethical analysis of prevailing economic theories that continues to be relevant. The mounting challenge of overcoming economic exploitation eventually led to his "Poor People's Campaign," announced in December of 1967, which demanded the implementation of public policy toward the goal of ending this portion of triple evils racism, militarism and economic exploitation. King was assassinated on his way to seeking redress in Washington; however, the economic

reforms that he campaigned for in Memphis, Tennessee, provided cornerstones for the “beloved economy” he sought to build (Young 2009, 6; Wood 2005, 85). In retracing the development of King’s economic theory, this article seeks to contribute to the intellectual discourse about King by broadening our understanding of the scope of his radical social reform agenda, as well as about the economic theory that emerged during a period of crisis in American society. King’s persistent attempt to structurally reform capitalism demonstrates that he believed there can be no beloved community without a beloved economy.

King’s concern with both the economy and the community is related to his desire to establish a beloved relationship among all human beings. It is from this overarching premise of the beloved community that the necessity of a conceptual framework that embraces all Judeo-Christian believers – and nonbelievers – becomes noteworthy, for the triple evils persevere in America and around the world. Examining King’s early ministry in the context of reforming capitalism yields concrete evidence that the civil rights movement’s leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., were concerned about the economic conditions of all people throughout the world, and in particular those dwelling in the richest nation in the world.

EARLY INFLUENCES

King’s concern for economic stabilization went beyond African Americans. His work on the Connecticut Tobacco Farm taught him more than how to harvest tobacco; it gave him first-hand knowledge of the economic privation faced by laborers of all races, none of whom were compensated fairly for their labor:

During my late teens, I worked two summers against my father’s wishes – he never wanted my brother and me to work around white people because of the oppressive conditions – in a plant that hired both Negroes and whites. Here I saw economic injustice first hand, and realized the poor white was exploited just as much as the Negroes. (King, *Strength* 1963, 77–8)

King also understood the link between economic exploitation and racism, which he expounded on in his speech “God Marches On,” delivered following the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in March 1965 – much earlier in his civil rights work than previously understood. His criticism of capitalism’s flaws was ongoing throughout his journey from Montgomery to Memphis. King began building the framework of his economic analysis of America in the summer of 1955; he began with the African American community’s fragile economy. King’s insights were prophetic, his speeches poetic:

[The economic problem] radiates in our communities like the rays of the beaming sun. In every community people are hungry, unemployment is rising like a tidal wave, housing conditions are embarrassingly poor, crime and juvenile

delinquency are spreading like the dew drops on an early fall morning. (King, Papers, vol. 4, 2000, 220)

Here King is building on a theme that Walter Rauschenbusch taught and Harry Fosdick preached, namely, the necessity of religious leaders to concern themselves with people's social conditions in this world rather than (or in addition to) their well-being in a future world. King lamented,

[h]ow we can be concerned with the souls of men and not be concerned with the conditions that damn their souls? How can we be concerned with men being true and honest and not concerned with the economic conditions that made them dishonest and the social conditions with the economic conditions that make them untrue? (Ibid., 222)

Similarly, King appropriates the pericope of Dives and Lazarus from Luke 16:19–31, a parable of sin and evil, to discuss American capitalism's failure to provide for laborers. King notes in an October 1955 sermon that Dives – who was rich on Earth – went to hell, and Lazarus – poor and ill during life – went to heaven: “There is nothing more tragic than to find a person who can look at the anguishing and deplorable circumstances of fellow human beings and not be moved. Dives' wealth had made him cold and calculating; it had blotted out the warmth of compassion” (Ibid., 236). King returned to the same theme on March 18, 1968, in his speech “All Labor has Dignity,” in which he spoke about individuals so selfish and indifferent to the plight of others that they accumulated wealth at the expense of others. King did not condemn wealth per se; rather, he condemned the failure to share the economically generated wealth with the poor: “Dives is the American capitalist who never seeks to bridge the economic gulf between himself and the laborer, because he feels that it is the natural for some to live in inordinate luxury while others live in abject poverty” (Ibid., 238). He believed that wealthy people must pay those who work for them a living wage. He saw economic equality as spiritual prosperity.

BUILDING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Following the success of the Montgomery bus boycott, King became a sought-after speaker and was called upon to aid in desegregation efforts elsewhere. In 1956 he first introduced the idea of the beloved community to the Diaspora; it would prove to be one of his most enduring legacies, the pinnacle of his efforts to redeem the soul of America from the triple evils of racism, militarism, and economic exploitation (Fairclough 1987, 32). King was inspired by Walter Rauschenbusch's interpretation of the beloved community, which had been inspired by Josiah Royce. Royce was a philosopher who first coined the phrase the beloved community.

The SCLC, with King at its helm, incorporated the beloved community into its fight against segregation, and it became the backbone of the civil rights movement as a whole

(Wood 2005, 95). The concept was hardly foreign to African Americans; it has deep biblical roots, and permeates the book of Ephesians (Young 2009, 2) – a text King (and the entire civil rights movement) leaned upon heavily. In it, King’s imaginary Paul argues that the church is the beloved body of Christ. He uses the term “beloved” in the first chapter after saying that believers are adopted into the family of Christ in the fifth verse:

He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.... In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:1–9)

A large segment of Christians in America – particularly in the South – did not heed the teachings of the scriptures at that time. The interpretation of the preceding passage that would argue against segregation in Ephesians holds that everybody, regardless of race or beliefs, has Christ’s blood. King often lamented that the most segregated time of the week in America is Sunday mornings (King, *Testament*, 1986).

The terms “beloved” and “redemption” can also be found in King’s sermons as early as August 1956:

We will have to boycott at times, but let us always remember that boycotts are not ends within themselves. A boycott is just a means to an end. A boycott is merely a means to say, “I don’t like it.” It is merely a means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor but the end is reconciliation. The end is the re-creation of a beloved community. The end is the creation of a society where men will live together as brothers. An end is not retaliation but redemption. (King, *Papers*, vol. 2, 1998, 344)

In 1956, at the age of twenty-seven, King already possessed a coherent vision of the beloved community and followed the Pauline definition of the new age and the purpose of humanity. His interpretations of the Bible were explicitly relevant to the civil rights movement.

KING AND CAPITALISM

King’s most in-depth analysis of the benefits and drawbacks of capitalism is in Paul’s “Letter to the American Christian,” a sermon he delivered on November 4, 1956. King noted capitalism’s strengths: that various goods and services can be delivered rapidly, efficiently, and abundantly, strengths that made the United States a wealthy nation. How-

ever, King appealed to the nation to understand that with great blessings come great responsibilities, such as ensuring dignity and respect for all, regardless of their economic station: “[Capitalism] can cause one to live a life of gross materialism. I am afraid that many among you are more concerned about making a living than making a life” (King, Papers, vol. 1, 1992, 416). King knew that a person is more than the sum total of his or her material possessions, and warned about a society that valued individual wealth over the collective good. King's activism aimed at correcting capitalism in order to realize a beloved – and therefore just and truly Christian – community.

King, through the imaginary Pauline letter, wanted well-heeled capitalists to use their power and influence to promote better distribution of resources for everyone. King's vision was not limited to correcting capitalism solely in the United States: “You can work within the framework of democracy to bring about a better distribution of wealth. You can use your powerful economic resources to wipe poverty from the face of the earth” (King, Papers, vol. 2, 1998, 344). King understood that the ability existed to eliminate poverty across the world, but the moral will of the majority of people to do so was lacking. King gave this analysis of wealth inequality:

God never intended for one group of people to live in superfluous inordinate wealth, while others live in abject deadening poverty. God intends for all of his children to have the basic necessities of life, and he has left in this universe “enough and to spare” for that purpose. So I call upon you to bridge the gulf between abject poverty and superfluous wealth. (King, Papers, vol. 2, 1998, 344)

King sought the help of the affluent to work against income and wealth inequality so that each of God's children could live a quality life. King's desire to correct the excesses of capitalism – specifically, the exploitation of the poor by materialistic individuals – stretches back to the first few years of his ministry, and his opinions about capitalism are consistent with his positions on violence and racism:

The misuse of capitalism can also lead to tragic exploitation. This has so often happened in your nation. They tell me that one-tenth of one percent of the population controls more than 40 percent of the wealth. Oh, America, how often have you taken necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. (Ibid., 416)

By underscoring that the poor are just as worthy as the rich in the eyes of God, King confronted an issue that resurfaces again and again in American history, the inequality of wealth. King's Poor People's Campaign addressed the lack of capital available to the poor (Young 2004); the concentration of wealth, he knew, leads to exploitation, and luxuries for the few were obtained at the expense of necessities for the masses (Bellamy 2009).

King's critique of capitalism continued in his ministry and public statements. He

called upon capitalist leaders to use the democratic government to improve the distribution of resources for the masses. King displayed a faith in capitalism and democracy. King, through the imaginary Pauline letter, wanted well-heeled capitalists to use their power and influence to promote better distribution of resources for everyone. King's vision was not limited to correcting capitalism solely in the United States. He understood that the ability existed to eliminate poverty across the world but the moral will to do so was lacking. King gave his analysis of wealth inequality. "God never intended for one group of people to live in superfluous inordinate wealth, while others live in abject deadening poverty. God intends for all of his children to have the basic necessities of life, and he has left in this universe "enough and to spare" for that purpose. So I call upon you to bridge the gulf between abject poverty and superfluous wealth" (King, Papers, vol. 2, 1998, 344). King sought the help of the affluent to work against income and wealth inequality so that each of God's children could live a quality life.

King discussed the immorality of inordinate wealth existing among a sea of poverty. Similarly, he provided what Baldwin (1991) describes as the core of King's beloved community in discussing God: The belief that God is impartial, that God created each person unique, but that God created no one human better than the other. Second, it reveals a sacramentalistic idea of the cosmos as echoed by the psalmist: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof – the world, and they that dwell therein; each human being only has a finite interest in land because life is mortal" (Burrow 2006, 172). King's correction of the misuses of capitalism involved clarifying to whom the world really belongs – to the masses, not the top one-tenth of one percent who at that time controlled 40 percent of the nation's wealth. In King's view, this correction could reconcile the historically fragile relationships between the rich and the poor, blacks and whites, Jews and Arabs.

At his first speech at the Lincoln Memorial on May 17, 1957, King addressed American citizens, but his message was for Congress:

Give us the ballot, and we will no longer have to worry the federal government about our basic rights. Give us the ballot and we will no longer plead to the federal government for passage of an anti-lynching law; we will, by the power of our vote to write the law on the statute books of the South, bring an end to the dastardly acts of the hooded perpetrators of violence. Give us the ballot, and we will transform the salient misdeeds of blood thirsty mobs into the calculated good deeds of orderly citizens. (Ibid.)

Pluralism as envisioned by James Madison, King underscores above, was unachievable as long as poll taxes, literacy tests, and other obstacles impeded African Americans from exercising their franchise. Through the ballot box, they could elect legislators and judges who would protect their interests; without access to it, African American contractors could not work as government contractors despite paying taxes to the very government

that oppressed them. And governmental disenfranchisement promoted hatred rather than love, keeping a beloved community of men and women of all races beyond reach.

KING AND ORGANIZED LABOR

King's critique of capitalism sharpened in his speeches to labor unions in the early 1960s. He spoke about the effects of technology on American workers. King's keen analysis of social conditions was reflected in "Change Must Come to the United Neighborhood Houses of New York," a speech he gave in the early 1960s: "It is an economic truism that the more we create miraculous instruments of production, the more we create both material surpluses and human surpluses" (King, Morehouse 2.3.0.600_007).

It appears to me that this is just as true today: we suffer not from a lack of consumable goods but from too few consumers who are able to purchase those goods without incurring debt. Although the United States is the richest nation in the world – indeed, King would say, because the United States is the richest nation in the world – there is an income crisis affecting the poor and middle class traceable to high unemployment rates, underemployment, wage suppression, outsourcing, and a minimum wage outpaced by inflation (Dobbs 2006, 116; OSU 2012). And those factors are tied directly to discrimination. One of King's concrete political solutions was a "guaranteed income" for all Americans through which he envisioned eliminating poverty (King, Testament, 1986, 615):

We have come a long way in our understanding of human motivation and of the blind operation of our economic system. Now we rather widely acknowledge that dislocation in the market operation of our economy and the prevalence of discrimination thrusts people into idleness and bind[s] them in constant or frequent unemployment against their will. The poor are less often dismissed from our consciousness today by branding them as despised and incompetent. We also know no matter how dynamically the economy develops and expands it does not eliminate poverty (King, Morehouse, 2.3.0.600_006).

The poverty rate for African Americans in the 1950s was 22.4 percent. It had declined to 12.3 percent by 1973 because of public policy changes such as the Civil Rights Act and the "War on Poverty" made during the 1960s, without which the poverty rate would likely have increased instead. Even so, it was nearly 8 points higher than the national average of just 4.78 percent. Clearly, racism – in the form of policies like "last hired first fired," which affected blacks disproportionately – contributed directly to that phenomenon. King believed that the resources to wage a "War on Poverty" were too limited to effectively eliminate poverty.

It was often remarked that "a rising tide lifts all boats" – a quote made whenever Republicans wanted to justify tax cuts and attributed to President John F. Kennedy and actually made in 1963. Apparently, the poor may not have had many boats to put into

the great oceans of economic opportunity in the world because we have had plenty of tax cuts and the rich have gotten much richer since the 1980s. The rich have bigger yachts but the poor's tug boats are sinking. The amount of poor in the nation has not dipped under 12 percent since 1978 (Morgan 2011). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2011 the unemployment rate for African Americans was approximately double the national rate; the poverty rate among blacks was twice that of whites (Macartney, Bishaw, and Fontenot 2013).

The King collection at the Atlanta University Center holds primary source documents that evince King's deep interest in economics and contradict general perceptions that he concentrated his efforts on race issues and nonviolence (Young and Sehgal 2010). According to Andrew Young, to avoid being labeled a "socialist" or a "Communist," King tended to curtail his discussion of economics or address them cryptically: "We said we just want the same thing everybody else had. Martin's decision not to talk economics put the country very much at ease" (Young and Sehgal 2010, 65). This explains why King never gave a speech that addressed economic conditions in the United States comprehensively until the Poor People's March in Washington in 1968 (Bretz 2010). But a close examination of King's speeches and writings makes clear that economic opportunity was at the heart of his understanding of the aims and goals the civil rights movement (Young and Sehgal 2010, 61). Although he frequently addressed economic issue in veiled fashion, King consistently throughout his career professed that the economic inequities in the United States result directly from capitalism's inability to meet the needs of the working poor.

As early as 1961, King spoke to labor union gatherings about the history of organized labor and the economic challenges confronting workers. He addressed the Fourth Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO in Miami. (King, Morehouse, 2.3.0.140_001). He spoke in Detroit in April 1961 about the similarities of the economic conditions facing blacks and whites and the need to raise the minimum wage, then just \$1.25. He sprinkled economic analysis into speeches to local unions. He told the United Packinghouse Workers of America on May 21, 1962, that racism within the union itself was undermining its bargaining position with the Minneapolis-based meat-packing union (Jackson 2007, 95). In October 1963, King reminded attendees at the thirtieth anniversary gathering of District 65 of the AFL-CIO that the suppression of the voting rights of Southern blacks would yield congressional delegations from Southern states that opposed workers' rights (King, Morehouse, 2.3.0.270_002).

King did not speak solely to labor unions about economic inequality. He expounded on housing and employment discrimination to the National Press Club in July 1962 in Washington DC (Ibid., 2.3.0.400_015). Following his acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, King lectured in New York City, voicing his opposition to tokenism within the struggle for economic justice. He addressed the need for fair housing policies before the

United Neighborhood of Houses of New York in his speech "Change Must Come" (Ibid., 2.3.0.600_002). And King spoke forcefully on behalf of the poor and the disenfranchised at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco in 1964, where he argued that white laborers suffered from income suppression as a result of slavery and segregation, too, in the form of depressed wages, and he called for G.I. Bill-type legislation to address those ongoing inequities:

Few people consider the fact that in addition to being enslaved for two centuries, the Negro was, during all three hundred years robbed of the wages of his toil. No amount of gold could provide an adequate compensation for the exploitation and humiliation of the Negro in America down through the centuries. Not all the wealth of this affluent society could meet the bill. Yet a price can be placed on unpaid wages. (King 2008, 2.3.0.1610_011)

King's speech at the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, that same year addressed the voter suppression caused by the party's refusal to recognize Mississippi's delegation to the convention. In 1965, King appeared in Atlanta before the Hungry Club to deliver "A Great Challenge Derived from a Serious Dilemma." Indeed, King wrote and spoke many times prior to 1964 on the economic conditions of poor people and how to ameliorate their plight.

King also delivered many sermons touching on his concern with economics. His topics included comparisons of Communism and its incompatibility with Christianity, and how the materialism of the United States outpaces its ability to pay consumers enough to consume items and the immorality of greed. In November 1961, King addressed the Fellowship of the Concerned, a part of the Southern Regional Council, delivering the sermon "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience" (King, Testament, 1986, 43). In it, he described Communism's fatal flaw: its tenet that the ends justifies the means, thereby opposing Lenin's reliance on violence, which was unacceptable to Christians. King consistently attacked wealth for wealth's sake, as on March 31, 1968, at the National Cathedral, when he lamented, "The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually" (Ibid., 620). And in 1967, he explained why greed is sinful in the sermon "Why Jesus Called a Rich Man a Fool," relating a story of a rich farmer building a bigger barn for his abundant harvest rather than distributing the extra food to the poor. The rich man's soul was required of him that very evening.

KING THE LABOR ORGANIZER

The aid of advisers Stanley Levison, Ralph Helstein, Ella Baker, and A. Philip Randolph ensured King was always well-prepared for his speeches to labor unions (Jackson 2007, 71). In his 1961 speech to the United Auto Workers Union, King spoke of labor's history of struggle – and triumphs – gaining their confidence by demonstrating his

knowledge of their tactics and tenacity:

I would like to open by saying that organized labor has come a long, long way from the days of the strike-breaking injunctions of federal courts, from the days of intimidation and firings in the plants, from the days that your union leaders could be physically beaten with impunity. The clubs and claws of the heartless anti-labor forces have been clipped and you now have organizations of strength and intelligence to keep your interest from being submerged and ignored.

An admirer of the social gospel crusader Walter Rauschenbusch, King understood the role the church could play in organizing labor in New York (Ibid., 15). But he also understood the value of organizing directly. Both the church and labor could employ economic boycotts and non-violent protest to pursue social and economic victories. He told the 1961 AFL-CIO convention in Miami:

Negroes in the United States read this history of labor and find it mirrors their own experience. We are confronted by powerful forces telling us to rely on the good will and understanding of those who profit by exploiting us. They deplore our discontent, they resent our will to organize, so that we may guarantee that humanity will prevail, and equality will be exacted. They are shocked that action organizations, sit-ins, civil disobedience, and protests are becoming our everyday tools, just as strikes, demonstrations and union organization became yours to insure that bargaining power genuinely existed on both sides of the table. (King, Testament, 1986, 202)

Furthermore, King underscored the shared values of the labor movement and the civil rights movement by unmasking their common foes:

A duality of interest of labor and the Negroes makes any crisis which lacerates you a crisis from which we bleed....Whether it be the ultra-right wing in the form of Birch societies or the alliance which former President Eisenhower denounced, the alliance between big military and big industry, or the coalition of Southern Dixiecrats and Northern reactionaries, whatever the form, these menaces now threaten everything decent and fair in American life. Their target is labor, liberals, and the Negro people. (Ibid., 203)

It was the same economic forces – and often the same political bodies – that opposed both desegregation and a living wage for labor, and went to great lengths to block the representation they sought in Congress.

King knit together the triple evils of militarism, racism, and economic exploitation, and saw the equivalence between racist tactics to exploit African Americans and anti-labor tactics to exploit white laborers: both resulted in financial gains exclusively for the wealthy and privileged. And he believed the power of combining non-violence with eco-

conomic boycotts – the strategy that brought the segregationist bus company to its knees in Montgomery, Alabama – could affect change for blacks and whites alike.

In his speech before the United Packinghouse Workers Union in 1962, King challenged innovators to find a moral, dignified alternative for American workers being displaced by technology:

As machines replace men, we must again question whether the depth of our social thinking matches the growth of technological creativity. We cannot create machines which revolutionize industry unless we simultaneously create ideas commensurate with social and economic reorganization which harness the power of such machine for the benefit of man. (King, Morehouse, 2.3.0.250_004)

King remained critical of innovators who displaced American workers but remained unwilling to employ their inventiveness to create alternative jobs or to use their wealth to bridge the gap between rich and poor. Today's kings of industry behave similarly, outsourcing American jobs with no concern for the effect on the American economy and the displaced workers.

KING AND HUMAN DIGNITY

For King, civil rights were human rights: "The struggle for civil rights is a fight for human dignity in its broadest dimensions," he said to the labor union in Chicago (Ibid., 2.3.0.250_005). Industry was relying more and more on technology and less and less on human labor. King knew that the dignity of those subsequently idled had to be preserved or many would wind up in jail or become addicted to drugs and alcohol:

The economists have prophesized of the tragic effects of automation and cybernation: educators warned of the lapses in our system of education, but no member or groups within the power centers of our society are prepared to face the drastic reforms which will be necessary to deal with these situations. (Ibid., 2)

King was prescient in identifying the social upheaval that would result from the loss of American manufacturing jobs, although he did not foresee how the growth of the service industry would offset that job loss somewhat.

The right to respect and human dignity – the enemies of segregation – was a core principle in King's beloved community. Absent it, he showed blacks and labor the power of economic withdrawal. And King differentiated between desegregation and integration. Desegregation was the removal of legal barriers to inclusion. Integration was based on agape love, enabling people of all races to work together, shop together, live together, and invest together because they see themselves as woven together in a single garment of mutuality.

In conclusion, King foresaw a need for a beloved economy to overcome the vast

shortcomings of income and wealth economy. He understood the need for every individual to be able to participate in the marketplace regardless of their race, religion, nationality or their social class membership. He embraced the poor, the rich, the black, the red, the white and the yellow people.

As Andrew Young has noted, King understood that having capitalism without access to capital for everyone was as meaningless as having a democracy without everyone having the right to vote (A. A. Young 2009). King did want a global economy and talked often of how interconnected each individual on the planet were. However, King was against the exploitation of one group of people for the benefit of a few people. The Poor's People March on Washington came after King realized the contribution of government policy toward displacing farmers and laborers in favor of paying people not farming at the behest of major agricultural companies (Ibid). King knew that government policy must be equally intentional in cultivating an economy to embrace all the people as it had been in sustaining inequality. King envisioned democracies around the globe possessing love, power and justice working together to correct economic injustices.

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Yo Protesto! Puerto Rican Anti-Vietnam War and Pro-Independence Protests

The American sphere of interest, per the Monroe Doctrine (1823), arguably inducted several Latin American countries into the United States' habit of interfering with other countries when U.S. interests were at stake. Paradoxically, as Historian Michael Parenti points out: "Not many Americans could put together two intelligent sentences about the histories of Mexico, Canada, Puerto Rico, or Cuba..." (qtd. Lockhard 269). This sobering and embarrassing admission concerning the United States' general lack of global intellect toward the cultures and histories of countries in which it invests millions of dollars or, at the very least, spend millions of dollars in humanitarian aid. A broad base of historians, such as William Applebaum Williams and his "revisionist" followers, contend that "empire is as American as apple pie"; America likes to spread its influence and democratic ideals to areas of the world where this influence is, frankly, often unwanted (Williams qtd. Lockhard 244). Walter Hixson's thesis in his controversial book *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* echoes this ethos, declaring:

[N]ational identity is both culturally constructed and hegemonic. Foreign policy flows from cultural hegemony affirming "America" as a manly, racially superior, and providentially destined "beacon of liberty," a country which possesses a special right to exert power in the world. Hegemonic national identity drives a continuous militant foreign policy, including the regular resort to war. (Hixson 1-2)

The average American does not actively pursue this hegemonic, aggressive point of view, but it is ingrained into American national identity. Average Americans want what is best

Erin R. McCoy is an assistant professor of English and liberal studies at the University of South Carolina Beaufort. Her research focuses on developing an comprehensive study of international cultural historiography during the Vietnam War era.

for the United States, a desire that often excludes, in some instances, considering the point of view of their opponents.

This national identity insists that political arguments regarding foreign policy decisions rarely result in solutions that negatively affect the United States' interests, which can be interpreted as a further extension of U.S. imperialism. The Vietnam War serves as one strong piece of evidence regarding Hixson's argument for the United States' cultural identity as an aggressive, "manly, racially superior" nation. The United States is often criticized for what appears to be an ignorant attitude toward the impact of its foreign policy, and the nation's behavior in Latin America remains key testimony in the argument that the supposed "beacon of liberty" acts imperialist – often. The United States' interventions in Latin America under the banner of anti-communism follow the same pattern of behavior Hixson discusses in *The Myth of American Diplomacy*. Just a forty-year slice of the country's history (1954 – 1990) reveals that the

list of Latin American governments, some of them democratic, that were actively destabilized, overthrown, or replaced directly or indirectly by the United States is long and sobering: Guatemala (1954), Brazil (1963), Dominican Republic (1965), Chile (1973), Jamaica (1980), Grenada (1983), Panama (1989), Nicaragua (1990). (Lockhard 252)

Following this "long and sobering" behavioral pattern, U.S. war efforts in Vietnam, political scientist Craig Lockhard argues, were "hardly unique" (252). What was unique about the Vietnam War, however, was the historically significant amount of Americans – over half the population – who opposed it (Carroll).

This article examines the unique role Latin Americans played in the movement against the United States involvement in the Vietnam War. I explore new scholarship and personal narratives, as well as the music and art of the era, to map the intersections between the civil rights movement, anti-war effort and Puerto Rican independence agenda on the mainland and in Puerto Rico.

LATIN AMERICAN MINORITIES & THE VIETNAM WAR

The larger reaches of the civil rights movement in American history remains largely glossed over in historical texts; the movement was far reaching, and included the resurgence of Native American cultural recognition, migrant politics of the Chicano movement, and the resurgence of nationalism among Americans of Puerto Rican descent. These aforementioned groups – who also contributed lives to the Vietnam War effort – became emboldened by the rhetoric of the various factions of the civil rights movement. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations responded by monitoring perceived "terrorist threats" from within these communities. Those who were targeted for surveillance included the Puerto Rican Young Lords, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the organizations

with which he had been affiliated, and the Black Panthers, to name a few.

Contemporary historians recognize that the chaotic Vietnam War era's story cannot be told without acknowledging the links between the anti-Vietnam War movement to the various factions of the civil rights movement. George Mariscal chronicles the Chicano-American experience of the Vietnam War in 1999's *Aztlán and Viet Nam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War*, interspersing literature from and about the war with historical and cultural accounts, such as veteran's war memories, of the many Mexican Americans who fought in the Vietnam War. He asserts that Latin Americans, despite their large contribution to many U.S. war efforts, are left out of the larger dialogue about the war:

Two of the surnames that appear most often on the wall of the Viet Nam [sic] Memorial in Washington D.C., are Johnson and Rodriguez. These two names tell us something about the composition of the U.S. military during the war, especially the combat units [...] histories of the war and cultural representations of the war have yet to hear the voice of "Rodriguez." (Mariscal 3)

The cultural history of the Vietnam War, through the voice of "Rodriguez," appears similar to that of some African-American accounts of their experience during the Vietnam War era. General feelings of "otherness" or "separateness" dominate journalist Wallace Terry's book *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*, a collection of war memories from African American Vietnam veterans; similar expressions of cultural distance are expressed in Puerto Rican veteran accounts. Chicano, Puerto Rican, African American, and Native American veteran remembrance of the Vietnam War all include testimonies of the conflicting feelings they had as soldiers; it was difficult to fight for the freedom of another country when one perceived one's own freedoms as citizens of the United States were compromised, suppressed, or non-existent.

While several Puerto Rican Vietnam War veterans have been awarded high honors in the U.S. Military, including the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross, and the Distinguished Service Cross, many veterans of Latin American descent remain passed over in favor of Caucasian soldiers. On February 21, 2014, President Barack Obama announced that he would award the Medal of Honor, retroactively, to nineteen "discrimination victims," seventeen of which are classified as "Hispanic" (Wilson). It is worth noting that, even in 2014, Jesse Erevia, the son of one Hispanic recipient, Santiago J. Erevia, remarked that his family "wondered why [Santiago] didn't receive [the award] the first time and thought it may have been because of his name" (Wilson). Tensions between the Latin American community and the United States government have unfortunately been a predictable object of consternation in U.S. history for the majority of the country's past and present.

Despite the racial strife that dominated the Vietnam War era in the United States, all "races" of the country appeared in the U.S. armed forces during the conflict, just as

they did in every previous conflict in the country's history. The hastily and purposefully timed 1917 Jones-Shafroth Act allowed the United States to draft Puerto Ricans into World War I, and Puerto Ricans have consistently served in every U.S. conflict and in its armed forces since the first world war. Like every other American "group," Puerto Rico made a large contribution to the Vietnam War. An estimated 48,000 Puerto Ricans served in the armed forces during the conflict, and hundreds of Puerto Ricans died in the Vietnam War, either killed in action or taken as prisoners of war (Avilés-Santiago, n.p.). Many Puerto Rican soldiers returned to the U.S. with anti-American sentiments and anger that would stoke the fires of Puerto Rican protests against the war in Vietnam and for independence of Puerto Rico.

ANGER AND ACTION

A wave of visible Puerto Rican pride emerged in part because of the televised marches and Sit-Ins of the civil rights movement. Echoing sentiments George Mariscal describes in *Aztlán and Viet Nam*, Yasmin Ramírez notes:

Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, as well as African Americans, joined forces to demand civil rights reforms throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The induction of thousands of young Chicanos and Puerto Ricans into the Vietnam War added Latino voices to antiwar protests. (Ramírez 10)

The Latino artists joining in anti-war protest voiced their feelings in many ways, including art, social work, and music. Ramírez's research of graphic art pieces made by Latin American artists during the Vietnam War era reveals several links connecting the Civil Rights Movement to anti-Vietnam War protests. One distinctive anti-war poster, designed by Cuban native Tony Evora, titled "Cero Plebiscito / No Vietnam" (Zero Plebiscite/No Vietnam, 1966), combines civil rights issues on the mainland and the island with a distinct anti-Vietnam War stance. The poster, according to Ramírez,

[r]elates to events in 1966, a year when the Puerto Rican government proposed holding a plebiscite to decide the island's political status. The U.S. Congress, however, advised the organizers that they would not recognize the plebiscite as legally binding. Consequently, the pro-independence supporters lobbied the public to boycott the process. An additional cause for alarm at that time was the fact that Puerto Ricans, [denied] voting rights in U.S. presidential elections, were being sent to Vietnam in droves. Evora's screaming figure conveys outrage at the injustice of men being enlisted in battles that they had not chosen. (Ramírez 11)

The basic right to vote – especially on a ballot that related to your home's political status – serves as only one example of the many social injustices faced by both island and main-

land Puerto Ricans. The “screaming [in outrage] figure” in Evora’s work remained silent in poster form, but his figurative voice found a literal mouthpiece in the Young Lords, a group that acted, loudly and purposefully to engaged Puerto Ricans on the mainland to demand social change.

In 1969, in a predominantly Puerto-Rican neighborhood in el barrio of East Harlem, New York City, a group of young Puerto Ricans “piled garbage on Third Avenue and set it ablaze” (Lee). This bonfire was arguable the first noticeable action of the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican revolutionary organization “of mostly Puerto Rican students from SUNY-Old Westbury, Queens College and Colombia University” (Lee). These revolutionaries living in many major U.S. cities were the children of Puerto Ricans who, en masse, migrated to the U.S. between 1948 and 1958, as U.S. citizens, “in search of stable jobs and decent housing” (Lee). These citizens did not receive the same treatment of their fellow citizens; racially marginalized, Puerto Rican immigrants “faced filthy and dangerous tenement housing and a school system that denigrated their language and culture and offered little opportunity for higher education” (Lee). Dissatisfied with their situation, young Puerto Ricans on both the island and mainland began to revolt during the Vietnam War era. Even though Puerto Ricans sent their children to fight the war in Vietnam, they continued to fight a war against inequality on their own streets.

Inspired by a group called the Young Lords in Chicago, Illinois, who “were a former street organization that gained national attention when they took over a local church in order to provide child care, a breakfast program, and other community-oriented programs,” Young Lords groups across the United States began to develop similar community-based projects (Lee). The Young Lords’ original ethos was a bit more militant and revolutionary, but eventually they channeled their “attention-grabbing strategies to draw attention to social inequality”; the groups took their cues to action from the communities they lived in, though a few members pursued an agenda concerned more with Puerto Rican Independence and cultivating Puerto Rican nationalism. One of the more aggressive advocates for Puerto Rican independence was Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN)¹, a separatist organization with roots in Puerto Rico. In the 1970s, FALN became known for guerrilla fighting tactics, such as bombing government areas and then publicly taking responsibility for them in order to bring awareness to the movement for Puerto Rican independence. Many FALN members were arrested in the early 1980s on charges of “seditious conspiracy” (Pérez). Protests against military action in Puerto Rico and the inequality of Puerto Ricans living on the “mainland” appear, in retrospect, extremely just causes, but the bombing of buildings makes the FALN’s actions appear far too militant and, frankly, scary, to promote real social change. The Young Lords’ communi-

1 Armed Forces of National Liberation

ty-based projects respected all citizens and strove to help people in need, but, in contrast, the FALN's projects were more incendiary, as they followed the Black Panthers' *modus operandi* as a blueprint for successful social protest. While dramatic and violent action inarguably drew attention to the Puerto Rican independence movement, the lines delineating a clear difference between a "terrorist" and a "nationalist" often became blurred.

Bernard Headley discusses the paradox of nationalist fervor and terrorist activity in his article "Who is the Terrorist? The Making of a Puerto Rican Freedom Fighter." Headley's brother, Oscar López-Rivera, was imprisoned in the United States in 1981 for "seditious conspiracy" (162). While he participated in Young Lords' activities, he never joined the group, preferring to cast a wide net of civic activism that included founding cultural centers and alternative, Puerto-Rican-centric schools in the United States (Bennett). López-Rivera was alleged to have been a FALN leader and faced "two counts of exporting arms and explosives in interstate commerce" (López-Rivera and Headley 162). Evidence from López-Rivera's trial revealed the "extended and sophisticated government activity [that attempted to connect] Puerto Rican prisoners of war and their outside supporters of criminal activity" (162). Furthermore, López-Rivera alleges that this U.S. government activity encourages the "arrest and subsequent incarceration" or "ordinary citizens [who support] Puerto Rican independence" (162-3). López-Rivera admits his links to FALN, but does not claim responsibility for any deaths associated with FALN actions.

López-Rivera argues an important and ignored position of U.S. history – the position of "a freedom fighter and a prisoner of war" who believes himself to be wrongly incarcerated as a "terrorist" (López-Rivera and Headley 163). Oscar López-Rivera maintains that he was "born a colonized subject" of the U.S. and that one of his duties, as a patriot, "is to fight, by any means necessary, for the liberation of Puerto Rico, so that, as a nation, [his] people can exercise their right to self-determination and national sovereignty" (163). Reflections of this attitude can be found in much of the FALN's rhetoric, but the Young Lords did not try to achieve Puerto Rican liberation from the U.S. or national sovereignty. Instead, the Young Lords focused on community projects, mostly in a non-violent, civic-minded way. López-Rivera personifies Tony Evora's screaming figure in Cero Plebiscito; his outrage over being unjustly enlisted in the Vietnam War reshaped itself into outrage over being unjustly enlisted in propagating an idea of America that he disagreed with, and his civil work supports his alternative idea of America – one that includes and celebrates Puerto Ricans as part of America's fabric. He is a patriot in that he has unfailingly fought for freedom, but specifically the freedom of Puerto Rico.

Arguing that "self determination, democratization, and military occupation are favorite topics of U.S. politicians and the news media," López-Rivera points out that discussions of these topics are limited to Europe and Asia and do not extend toward Puerto Rico. After condemning the U.S. for criminal colonization of Puerto Rico under the laws of the United Nations, he recounts Puerto Rico's tumultuous history with the U.S., begin-

ning with U.S. history indoctrination in Puerto Rican schools, and the “destruction” of Don Pedro Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party under the Roosevelt and Truman administrations (166). López-Rivera paints Puerto Rico as a police-occupied state under a campaign to “stigmatize and criminalize the entire patriotic movement”; 1950s Puerto Ricans were scared to wear the colors of the Nationalist Party or show outward support for the movement (167-8). López-Rivera’s first grade classroom became a forum for anti-patriotic propaganda,” where “leaders in the patriotic struggle were called bandits, terrorists, lunatics, and criminals” by their U.S. overlords (167). The “freedom fighter” recalls his family’s forced move to the U.S. from Puerto Rico, due to “Operation Bootstrap,” a U.S. initiative that urged “emigrants [to help] stabilize the economy by sending money they earned in the United States back to their families” (168). The “dehumanizing...degrading...and demeaning” police violence López-Rivera experienced in Chicago soured him to the U.S. Despite feeling as though he were a marginalized individual, López-Rivera decided to serve in the Vietnam War in 1965, believing “firmly that [he] was there to fight a communist invasion, and that [his] mission was to help the Vietnamese forces liberate their country” (171). The heightened anti-communist rhetoric could not be escaped in the United States, and López-Rivera’s sympathies were in line with the idea of a free Vietnam.

Unsurprisingly, López-Rivera found the Vietnam War a living comparison to the nationalist struggles of the Puerto Rican independence and patriotic movements. The Vietnam War was the first “televised” war, and thus protests against it – and civil rights demonstrations – were seen. One could find a compatriot in their living room, even if it was just a blurred televised image. Many Americans who did protest – for Civil Rights, the end to the Vietnam War, women’s rights, etc. – found solace in that their views were not only shared but also vocalized, televised, and part of a national cultural dialogue. The Vietnam War revealed the horrors of combat, often in color, on the evening news. Citizens of the United States were forced to reconcile their own views against the violence on screen. For those fighting in the war, especially soldiers of marginalized cultural backgrounds, the inequalities and injustices they may have passively noticed at home became magnified during the war, and, for many, more amplified upon their return from service. López-Rivera calls his time in Vietnam a “political baptism” where he learned the fundamentals of colonization by U.S. standards (Headley and López-Rivera 171):

[I now realized] what an earlier generation of Puerto Rican patriots meant when they said that we and our African American brethren were being used as cannon fodder in the white man’s wars [...] I was trained to be a terrorist; and my role in Vietnam was to bring terror and havoc to the Vietnamese. I was there shooting and trying to kill people who had not done anything to the Puerto Rican people [...] I was sent to Vietnam to do what good colonized people do: protect the

economic, military, and political interests of the colonizer. (López-Rivera and Headley 171-2)

Though awarded the bronze star for his service in Vietnam, López-Rivera returned to the U.S. in 1967 to devote himself to organizing activism and social protest in Chicago's Puerto Rican community. This new dedication to public service stemmed from López-Rivera's belief that the "real terrorists were the Chicago police who broke bones, cracked heads, and drove fear into the hearts of citizens" (173-4). However, this Vietnam veteran's actions eventually led him to be branded a "terrorist," a label that rankles López-Rivera and convinces him that he has been wrongly imprisoned; López-Rivera believes his incarceration – and many others' – results from his Puerto Rican nationalism (173-4). The "wrongful imprisonment" of Puerto Rican "nationalists" remains one of many matters spurring new activists for Puerto Rican independence, and recent films like Iris Morales' 1996 documentary of the Young Lords, *¡Palante Siempre Palante!*, highlights the U.S.'s rejection of Puerto Rican nationalism through the lens of 21st century colonialism.

López-Rivera finds comfort in the idea that, despite his incarceration, the decorated war veteran's "body can be imprisoned but [the American authorities] cannot imprison the spirit of Puerto Rican nationalism" (López-Rivera and Headley 174). He recalls a poem composed by Ho Chi Minh, who he identifies as a "revolutionary compatriot" (174). The poem centers on the idea of "sowing a peach seed and observing it grow into a fully developed tree," which López-Rivera sees as a metaphor for his vision of an independent Puerto Rico. He ends his treatise of nationalism with the musing "each generation of Puerto Rican patriots has sown a seed to keep our ideas and ideals alive" and that he "can only hope that the newer generation of Puerto Ricans will not fail to sow another seed for the generations yet to come" (174). The testimony of Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States as personified in Oscar López-Rivera, an imprisoned man, true, but also a community activist, an American citizen (or perhaps a "colonial subject"), and an American war veteran, serves as an extended metaphor of Puerto Rico as a suppressed entity. The insistence of Puerto Rican independence and assertion of its nationalism lives on in the stories and legacies of the Young Lords, a revolutionary group dedicated to helping ordinary, often marginalized people. The activities of Puerto Rican social activists like Oscar López-Rivera during the Vietnam War era are simultaneously courageous and conflicting. How is a Vietnam War veteran turned social activist now a jailed "terrorist?" When Puerto Ricans spoke out for their independence or their wish to have cleaner neighborhoods during the Vietnam War era, the U.S. government responded with FBI infiltration and police action. But the activist spirit endures, though much of that activism manifests itself within the mainstream; many former Young Lords now hold positions in government and media (Lee).

While Oscar López-Rivera fought for Puerto Rican rights in Vietnam and in the United States, the young singer/songwriter Roy Brown Ramírez used his music to fight for social justice and an independent Puerto Rico.

ROY BROWN'S YO PROTESTO!

Puerto Rican songwriter and political activist Brown was writing material for his album *Yo Protesto!* during the tumultuous Vietnam War era. Brown, whose mother was a native of Poncé and whose father was an American naval officer, grew up in Florida. His early memories reflect on an acute awareness of American racial inequality. He remembers wondering “why blacks had to go to the back of the bus” while he lived in Florida (“Estas brasas de aquellos fuegos”). While studying at the University of Puerto Rico in the late 60s and early 70s, the inequalities and social injustices he saw and his passion for music pushed him to explore a whirlwind of social and political struggles of the 70s (“Estas brasas de aquellos fuegos”). Brown was not a member of the Young Lords on the mainland, though he has played at least twice (‘66, ‘88) for Chicago’s Fiesta Boricua, a long-standing Puerto-Rican festival rooted in civic activism popular with López-Rivera’s early work and efforts of the Young Lords (Flores-Gonzalez 19). Brown was more closely aligned with an “evolution of protest music” named *nueva canción*, which

utilized popular rhythms and modern instruments (electric guitar, drums, percussion, etc.) together with traditional instruments (cuatro, Spanish guitar, güiro, tiple, etc.) to create a musical genre based on both modern and folk music that would reach homes through the radio and television and their social message of reform is heard by a majority of the public. (Vázquez)

Nueva canción songs, unlike much of American anti-Vietnam War music, are not loud or brash. Melodic and boasting heavy Catalan guitar influence, *nueva canción* songs reflect a conglomeration of European and Caribbean sounds. *Yo Protesto!* features melodic Spanish guitar playing instead of the folksy harmonies (CSNY, the Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, etc.) or amped rock (Country Joe and the Fish, The Animals, The Rolling Stones, Jefferson Airplane, etc.) that most anti-Vietnam War American musicians performed during the era. Brown’s songs from 1969’s *Yo Protesto!* “stoked the fire that burned rebellious picket lines and student demonstrations of the time” (“Estas brasas de aquellos fuegos”). The refrain of “Monón” – “Fire, fire, fire/ the world is on fire!/ Fire, fire/ Yankees want fire!” – became the adopted battle cry of Puerto Rico university protesters in the 1970s, and *Yo Protesto!* appropriately sought distribution with the Puerto Rican Socialist Party’s record label, Disco Libre. The era was hard on Brown but also inspirational. In a 2006 interview, Brown said of the *Yo Protesto!* era:

The hippies, the Vietnam War, [I was] a twenty-year-old who didn’t know who he was [...] The police followed and pursued me. They said that I was a terrorist

and wanted to fight the governor. My friend was in jail because he didn't want to fight Asians... My life was such a disaster and the context for songs like... "Monón," "Con Macana," "Hablando," y "Dime Niña" (Frese)

The songs on *Yo Protesto!* carry a strong theme of resistance against a complex imperial power. Brown's lyrics suggest this enemy is as destructive in Puerto Rico as it is in Vietnam. Exploring his songs' lyrics reveals a new perspective on the United States during the Vietnam War era.

The popular song "Monón" also admonishes a metaphorical United States as "a man without equal/you are a man of God/fruit of evil/[you] walk dropping bombs/ [you go] digging graves/ [your] mind is nuclear/ release bombs in Vietnam" (Brown). Much like the shadowy figures in Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" (1963), "Monón" is careless and heartless regarding the havoc he wrecks around the world. In the song, "No Me Sulfuro Mas" the narrator recalls, "back in Santo Domingo/Haiti and Vietnam/there are thousands of others [who] also suffer... [but] we who know who to stop" (Brown). The U.S. is the enemy of not only Puerto Rico, but all those who suffer under its oppressive actions. And, far from the hippie messages of peace and love, Brown's lyrics for the song "Páco Marquez" seethe with violent intention: "With a revolver in hand/the friend of my brother/ is finished... Men of an ideal/ fighters against an evil/ that has a people chained" (Brown). The overt imagery of slavery, paired with the image of a semi-concealed "revolver," implies the encouragement of Puerto Rico against its captor, the United States.

Yo Protesto!, for all its protesting, is still very much an album of 1969. Although the album has two different covers (one for the Vanguardia label's release and another, the first, for its release on the label Disco Libre), both show protest occurring. The Disco Libre cover includes slap-dash, graffiti-style lettering over a scene of protesters marching in a line next to gun-toting guards, echoing many of the evocative images of social protest seen in the media during the Vietnam War era. The second cover for Vanguardia shows a seated Brown holding a protest sign (depicting himself, playing the guitar) with the same lettering style of the first cover. Both images reference protest, befitting the title, but the second cover, featuring Brown, utilizes the guitar – music – as the primary mode of protest. This cover is more indicative of the gentler tone of social reform not only taken by *nueva canción* songs on the island, but also from the Young Lords on the mainland. Roy Brown's protest music, even while often boasting stirring and provocative lyrics, approached protest with a more peaceful stance than that of the FALN, and thus is more indicative of most common protest demonstrations (but not necessarily all) occurring in Puerto Rico during the Vietnam War era.

Roy Brown found political inspiration from celebrating nature (also a trait of nationalist songs). In several of his songs, he intertwines compliments to the "beautiful island" with social commentary. The U.S. military's use of the "little sister" island of Vi-

equates for bombing and artillery testing has long rankled the Puerto Rican public, and the ravaging of Puerto Rico's islands for commercial use is a recurring theme in several of the songs on *Yo Protesto!* The charming floating ballad "Dime Niña" is a love song to the people of Puerto Rico. "Tell me, friend, if you seek the gloom, loneliness," he sings. "And tell me brother, why not fight for your love, your dignity? [Why not] tell people, of the glory...father of freedom." Brown renders Puerto Rico as a homeland even for those who never called it home – that is, "home" for Puerto Ricans living in America and who are unable to reconcile their perceived dual nationalities. The lyrics of "Mr. Con Macana" lament that a fallen comrade will "die without knowing why/ and you will be nothing/ without knowing the Borinquen/ the bright jungle" (Brown). The "bright jungle" gives a Puerto Rican "something" to live for, a "why" that demands to be answered.

The Young Lords brought the issues of el barrios to the news outlets, and the FALN made sure that everyone was aware that some Puerto Ricans preferred independence from U.S. oppression. These cornerstones to Puerto Rican anti-war and social protest present a historical reality long overlooked and underrepresented in the telling of the historiography of the United States and the Vietnam War. Roy Brown's *Yo Protesto!* protests that Puerto Rico's side of the Vietnam War era story may be a small piece of a larger narrative of American history. Roy Brown continues to compose and perform his music of protest and pro-Puerto Rico, partly abiding by the work of the FALN, the Young Lords, and Oscar López-Rivera, but also enduring as his own voice, carrying his own protest signal – his guitar. Brown remains an approachable and beloved figure in Puerto Rico – many people I spoke to in San Juan were delighted to talk about him and many suggested that I call him or drop by his house. Like his pro-Puerto Rican Independence compatriots, Roy Brown remains one of the many voices of "Rodriguez," and he, like many others, has made a life-long commitment that his voice, and his protests, continues to be heard.

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Conquest Narratives and Social Activism in Latin America

Modern scholars find ample opportunities to critique the work of their predecessors, and in many ways this reflects the mission of the academy: to build upon current knowledge by not only seeking voids but also by designing methods to fill them. At times, in the pursuit for truth it is easy to forget that contemporary social scientists also view subjects through a specific set of lenses. The modern paradigm by its nature sets present-day scholarship in opposition to that which preceded it. A more balanced empirical approach would not seek deconstruction for the sake of deconstruction, but rather to learn from mistakes of the past in order to move forward constructively. It argues in favor of an alternative narrative of the conquest, one that reduces the focus on friars as conquerors and oppressors, and redirects attention to their possible role as activists and social advocates. In the process of exploring this alternative perspective, another pertinent question emerges: Are modern day anthropologists and other social scientists engaged in social advocacy and activism doing the same thing that the friars of the conquest period were doing, in intention at least? If so, have modern scholars studied the mistakes of the past and integrated alternative models into their methods of action?

It seems a researcher's foremost responsibility is to protect the interests of his subjects; however, what that means exactly is not clear. Those who promote activism assume several things: that today's scholars know what is best and previous scholars – either the early anthropologists with whom contemporary ones try to disassociate or the Catholic friars, priests, and nuns who preceded them, with the intellectual paradigm no longer recognized as scholarship – were not also seeking what they saw to be best for indig-

Raffaele Florio is an associate professor of history and the director of graduate studies in the History, World Languages & Cultural Heritage Department at Regis College. Florio founded and is the director of the Public Heritage Institute in Weston, MA. He has a PhD in culture, language and memory from Salve Regina University, an M.A. in cultural anthropology from Brandeis, an MA in medieval and Renaissance history from Providence College and a BA in social science from Rhode Island College.

enous populations. This essay seeks to address these issues with emphasis on the latter assumption. It is my belief that both are intricately woven into the temporal fabric of the academy and society at large. The paradigm, reflecting a particular *zeitgeist*, often makes little sense outside of its own context. It is the responsibility of the scholar to evaluate each movement on its own terms, which is not to suspend judgment but rather engage in a more critical analysis.

I discuss this in three parts. Do social science scholars know what is best and furthermore what responsibilities are associated with that knowledge? Secondly, I attempt to unravel some criticisms waged against previous scholars, i.e. Spanish Catholic friars who have come to be regarded as colonizing forces. Included in this will be a general discussion of paradigms. Lastly, I use the Virgin of Guadalupe as an example of mediation between two colliding cultures.

THE CRYSTAL BALL

Matthew Restall begins with an intriguing question: “Were the Mayas of colonial Yucatan actually Mayas?” (“Maya Ethnogenesis” 64). Grant D. Jones, who ironically dedicates his work “to the memory of the Maya whose lives were transformed or cut short,” believes from a linguistic perspective there exist “deep historical affiliations” within the Yucatan, but admits that the early history is “too poorly understood” (3). This raises the question of indigeneity and how the term is applied and used. Over time ethnic identifications fluctuate, and further obfuscation results from political conflicts rallying around these terms. Today’s scholar, considering humanitarian responsibilities toward cultures studied, must face Restall’s own answer to his question: “In terms of both the identities they claimed and those assigned to them, they were not [Mayas]” (64). He says the evidence confirms his idea that the group of people currently identified by scholars as Mayan “did not consistently call themselves that or any other name that indicated they saw themselves as members of a common ethnic group” (Ibid.).

This raises several flags and forces one to question whether scholars, as suggested by Restall, have not invented these categories. What would that mean for today’s scholar? Victor D. Montejo, focusing on self-identification, provides a reply by appealing to public heritage – a collective sense of self, based on perceived connections with a common ancestral set and viewed as a valuable identifying factor to be preserved for future generations. A self-labeled “Mayan anthropologist and writer,” Montejo wants to help advise researchers in “dismantling the stereotypes and images created by early anthropologists” (123-4). Claiming his people must reassert its “Mayanness,” he hopes to “dispel the political amnesia of the majority of Maya” (125); the goal “is to ignite a stronger desire to empower ourselves and promote our identities for the future” (Ibid.). Inevitably the cultural memory critique emerges, complicating the discussion: When memory is counterbalanced by social amnesia does it hold any value at all or is it a socially-constructed stuffed shirt?

Montejo's preemptive strike against critics of collective memory is well-intended but is not without weaknesses. He addresses Fischer and Griffin's idea that the Mayan-ness movement seeks to revive "ancient patterns of Mayan culture as essential relics to be worshipped" (Montejo 128) and fields Hobsbawm's criticism that such revivalist movements use ancient material to invent tradition and consequently cultural significance. He admits the Maya are continually "creating and recreating their Mayan culture and redefining themselves" (129), but denies he is creating a "romantic past." He says the Maya are not inventing themselves "to the same degree as Western cultures" and that "for us, the Maya, cultural heritage is clearly visible, and its roots are still strong and firmly embedded in Mayan soil" (Ibid.). Here the argument loses steam, gets sidetracked, and the conclusions suffer. His concluding remarks hinge on the idea that Mayans are the true Mayans. They should be recognized as such "because there are elements that strongly link them to the millennial history and tradition of their Mayan ancestors" (144). The argument is questionable.

The idea of heritage, however, makes the case credible and compatible with Edward Fischer's model. In a cultural memory study, Larry Griffin and Peggy Hargis offer an opening line which rivals Restall's in wit: "This much we know; the past is not really, can never be, past at all" (42). History in this sense becomes organic and is compatible with the argument for authentic indigeneity. Adopting this model eliminates the need for empirical data definitively mapping a direct lineage from today's Maya to those of the ancient world. This historical approach, the study of memory, Griffin and Hargis say, "is not exactly the academic study of history" (43); however, they admit "the exploration on collective and social memory, has proffered new questions about the interpretations of how collectivities and individuals are both constituted by the past and mobilize it for present-day projects" (Ibid.). The past is an efficient way to deal with the present, reinforcing Montejo's point about self-identification, which is what may be referred to as heritage. Truth aside, one's story about oneself becomes true on its own terms; the representation provides a true account of how a person or a people view themselves in a wider context. In the case of Montejo, one is sure that he sees himself as Mayan but may wonder if Mayans (the wider group) accept Montejo as one among equals. Would his indigeneity be questioned because of his decision to enter what another "Mayan" might consider as colonial?

Scientifically proven links with a past is near-impossible in terms of heritage and memory is not to adopt a radically relativistic approach. Viewing history organically requires a shift in paradigm. It is not a denial of a true past but the acceptance of a historical present. We are forced to see through packaged periodization and evaluate knowledge of the past as knowledge from the past forming an individual or collective consciousness of the present. In addition to thinking critically about the methods and actions of scholars who have come before, today's researchers have a greater responsibility. Each generation

has one generation's worth of successes and failures more than the previous of which to be critical. Additionally, this generation of scholars has learned to be critical of its own practices.

The basic responsibility of social researchers is to the people and cultures they study, which includes working with the person or group's best interest in mind, avoiding situations which might cause them harm. The American Anthropological Association notes that researchers must consider the potential social and political repercussions resulting from their findings before disseminating that information. On these terms, recording, documenting, interpreting, and ultimately preserving cultural and material artifacts to the best of one's ability are ethical duties. These fulfill the scholar's obligations to hosts, informants, interviewees, performers, etc. by helping to save the stories, emotions, pains, and fortunes, which are perceived to be integral to a group's heritage – for present and future generations.

Must every social researcher be an activist? This hinges on another question: Is the scholar committed to truth and confident that he or she possesses it? Many have come bearing truths before and countless classroom hours are dedicated to their deconstruction. Has the researcher thought critically about past truths, learned from them, and made adjustments? Has he or she considered what future critical analysis may reveal about his or her activism? One cannot predict the future, or be sure of universal truths; however, one can hope to get close. Activism requires due diligence. Advocating aggressive activism is risky business, but turning a blind eye to human injustices is inexcusable and is outside the boundaries of moral relativism. According to the American Anthropological Association, advocacy on the part of the researcher is “an individual decision, but not an ethical responsibility.” Here too, in terms of ethical certainty, an empirical decision is difficult; Bentham's “utilitarian calculus” cannot provide a reliable answer.

THE OPPRESSIVE FORCES OF A WESTERN GOD

As Montejo has argued, a Mayan identity is like a Western one in terms of social construction. Each is constructed in relation to the other. Otherness is inherent in any self-identification; without it, there is no need for identity. The unity of opposites is as old as philosophical inquiry itself, yet it is often forgotten. Before the West's current aegis and the nationalist (imperialist resulting) period preceding it, homogenization was religious in nature.¹ Rather than rallying under a flag, the West, prior to the end of the eighteenth century rallied under a different religious symbol – the cross.² Regardless of the symbol it is imperative to focus on the struggle to learn from the past.

1 By common definition of course. I do not intend to insinuate that the other two are not “religious.”

2 First a crucifix, and then a cross and crucifix in competition with one another.

Citing Hegel and Foucault, Matthew Liebmann concludes: “Power and domination are not one-way streets. The very concept of power asserts the mutuality of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated” (2008, 142). This dynamic relationship is reiterated in Julianna Barr’s *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman* (2007), where it is claimed that Spanish images of the Virgin helped mediate relationships between the natives and conquistadors. She says in their gendered hierarchy, the image represented a peaceful embodiment and the Spaniard had the option of resisting their interpretation or making accommodations. Neither party, however, is a stranger to cultural accommodation. On both sides of the Atlantic, icons and rituals, myths and images, pantheons and chapels were bought, sold, and traded. New Spain was no exception.

Restall says “the Franciscans were the driving force behind efforts to convert native peoples and building a colonial church” (2003, 9). He provides several stories attesting to the effectiveness of the friars. On the Incan siege on Cuzco in 1537, he claims “accounts...by both Spaniard and Andeans...credit the intervention of Santiago and the Virgin as important explanatory factors, if not the deciding factor” (133). He claims further that Franciscans and Dominicans promoted the idea of divine providence as the reason behind God’s interference in the Conquest (133). Victories, especially among recent converts and groups allied with the conquistadors, were interpreted as miracles. Evidence seemed to indicate that the Spaniards were destined to dominate the native populations, and although the ideological religious victories reverted to hands of secular domination, those friars – the original ethnographers (15) – saw themselves as the first activists among the indigenous population, building missions, chapels, hospitals, and schools.

Anthony Grafton says friars believed the natives might become better Christians than the Europeans and further: “Friars were trained...to observe and investigate. The tools of the Inquisition... provided them with a set of questions to ask about beliefs and rituals in the Americas” (Grafton 1992, 93).³ Seventeenth century Jesuit, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, wrote about professed women in the Conceptionist convent of Jesus Maria, in Mexico City, regarding them as “efficacious venues of divine favor,” and claiming that “God’s distribution of His bounty had been made among all people regardless of gender and race” (Lavrin 1999, 233-4). A half century later, in a letter to Phillip IV, Juan de Palafox, bishop of Puebla, recognized spirituality as a natural Indian trait, praising “their great piety, devotion, innocence, humility, and other exemplary qualities” (Ibid., 237).

The natives may have sensed a positive change in the new regime, and a scholar today may interpret this as building a false consciousness on the part of the friars, but

3 Grafton, Anthony. *New Worlds, Ancient Texts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992. p. 93.

it is difficult for researchers to ascertain motives on either side. The friars were fulfilling their vows by converting the world, and may have intended to usher in the second coming of Christ; the native allies of the Spanish saw an aggressive overlord overthrown and perhaps anticipated a new era of peace. Most post-colonial researchers, especially those who advocate activism in Latin America, would shudder at the idea that Spanish friars were engaged in the same work, and that they too shared the vision of a better life for oppressed masses. William Taylor calls this period “the ‘spiritual conquest’ ... not so much the conversion of native people to Christianity as the place of religion in the formation and maintenance of colonial rule” (1996, 10). The idea of a “spiritual conquest” is itself zeitgeist-dependent terminology, grounded in the post-enlightenment thinking which convinced Daniel Boorstin in *The Discoverers* (1983) to claim the Christians “conquered” the Roman Empire. The water is muddied further in the present case. In a post-enlightenment/post-colonial/post-modern world, which is worse, ending imperialism or using religion to do it? Perhaps definitions of “better life” and our socio-political paradigms have shifted in tandem. Modern thinkers may feel that humanity is better prepared this time to handle the disentanglement of world powers, that we might avoid descending into another “dark age” (another paradigmatic term). This is not to suggest that we model ourselves on the work of the friars but rather learn from their successes and mistakes, in addition to those of secular authorities, early social scientists, and governments and their armies. Cultural collisions have happened since time immemorial and Latin American history can provide today’s student of cultural history with some valuable insight; it provides clues about the context of cultural change in the unrecorded annals of western history and ideas about the our present conditions and the future of our society.

Lavrin’s “Indian Brides of Christ” provides historical and ethnographic insight on the role of the friars during Taylor’s “spiritual conquest.” Lavrin asks: “Could an Indian woman become a nun?” and wonders why it took it took two centuries and “a passionate exchange of contradictory opinions” to accomplish this feat (225). She argues, “during the first years of evangelization, friars tinkered with the idea of conventual life for indigenous women, but they soon abandoned it in favor of religious indoctrination and education for life” (225). For her this is an exhibition of the society’s “biases regarding race, gender, and class,” noting that “male Indian nobles began to receive indoctrination and education to facilitate a rapid religious and cultural adjustment” (226). The first convent, Nuestra Sra. de la Concepcion (1550), was built for women of Spanish descent. Lavrin points out that included were “two mestiza daughters of Isabel de Moctezuma” (229). Around then Franciscans backed off convent building. The First Mexican Council in 1555 and the Third Provincial Council 1585 rejected Indian ordination (230); however, Lavrin makes it clear that the “Vatican toned down its language to a statement that such ordination would demand great caution” (Ibid.).

This case may be interpreted in several ways. It is feasible to suggest that the Church

epitomized racism, seeking to reproduce the hierarchical society which served as the foundation for its wealth and power in Europe, or that it had a sexist agenda designed to perpetuate the Old World's rigid patriarchy. It is equally plausible to suggest that the Vatican, having well-over a millennium's worth of experience in the religious conversion business was skeptical about pre-Columbian religious practices – in some ways like those which it had experienced in rural European communities, but in other ways unlike anything they had seen before. The question was left to the discretion of the local bishops.⁴ It may be suggested that the hospitals, churches, and schools aimed at “education for life,” although seen today as tools of colonization, were not viewed that way in the sixteenth century, and furthermore that these friars were engaged in many of the same kinds of activism which is promoted today. In terms of sexism and racism, one must wonder how much power the friars had regarding the dynamics of the socio-political structure of New Spain.⁵ More importantly, who should be considered the “Church” there: the friars, the politically entrenched secular bishops, or the noblemen bearing the symbol of the crucifix?

CULTURAL RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Contemplating the cultural diversity – language, ritual, ethnicity, etc. -- among the native population and the clash of civilizations upon Spanish arrival, one is struck by the possibilities in a romantic sense, and the seemingly insurmountable difficulties in a materialist sense. Lavrin notes: “Race and spirituality made a strange and potent mixture in the New World. European Christianity confronted a tough situation when the issue of admitting a new race to the elected body of the brides of Christ was posed in the sixteenth century” (1999, 255). The “tough situation” was more than simply a gender issue; it involved a “shift from hesitation and doubt to an approval that, while not shared or felt by all, was at least a sincere acknowledgement of the natives’ capability for living the faith as fully as any true “old Christian” (Ibid.). Matthew Liebmann has effectively argued that both individual and group identities are “recursive, constantly shifting, negotiated strategies of alliance building...they constantly shape and are shaped by perceived similarities and differences” (133). The examination of identity involves the analysis of “ethnicity, gender, class, faction, race, etc.” which adds to the difficulty because it makes identity a “malleable concept” (Ibid.).

Malleable identities and cultural reciprocity is exciting for the curious and scary for

4 In fact, when the convent for Indian women was finally constructed during the 1720s, Pope Benedict XIII issued a letter, in opposition to some of the local bishops, in favor of ousting four Spanish professors at the all-Indian convent, Corpus Christi.

5 It would be interesting to weigh the educational opportunities and literacy rates in New Spain against Spain's Indigenous populations in Iberia, Sicily, and Southern Italy.

the entrenched. It is seldom a quick process and it is never finished. It is reasonable to that political structures on all sides would be suspicious of contending ambitions. It is also clear why some natives would readily accept the new powers and their religion while others would dig in their heels against the perceived enemy. Lastly, it seems clear why the friars would be willing to embrace the diversity in their pursuit as “fishers of men” and equally evident why the Vatican would issue a word of caution on the ordination of natives.

Liebmann adds weight to this interpretation. After the Pueblo rebellion in 1680, natives adopted a return-to-tradition strategy in order to eradicate the Spanish influence upon their tribes. Archaeology and ethnohistory collected data to support the theory that during the decolonization years (1680-92), the Pueblo continued to use “Christian imagery and material culture” (132). While some see this as evidence the natives refused to disengage from the Catholic faith, remaining subordinate to Spanish domination, Liebmann takes a different approach. He says this interpretation “denies agency to Pueblo peoples” and makes the assumption that “Christian symbols meant the same thing to all people at all times” (133). In this sense, the objects and images reflect the agency of those who embrace them. For Liebmann, they were used in ways the Pueblos understood as not contradictory with their own traditional beliefs, such as the use of halos and concentric circles in artistic representations. He also implies intentional manipulation of objects which speak out in opposition to Spanish Catholicism; he notes the use of Christian imagery on traditional katsina figures which missionaries believed to be “devils” (138).

Two ideas emerge from Liebmann’s discussion. Cultural conversion is ongoing, and the use of Catholic imagery as either a component of traditional, pre-colonial ritual, or as an antagonistic tool adds to the richness of reciprocity. Intentional or not, adoption of the imagery became part of Pueblo vernacular. Despite any resistance to the perceived inappropriate use of these objects on the part of the missionaries, they too became ever more aware of the progressively blurring lines between their cultures.

An accord was struck and it is aptly captured in the title of Julianna Barr’s work: *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman*. In the first book published (1648) on the Virgin of Guadalupe, *Imagen de la Virgen María*, Miguel Sánchez writes: “Guadalupe bestowed many favors on the native peoples of Mesoamerica...in order to ‘inspire, teach, and attract them to the Catholic faith’” (Matovina 2009, 61). Sanchez drew comparisons between the image of the Virgin and the woman described in Revelations 12:1-2: 1: “Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.” This birth was the new Christian world and Matovina suggests that Jesuits began to “postulate in Neoplatonic terms that her image authentically depicted the divine concept of Mary” and that:

Mary was sacramentally present in the perpetual miracle of the Guadalupe image.... Christ evangelized the Old World through the apostles' preaching of the word, while Mary of Guadalupe effected the evangelization of the New World through her miraculous image, a visual means of communication highly suited to the indigenous psyche. (72)

According to Matovina, Sanchez "professed Guadalupe as 'a native of this land and its first "Creole woman" Benedict XIV assigned as the epigraph for the office of her feast day: 'God has not done thus for any other nation'" (73).

Scholars have not universally accepted this interpretation. Jeannette Peterson (1992) said by the time of the First Mexican Council in 1555 the Church hierarchy was forced to accept its "failure to eradicate paganism" and acknowledge "Indian resistance to domination" (40). She then indicates that friars began to incorporate native beliefs by substituting "Christian saints for old gods," and concludes "the Virgin of Guadalupe was one such fusion of a European mother of God with native mother goddesses" (ibid.). She cites a complaint by the Franciscan Sahagun in 1576 that "pilgrimages to Tepeyac were only a continuation of pre-Hispanic practices and that natives consistently referred to Guadalupe as Tonantzin" (Ibid.). Her allusion to the friar's complaint actually bolsters the case of those with whom she takes issue. It stands as evidence of the cultural give-and-take, exposing the resilience and power of cultural continuity. Her discussion of "fusion" adds nothing to the conversation. The method she highlights is well-known throughout western history. In Acts 17:23, Paul tells the Athenians that their altar to "the unknown god" is intended for the Judeo-Christian god which encompasses all the rest. While this allusion may seem tenuous and perhaps specious, one can find specific, documented use of Christian/Pagan reciprocity in the sixth century "Apostle of England," Augustine of Canterbury who overtly encouraged it and was renowned for his success. These methods were no secret. The Jesuit, Juan Uvaldo de Anguita, established a mission in the early eighteenth century explicitly for this purpose. According to Lavrin:

[Uvaldo de Anguita] established the first link between the new and the old world and the new and the old Christians. East and West had met He juxtaposed the symbols of the old deities and the Christian ones to prove to his audience that it was possible to build Christian life on the foundations of pagan gods and festivities. (258)

In short, finding commonalities and negotiating differences between colliding cultures is the ongoing story of civilization. Hugo Nutini has argued that after Catholicism became the dominant religious system in Mexico it was aggressively challenged by the eloquent preaching of Protestant missionaries. He notes that in the last fifty years both of these formidable organizations face the rising challenge of what he calls "Native Evangelism" (2000, 51).

Peterson continues: with her “humble attitude and pious gesture, the Virgin of Guadalupe conveniently reflected the colonial church’s image of the native population that it sought to bring under its control” (40), adding that it was “a lucrative source of income for the church...[and] was still paternalistic and exclusionary” (45). Bias aside, Peterson brings some helpful information to light. She claims that the Virgin’s apparitions happened several times over the centuries and points out the association between the Virgin and pulque, the ritual drink of pre-colonial priests made from the maguey plant dating back at least two millennia. She notes that the Virgin is still called “the Mother of Maguey” in parts of Mexico (Peterson 1992, 45 and Taylor 1987, 19). Astutely, Peterson points out an ambivalence about the Virgin using various examples of material culture concluding that “the Virgin is still seen as both a symbol heralding freedom and a signifier of submission” (47). William Taylor supports this: “The idea that one symbol [Guadalupe] can stand both for submission to authority and liberation will not surprise most students of the history of religions” (1996, 161).

Matovina says most scholarship has “examined the Guadalupe image, apparition accounts, and its historical context as a means to explore the collision of civilizations between the Old and New Worlds and the ongoing implications of this clash for Christianity in the Americas and beyond” (62). He also agrees “her relation to the historical process of *mestizaje* (racial mixing) and nation building” (65) adds to her complexity, as she has become associated with both the struggle to overcome the negative effects of the conquest of the Americas and the hope for a new future of greater justice [...] (66). This interpretation is not as clear cut as it seems. Hidalgo’s use of the image on the path toward Mexican independence, and the increase in such use in later years helped create a blurred line between religion and politics. This effected self-identification and lent itself to the paradox described by Peterson.

The feminist critique goes a step further, claiming the image was a tool not only for conquering a race, but subjugating women in the process. Althaus-Reid argues that a “Marian false consciousness” stretches back to the conquistadors:

Mary is a concept which comes to the continent at the same time as the concept of Indios. The presence of the icon and its nativisation produces a sense of continuity which is false, unmasking the oppressive role of the foreign religion of Christianity in the continent and keeps endorsing women with boundaries, aspirations and ideals which are imperialist in nature and ideological in method...[it is an illusion] under the heavy weight of a metaphysical and logical conquest. It is an ethical victory for the colonisers, under the banner of Mary, the icon which shows women why they are not real women. (Althaus-Reid 2000, 49)

She says artistic representations of the Virgin introduced to the native populations were de-sexualizing Mary, and asks: “What does the Guadalupeana have under her skirts?” She

argues while Mary's "womb" is constantly discussed, it is never depicted: "Unfortunately, the Virgin seldom shows her vulva in her numerous apparitions... the womb is the area of words, of seminal speeches while the vulva is that shocking pink swollenness which speaks by its mere presence" (63).

Her ideas of "logical conquest" and "ethical victory" are interesting because they indicate ideological, intellectual, and psychological warfare. The goals of this sort of battle are political, economic, and spiritual. Matovina says the Virgin "provides hope and inspiration for Mexican Americans ... called to embrace their identity as mixed-race mestizos, synthesize the richness from their parent cultures, and lead the way in constructing a society in which the barriers between peoples are broken (81). This conflicts with Althaus-Reed's critique; however, it need not be considered an opposition to feminist theory. "For the Chicana feminist theorists," argues Pineda-Madrid, "a liberative interpretation of Guadalupe needs to create space and support for Chicanas as speaking subjects, needs to heal and transform Chicanas so as to deepen their self-esteem, and needs to enable Chicanas (and others) to know even more deeply the inter-connectedness of all humankind and of all creation" (2005, 3).

Activists are not new to ideological warfare. When cultures come together, each is subject to change. Whether we are engaged in nationalizing, capitalizing, socializing, democratizing, secularizing, de-marginalizing, or idealizing indigenous identities, we are involved in political, economic, and spiritual battles aimed at a "logical conquest" and an "ethical victory."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Roberta Rice, in a review essay of several books on the indigenous rights movements in Latin America (2007), says that the "flurry" of organized political movements has been the impetus for "a veritable explosion of scholarship" in those regions (210). She concludes that indigenous groups are not only "questioning the legitimacy of the nation-state," but are also "contesting the very terms of democratic citizenship" (214). Two key questions emerge from her essay: "What are the implications of the legal and institutional gains of indigenous movements for the pressing development demands of the region's indigenous peoples?" Secondly, "would indigenous movements be more effective in advancing their agendas without participating in formal political processes?" (214).

These questions penetrate the heart of the discussion. As scholarship seeks to identify and eliminate the problems causing untold atrocities against humanity, it must also realize the implications of its activism. One chooses a side in a wager with high stakes and little certainty. History has shown that earlier forms of advocacy have gone wrong and are met with severe criticism and even animosity. The intentions of the friars in Mesoamerica may not be determined but their actions are debated. While some see them as spiritual conquistadors working to subjugate natives, others observe that by promoting

the adoption of Christianity and mediating between Catholic and pagan ritual – Guadalupe for example – the preachers did not “justify or abet the Spanish conquest but broke the cycle of indigenous victimization and subjugation.... [It] not only converted the indigenous peoples from practices like human sacrifice but also demanded that Spanish Catholics repent of their ethnocentrism and violence” (Matovina 2009, 90). Some have argued that veneration of the Virgin reinforced a European social structure (Althaus-Reed and Peterson), while others saw it as “a critique of the existing social order, a rejection of Spanish values and a guide to action... the opposite of structure and of everything hierarchical, paternalistic, and Hispanic” (Taylor 1987, 20).

In the wake of post-modernism, anthropologists have responded in a couple of ways. According to Shannon Speed they have either resorted to “retrenchment in the realm of the theoretical and the textual” or have engaged in “activist approaches” (Speed 2008, 66). Latin America has become a hotbed for such activism through both grass roots campaigns and NGOs. Susanne Jonas highlights a “National Dialog” which was initiated by the Catholic Church in 1989 to bring influential members of all groups in Guatemala. While those in control – the government, military, and business leaders – boycotted the discussion, “[it] expressed a clear consensus by the other sectors of society in favor of a substantive political settlement” (Jonas 1996, 150). These kinds of strategies appear to be examples of best practice in humanitarian activism. Civil disobedience only becomes a moral mandate when legal and legitimate options for resistance are exhausted. The National Dialog and the idea that religious mediation may help in the fight toward social justice is emerging throughout the region. Nuti notes revitalization efforts in Mexico, namely the community development group *Acción Católica* (2000, 52). Edward Fischer endorsed this type of activism in his work on civil society, which he says “allows the expression of will, of hopes and aspirations for the future, along with a sense of choice, self-determination, and empowerment” (2007, 2). He says:

The complexity of civil society resides in its quantum-mechanical aspect: simultaneously a point of resistance and of hegemonic collusion, civil society is formed from a contradiction that cannot be reconciled. The ethnographic challenge, then, is to represent this complexity without trying to force a synthesis of the thesis and antithesis. (2)

Indigenous movements are the clear result of violations against humanity. Poverty, exploitation, and political and economic experimentation created an unstable environment which is driving the indigenous rights movements. These civil society organizations build international relationships which Fischer claims can “help pressure the state from without, just as grass-roots action applies pressure from within” (2007, 3-4).

His definition of civil society is vague, but helpful for this discussion; it is what it is not. It is “not of the government, not of the private sector.” He continues: “While at its

broadest it can encompass everything from knitting circles to the Catholic Church, in practice it most often refers to organized NGOs” (4). These groups serve the movements, through regional development, mass media, and international networks, by utilizing local economies and socio-cultural capital to “bring economic thought and market forces to bear on governance and governmentalities” (7). This capital need not be purely economic. Heritage, as identity spiritually mediated through objects, or as wealth mediated through memory (as in Elizabeth Ferry’s work).

The friars, like the Mexica warriors before them, and the nationalists, capitalists, socialists, and anthropologists who followed, were engaged in ideological, intellectual, and psychological warfare. This is not intended to be a negative commentary. It should teach, inspire, and motivate twenty-first century researchers, professors, preachers, officials of both NGOs and governments, and activists. There is an important and active role to be played by today’s social researchers in Mesoamerica; they provide “on-the-ground diversity” (Fischer 2007, 1), and record, interpret, and disseminate data which, in the right hands, may help alleviate tensions in the regions they study. Civil society, in the form of NGOs, churches, or public media require the knowledge acquired by these researchers. World powers should consult the academy and anthropologists and other social scientists should play a consultative role in military operations.

This prescription does not come without its warnings. Heritage is real despite questions of its empirical legitimacy. It has been argued that memory is not knowledge of the past, but knowledge from the past, and that knowledge can become blurred over time. The researcher’s responsibility is to tell the story embraced by the people and to offer insight regarding the social improvements they desire. Fischer makes it clear: “[T]here can also be a heavy-handedness of good intentions that can become oppressive, even racist, in visions of indigenous futures built on distant moral projects and romanticized dreams” (3-4). The discretion is ours. Proceed with caution.

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Sam Shepard and Neil Simon: Aesthetic-Moralist Currents in American Drama

...the poet's traditional function on behalf of society... proposed
to make virtue delicious. He compounded a moral effect with
an aesthetic effect.... The name of the moral effect was
goodness; the name of the aesthetic effect was beauty.

— John Crowe Ransom, "Poets Without Laurels"

INTRODUCTION

John Crowe Ransom's quote epitomizes a coalescence of aesthetic and moral stimuli that has motivated American artists and conditioned American arts for decades. A list of artist-moralists in American culture would include in addition to Ransom such names as Sojourner Truth, Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mark Twain, Edward Arlington Robinson, Allen Tate, F. Scott Fitzgerald, e.e. cummings, James Baldwin, Allen Ginsburg, Edward Albee, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Arthur Miller, Toni Morrison, Woody Allen and many more. The moralism conveyed by artists (and, importantly, the aesthetic designs this moralism is embodied in) may reach a different audience than a preacher's orations – perhaps a more secular, liberal, "worldly" audience – but it has just as important a role in American life. To borrow Wayne C. Booth's diction, such artists, directly by way of persuasive hortatory, and indirectly by way of characterization, camouflaged argument and other narrative techniques, collaborate with audiences in "providing mature moral judgment" (307).

David Pendery is an assistant professor at National Taipei University of Business. He received his B.A. in international relations at San Francisco State University, M.S. in journalism at Boston University, and Ph.D. in English literature at National Chengchi University.

The artist-moralist current is so pervasive that virtually all authors could be included in this context. Consider Cormac McCarthy's hard-hitting aggressions and recall what McCarthy writes in *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West*: "Here are considerations of equity and rectitude and moral right rendered void and without warrant and here are the views of the litigants despised"? And Mark Twain, the ultimate practical-and-plain-dealing writer, writes of a great "moral sense" in mankind. Even if we did find a wholly "amoral" and straight-from-the-hip writer, I suspect he would be limited to a remarkably transparent and guileless readership, hardly a readership at all, because the moralism I am discussing is exactly what all readers want and need, it is in essence why we read.

There are many possible moral agendas providing direction through the complex ethical circumstances in life, including: the absolutist, highly structured claims of many world religions; supernatural/mystic/mythic philosophies; lay/scientific outlines; ascetic philosophies and retreats from the material world; fatalistic/pessimistic understandings; secular humanist beliefs in communitarianism and humanitarianism; anarchic world views; animistic/vitalistic interpretations; cognitive/constructive philosophies; agnostic/atheistic views; and a range of others. We might find evidence of any of these moral programs coloring the work of different American artists, but it is my stance that one encompassing covenant most prominently conditions the American aesthetic-moralist impulse: a set of virtue ethics principles in support of a moral life "center[ed] in the heart and personality of the agent – in his or her character" (Pojman 388), or as Aristotle simply said "to do good" (from *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book IV). I contend that, for Aristotle, "good" and "right" were, in essence, one in the same. Virtues and virtuous behavior were both good in and of themselves, as well as instruments to cultivate a best life. There is a slight differentiation here between modern views on doing the right thing in what are often specific instances versus Aristotle's broader view onto a lifetime. The varied values of this framework, which aims at the rightness and beneficence of acts based on good and decent motives, include (among others) love, honesty, truth, fairness, faith, justice, benevolence, loyalty, temperance, courage and duty. These virtues are "the right things to do," and many accept that they are intuitively understood and practiced by good people.¹

1 Consideration of the difference between the teleological and the deontological, where ethics refers to that which is considered to be good (as a purpose) and morality involves that which is obligatory (needless to say, based on rules), is, I think, unnecessary here. We can examine the moral and ethical implications of works of art simultaneously, and I think this is what average people do on a daily basis. We often view that which is good as obligatory in life, whatever we may think of its innate value (for its own sake). This is why we think of the right thing to do; we must do that which is right in life.

Benjamin Franklin wrote in his autobiography that “[my father] convinc’d me that nothing was useful that was not honest” (7), while Toni Morrison has written that her “single gravest responsibility ... is not to lie” (303). Arthur Miller had John Proctor declaim in *The Crucible*, “Let you look sometimes for the goodness in me, and judge me not.” Kurt Vonnegut Jr. in his *Breakfast of Champions*, inscribes protagonist Kilgore Trout’s tombstone with “We are healthy only to the extent that our ideas are humane,” and Ralph Waldo Emerson said in his “American Scholar” address that “character is higher than intellect.” Walt Whitman, always the passionate moral and spiritual advocate, urged his readers toward best behavior and beliefs in “Song of the Open Road”:

They go! they go! I know that they go, but I know not where
they go,
But I know that they go toward the best – toward something
great.

In this article I will examine selections from two American dramatists who function within the American artist-moralist tradition described here. My choice of drama is pointed. Some readers may venture that a roomier format, such as the novel, offers a more expansive platform for elaborate “theorizing,” comprehensive analysis, and realistic and/or creative depiction of moral topics. I grant that this may be true, but I believe that the drama form – public as it is, oral, with characters “speaking” to audiences, and audiences having a measure of “interaction” with live figures on stage – provides the most insightful look at our topic. The messages in drama not only become a kind of preaching, with the presentation of living exemplars of moral parables, but the stage also becomes a kind of tribunal, highlighting the importance of “defenders” of best behavior (the dramatist and a play’s characters), and “witnesses” (the audience, and again the characters) who can “testify” in defense of right, or in opposition to wrong behavior, all with the aim of reaching “just” verdicts on a play’s messages and content.

Note that this conception is seen by way of audience reaction, a more extant and operative conception that requires the actual viewing and responding to plays, which of course this paper cannot generate. Like any art form, drama can, of course, be seen and interpreted in varied formats. This is to say that drama may be read silently, and understood by a reader in a private sense, as dicta or in a narrative series. Similarly, drama could be read by a small group, not staged, but analyzed in this way. Drama can of course also make its way onto television and film, which might condition its messages in other ways. These varied formats could potentially open the analysis in this paper onto other interpretations, but I will solely refer to drama as activity staged by living characters in front of live audiences.

This discussion also highlights an interesting point about the ethical concepts I am discussing. The study of ethics can be broadly divided into two pursuits, that of ethics,

proper – the definition and dissemination of prescriptive ethical codes and conduct – and meta-ethics – a more elevated, less directly practicable analysis of the creation and delineation of these codes and conduct, their logical coherence, limits, origins, justification, interpretation, etc. My points about the public and juridical natures of dramaturgy indicate a given focus on pragmatic, prescriptive ethics conveyed to audiences, but there is no reason that we could not find instances of higher-level meta-ethical analysis in drama as well. In this paper, however, I will focus on the former point.

The two dramatists I will examine are Sam Shepard and Neil Simon, who I believe will give us an inclusive picture of modern-day moralizing in American drama (always with the aim of “doing good,” or perhaps I should say “saying good” within a virtue ethics framework). These two artists are at something of opposite ends of the political and cultural spectrum. Shepard, younger than Simon, is a fiery dramatist of contradiction and incongruity, conveying gloomy themes made even more foreboding by infusions of black humor and violence. Simon, of an older generation, is a middle-of-the-road playwright, emerging from a tradition of easygoing American humor and conservative moral values with a soft, humanistic edge. Different as these two dramatists are, we find that they each take up the moralist torch I have described, showing how the American aesthetic-moralist impulse insinuates its way into diverse beliefs and styles. Shepard is the “bad cop” in our scenario, the hard-hitting disciplinarian moralist, shouting from the pulpit, on the verge of flaying reprobate listeners; Simon, meanwhile, is the “good cop,” a friendly counselor, father-figure or trusted cleric warming our hearts with reassuring homilies about family, life and “the right things to do.” In our analysis we will compare and contrast these two artists in varied ways.

THE CONGRUENCE OF MORAL AND AESTHETIC IDEALS

In this section I will explicate an important analytical consideration that underpins my analysis of Shepard, Simon and the American artist-moralist tradition: the congruence of moral and aesthetic ideals. Consider this a look at my analytical methodology.

Moral and aesthetic frameworks, broadly, are both created with the aim of cultivating conceptions of best form and ideal content, substantial coherence, beauty, truth, and ontological and epistemological significance within intersubjective environments of audience and observer, speaker and listener, influencer and influenced. This confluence of the moral and the aesthetic – though admittedly the aesthetic considerations of artists often modify or re-channel moral/virtuous impulses – lends something of a helping hand to artist-moralists, imbuing their messages with fluency, comprehensibility and authenticity. (In an interesting turn in terms of this convergence of actuality, note how both “character” and “action” are basal constituents of both drama and ethics.) I have cited John Ransom, and at the risk of again citing an analyst sometimes considered overly-conservative and obsolete, Ransom also wrote that “the union of beauty with

goodness and truth has been common enough to be regarded as natural. It is the dissociation which is unnatural and painful” (453). To turn to an aesthetic philosopher that Ransom venerated – and who is rarely considered out of date – Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, also examined the linked roles of morality and aesthetics as they are evinced by poets and dramatists:

... the objects of imitation are men in action and these must either of a higher or lower type (for moral character mainly answers to these divisions, goodness and badness being the distinguishing marks of moral differences), it follows that we must represent men either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. (Book II, 52)

The above analysis indicates how morals and moralism are at the very heart of aesthetic structure. Such a view has not been overlooked in the past (particularly in literature, but we may apply these concepts to dramatic narrative). For Wayne C. Booth, who has explored this issue in extreme detail, “moral qualities as inferred from characteristic choices or as stated directly by the author, have always been an important basis for literary form” (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 130)², while Hayden White continues, “Where, in any account of reality, narrativity is present, we can be sure that morality or moralizing impulse is present too” (“The Value of Narrativity” 284).

To examine one key element of this isomorphism of morality (understood in the common sense of doctrines concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad) and aesthetic design, I will explain how one particular moral value inheres in artwork “below the surface” (this is to say that other moral values that I will examine in the work of Sam Shepard and Neil Simon in the remainder of this paper, such as truth, loyalty or love, are often much more visible or urgent in given works, above the surface as it were). This value is, simply, beauty. Emerson, when he wrote in his “Thoughts on Modern Literature” that “[o]ver every true poem lingers a certain wild beauty, immeasurable,” recognized not only the beauty stemming from skilled artistic rendering, but also a more mystic view of aesthetic beauty as something of a spiritual force. Even in those works that contain ostensibly “ugly” elements – and we certainly see these in Sam Shepard’s dark, violent dramatization – we often acknowledge a given aesthetic beauty, emerging from their skilled, accomplished depiction. White writes that the “value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (*The Content of the Form* 24). If we interpret White’s “coherence, integrity, fullness” (not to mention the “imaginary”) as potential attributes of beautiful

2 Note that another book by Booth, *The Company We Keep*, though not employed in my analysis, is a very important work in this field.

artistic creation – and I think that we may – then his analysis points toward the actuality of one moral concept – beauty – that is integral to aesthetics, as I have stated. I will examine other moral principles within the context of Neil Simon and Sam Shepard in the following sections.

NEIL SIMON: PLAYING IF SAFE

Neil Simon emerged from the Depression and WWII in America, a time of conservative ethics and a cautious world view that often looked to the past and righteous, absolutist principles for security. Simon's youth and early development were far from the advent of deconstructionist angst and turbulent cultural politics of the late twentieth century, and the aesthetics of his time had only a dash of political and social critique. Simon's drama, in a word, resides comfortably in a world of "family values" – unstinting loyalty, trust, honesty, respect and hard work – which resonated with American audiences in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, but which also finds devotees into the twenty-first century (though admittedly my definition here does not strictly apply to modern-day family values of the Dan Quayle variety, with its somewhat reactionary meaning in support of the nuclear family and strict gender roles). Family values in this sense can no doubt become claustrophobic (or worse, exclusionary), but at best (as in my view here) they can fit into a beneficial virtue ethics framework. Simon's are the moral guidelines radiating outward from the loving family circle, values that have been delivered from pulpits, taught in classrooms, and propounded from soapboxes from the earliest days in America.

I will examine selections from two of Simon's plays, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *Lost in Yonkers*. I believe these plays, based on Simon's early family life with his parents, siblings, relatives and neighbors, will best illuminate his moral universe.

Brighton Beach Memoirs at first glance looks like a birds-eye view of a fourteen-year-old boy's uncomplicated world – a world of baseball and early adolescence, of big brothers, mothers and fathers, of masturbation and first glances at pretty girls, and dimly emerging adult dreams and responsibilities. But the play is much more than this, and focused through the lives of ordinary people living ordinary lives in their families and neighborhoods – Simon's preferred milieu – *Brighton Beach Memoirs* becomes a sustained examination of a variety of moral precepts, from the personal to the communal, from the local to the universal.

Virtually all of the characters in *Brighton Beach Memoirs* are upstanding types, tested by different ethical challenges, but always falling back on the standard list of virtue ethics and family values I have discussed, when solutions are needed. Kate urges her sister early in the play to "stay on your own side of the street" (10), while Blanche later retorts to Kate in no uncertain terms, "I keep my word" (11). Nora, when she is arguing for her chance to be hired as a dancer, offers charitably to her mother, "Let me do something for you now" (16), while Jack generously offers of his sister-in-law's date that

he will “Make ... him feel comfortable” (90). A larger, threatening world looms in the background of these characters’ lives – Jack is sympathetically “afraid for all of us” with the onset of World War II (124) – but always Simon grounds his ethical framework in the immediate family. “The world doesn’t survive without families” (53) Kate tells Jack, and Stanley and Eugene make every effort to contribute to the family’s well-being, even scraping together a few cents worth of stamps to make up for Stanley’s lost salary. When Jack ponders where their family members who have escaped from the Nazis in Europe will stay, Kate interrupts with a brisk, filial “With us” (130). Any anger or disputes that crop up between family members are definitively settled for the better, with all coming out happier and more well rounded.

The most striking example of ethical conduct at work in the play emerges out of the possibility of Stanley losing his job, where he has defended a black co-worker he felt was being abused by the boss after a mishap. In a series of statements and explanations that elevate Stanley to the status of youth-hero, he tells his brother Eugene that his co-worker’s accident “wasn’t his fault” and the boss’s angry reaction “wasn’t fair” (24). Stanley felt no less than that “the dignity of everyone who worked in that store was in my hands” as he defended his co-worker and stood up to his boss (25). In the end, in the classical individual ethical response, Stanley firmly states “you always have to do what you think is right in this world and stand up for your principles” (of course he learned this from his father) (27). When Stanley tells his father that he could be fired for his actions, Eugene reports that he (Stanley) gives a stirring speech “like that movie, Abe Lincoln in Illinois ... defending ... his principles” (70), which leaves his father acknowledging to Stanley, “you did a courageous thing,” which was “something to be proud of. It was what you believed in” (71). The difficulty passes over with nary a black cloud – Simon in his mild-mannered way – and the further difficulty later in the play of Stanley gambling away his salary is also breezed over, with Eugene coming to his brother’s defense, and defusing any possible conflict.

The other important moral examination Simon conducts in *Brighton Beach Memoirs* is his look at bias among the different nationalities in the Brighton Beach neighborhood. This mistrust breaches the surface when Kate nastily tells Blanche about her (Blanche’s) upcoming date with Mr. Murphy, who is Irish, “I warned you the first day about those people” (100). Ostensibly she is referring to the fact that Murphy has injured himself while driving while intoxicated (which Murphy’s mother has generously informed the family about in a letter, in which she also tells them that her son has never failed to exhibit “honesty and sincerity” [99]), but the real source of her bitterness is her mistrust of Irish people. Her resentment prompts the following exchange:

BLANCHE: Stop calling them “those people.” They’re not “those people.” She’s a mother, like you and me.

KATE: And what is he? Tell me what he is.

BLANCHE: He's somebody in trouble. He's somebody that needs help. For God's sake, Kate, you don't even know the man.

KATE: I know the man. I know what they're all like.

BLANCHE: Who are you to talk? Are we any better? Are we something so special? We're all poor around here, the least we can be is charitable. (100)

Simon here not only instructs readers and listeners about the innate value of a charitable attitude toward others, he also slips in a comment on equality in a given society ("we're all poor..."). With such ethics extending beyond insular family values, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* enters a larger moral environment linking individual, family, societal and universal ethics. Such an environment is seen again in *Lost in Yonkers*, to which I now turn. While lacking *Brighton Beach Memoirs'* tight focus on virtue ethics, and with a slightly sharper edge than the previous play, *Lost in Yonkers* in many ways revisits the same moral themes, in the same family surroundings, evincing values from a now-bygone age in America. "Families should sort of stick together," Jay tells his grandmother (44), while Bella tells her mother, "I promise you, you would never worry about being alone 'cause you'd have us" (133). Jay risks his life for his uncle by tricking the gangsters, and then says "I thought someone in this family ought to help somebody else" (135). The homemade card from Jay and Arty to their grandmother in the concluding scene wraps up the conceptions of family love in the play.³

These American family values of the mid-20th century are spiced up by a cross-section of principles from an old-fashioned European system – a classic "strict but fair" moral doctrine also widely practiced in American families. Early in the play we are reminded that the "right thing to do" includes such traditional strictures as youths not playing hooky or smoking, finishing one's dinner, hard work, unreserved respect for elders, and possession of a tough exterior in a demanding world – "moxie," as the characters call it. Grandma Kurnitz herself was "from the old European tradition: 'You will behave, you will not talk back, you will work hard'" (Irene Worth in Simon, *Lost in Yonkers* 139). No doubt Grandma Kurnitz is imperfect – she can be "so mean" (98), and her

3 In one important element of the *Lost in Yonkers'* moral universe, the family unit is a bulwark against bigotry in the outside world, protecting the German Jewish grandmother from discrimination at the hands of her neighbors. Arty retreats from thinking about stealing his grandmother's money (which the boys wanted for the right reasons – to contribute to their family's coffers) when a neighborhood boy calls her a "dirty kraut" (83).

relationship with Bella is deeply strained and hurtful. But even she admits responsibility – “If I’ve done wrong by you [Bella], den it’s for me to take care of” (144), and to Louie she was a “Hell of a teacher” (93). Louie provides something of a moral foil in the play, as an illicit presence. In spite of his apparent lawbreaking and shady company, however, he is at heart constructive and committed to the family. In his rough-edged way he protects and tutors Jay and Artie, he always credits his mother, and he steps in forcefully to protect Bella from the weak Johnny – an apparently worthy contribution to her future.

Simon colors his central family values with brush strokes of universal moralizing principles, such as beneficence (which I maintain is indeed of universal significance) when Bella stands up for Jay and Arty, and subverts her mother’s will by announcing “No momma. They’re not going. They’re staying. Because if you make them go, I’ll go too” (47), and later when Jay gamely launches the conversation after dinner allowing Bella to bring up the topic of her new love interest; honesty, such as when Bella says of the boys’ father, “He never takes anything from anybody” (35), and grandmother Kurnitz tells Jay “You’re not afraid to say the truth. Dot’s goot” (147); moral courage and loyalty, when Jay confronts his uncle and tells him “Maybe you don’t rob banks or grocery stores or little old ladies. You’re worse than that...And I’ll tell you something about my father. At least he’s doing something in this war. He’s sick and he’s tired but he’s out there selling iron to make ships and tanks and cannons. And I’m proud of him” (103); and the straightforward dictum to do the right thing when Jay asks his uncle Louie, when he (Louie) is moving the boys into position to protect him from the gangsters, “We wouldn’t be doing anything wrong, would we?” (81).

As I have noted, a key moral dynamic that I am examining is a juridical element, which frames, advocates and explicates moral factors. This feature is essential to the structure of drama – with the “defenders,” “witnesses,” “accused” and “verdicts” conditioning stage action and audience participation. In *Lost in Yonkers*, Jay directly engages the audience, sharing his eyewitness view of the drama, which enables deeper retrospective deliberation and informed conclusions about action, behavior, and character motivation and decisions. (In *Brighton Beach Memoirs* Eugene similarly advertised to the audience, “You’re all witnesses...” [30].)

All in all, Neil Simon takes a somewhat circuitous route in his moralizing, or perhaps I should say that he simply wears kid gloves. Simon does not hit his audiences over the head with his beliefs and principles. He packages his moralism in a user-friendly wrapper that mostly accords with the values of the older generation of our parents and grandparents. Simon’s is an “old fashioned” morality, and in some ways he may be preaching to the choir of his devotees. Simon’s is not so conspicuous a moral stance as Sam Shepard’s, but it is no less important in American aesthetics and culture. His is an easier ride, a necessary, centrist complement to the fiery preaching of “true believers,” angry sermonizers (with both edifying and didactic aims, and always with the aim of

expounding a virtuous reality) and gloomy fatalists. We find Sam Shepard in various respects resides in these groups, and to his work I now turn.

SAM SHEPARD: THE ANGRY AMERICAN

Sam Shepard's plays cut to the heart of anxious existence and broken relationships, lacerated life in a mediated world, and personal dreams on the bier of hard-won experience. Always just outside the door of his ramshackle motel on the edge of nowhere is the threat of corporal violence and metaphysical havoc. Few would disagree that Shepard's dramatic worlds are peopled with characters in environments that are eerily "wiped out," "screwed up," and "un-communal, cut off from [their] own past" (Biggsby 12). Such a dramaturgy hardly seems fit for constructive moral examination, but Shepard nevertheless hews to this path. His aim is a view onto the dark side of moral and/or ethical behavior in human life, though with a simultaneous examination of many good qualities (not least family values), which in the end twins the good and bad, enabling us to see that which is first and that which is last in a Biblically concurrent sense (see Matthew 20:16).

Shepard, in contrast to Neil Simon, emerged out of the late 1950s and into the 60s in America, a time when morals were contested sharply across yawning gaps of experience separating generations. During this era something like an entirely new moral understanding arose in the United States, an understanding that was on the one hand accommodating and humanitarian – an "Age of Aquarius" world of peace and love – while on the other bitterly angry, reproachful and dismissive of the "over 30" generation (Neil Simon's generation) which Shepard and his peers saw as nothing less than a rot at the core of American culture. This rot was first and foremost a political and cultural disease of exploitation and imperialism, bigotry and racism, individualism gone mad at the expense of community, and a realpolitik existence that sought only zero-sum gains at the expense of others. The more personal and familial sides of these problems were the resulting dysfunctional relationships that seemed to be rending American culture apart – with husbands and wives, parents and offspring, brothers and sisters, and extended family members lost in storms of divorce, heartbreak, hurt, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, abandonment and adultery. The critical reception of Shepard's treatment of these problems has long celebrated the playwright as a postmodern dramatist and hell-bent-for-leather hanging judge of modern American culture. Such views, while in part true, are faulty for two reasons. First, to hurl Shepard into a postmodern maelstrom would be to strip him of agency, placing him at the mercy of a de-centered reality lacking any substantial referentiality – and this is surely not true of his work, which cuts to the heart of lived experience. Second, although Shepard is to be sure harshly critical in his laying bare of disquieting trends in American society, he is anything but wholly denunciatory, nor, in another possible postmodern take, simply in it for the fun, reveling in the chaotic, acidly humorous existence portrayed in his artwork. I venture to say that for Shepard the

sickness in American society is not only harmful to individuals, families and communities, but also to the very metaphysical and ethical heart of American (and, for that matter, any) culture and existence. Shepard's aim is nothing less than to make a beneficent contribution toward healing this diseased moral life at large, and his moralizing – though a bitter pill to swallow – ultimately has constructive objectives.

To obtain the results he is after, Shepard employs a sophisticated, two-pronged strategy, which comprises an incendiary mixture of utopian (moral) and dystopian (amoral, immoral) messages. We can see this twofold approach in that although Shepard has long crafted a hard-hitting “critique of the ‘real world’ [and the] superficiality of contemporary life,” he also peoples his drama with more positive “‘hero’ figures...who actively battle against forces of oppression” (Bottoms 59-60). To probe deeper, on the dystopian side, Shepard's work incorporates nihilist portrayals crafted of emotionally intense and neurotically split contrasts, fractured communication, rejection of tradition, grotesque and violent imagery, and intense graphic effects. This approach should not surprise us, for many angry moralists and preachers in American culture have painted uncomfortable fire and brimstone pictures of failed moral lives, in contrast with the promise of glorious righteousness and ultimate reward. However, on the utopian side, Shepard grew up in a generation seeking a positive rebirth of human consciousness into an improved state of virtuous behavior and belief – the Age of Aquarius, as noted. Such an ideal world can be seen in Shepard's work, providing a necessary positive foil to his negative dynamic. The combination of these dark and light sides, Shepard's heat and light, yield volatile but salubrious outcomes.

A primary way in which Simon effects his dualistic marriage of opposites is to douse his drama in intense emotion: “HEEZ MY HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAART!!!” shrieks Beth in *A Lie of the Mind* (20), expressing both devout love and searing pain. Some critics have evaluated the emotional outbursts in Shepard's plays as showy fireworks, explosions of bottled-up, intensely caustic feelings. While this is no doubt in part true, a more complete understanding is to view them as the “lively and sympathetic representation” (very lively and sympathetic representation) of individual and communal dilemmas (Frankena 455), and the demonstrative (very demonstrative) psychological milieu characters are immersed in during their ultimate search for a better moral life (Shepard's path to redemption won't be easy). In a word, Shepard plunges his characters into these personal and communal quandaries and conflicts so they can sort through the damage, craft adequate responses, and learn better behavior, with the ultimate aim of effecting a better, changed world: “It's all right. Once we're together, the whole world will change. You'll see. We'll be in a whole new world,” Beth tells Frankie in *A Lie of the Mind* (114).

The instances of moral indignation and endorsement in Shepard's work are so numerous that it is peculiar they have not been analyzed in depth before. Stephen J. Bottoms

hints at such an appraisal when he writes that Shepard's work at times exhibits "traces of a search for some unifying vision, a source of hope beyond the deadly, all-pervading hollowness" (59). John Blackburn, further, writes that Shepard's characters "endeavor to defend themselves against the weight of the past and the anxiety of the present by searching out a deeper, more essential origin" (Blackburn). Bottoms and Blackburn are on the right track, but they do not query deeply enough. If, following Wayne C. Booth, "The author's voice is [...] dominant in a dialogue that is at the heart of all experience with fiction" (272), then Shepard's voice is loud and clear in his drama, and moral indignation and sanction are integral to his "dialogue." One most important element of morality in Shepard's work, for example, is his celebration of love, an emotion ("the emotions are essential and central in our effort to gain understanding on any important ethical matter" after all [Nussbaum 21]). that girds the virtue ethics framework I have discussed. The love among Shepard's characters is a tested love, a bruised and often broken love, a misplaced love, a lost love – but love it is, deep and often wistfully present, as in *Fool for Love*:

EDDIE: We've got a pact.... You know we're connected May. We'll always be connected. That was decided a long time ago."⁴

– or *A Lie of the Mind* –

JAKE: (Softly) I – I – I – I love you more than this earth. (126)

– or heartbreakingly absent, as in *Buried Child* –

DODGE: Tilden was the one who knew. Better than any of us. He'd walk for miles with that kid in his arms. Halie let him take it. All night sometimes. He'd walk all night out there in the pasture with it. Talkin' to it. Singin' to it. Used to hear him singing to it. He'd make up stories. He'd tell that kid all kinds a' stories. Even when he knew it couldn't understand him. Couldn't understand a word he was sayin'... (65)

Sometimes Shepard's love is secure, strong, and deeply filial –

JAKE: No! Don't leave.

FRANKIE: All right. You okay?

JAKE: Yeah. Just sit with me for a while, stay here.

FRANKIE: Okay.

4 I have combined two quotes by Eddie here, from neighboring locations on page 31 of *Fool for Love*.

JAKE: Don't leave.

FRANKIE: I won't. (A Lie of the Mind 14-15)

– and sometimes loose-limbed, pushed to the breaking point, where it becomes neurotic or compulsive –

THE OLD MAN: It was the same love. Just got split in two, that's all. (*Fool for Love* 48)

Intense love, out of control love, angry love, love neurotic to the point of being unrecognizable – but Shepard's love remains. We can perhaps understand that critics have viewed the love that infuses Shepard's work in a jaundiced sense. We would all agree that Shepard's dramatic virtues have a gritty edge, and more than a modicum of attached pain and loss. But to lose sight of Shepard's portrayals of love as love in all its potential and realized glory, is a serious mistake, and can lead to diagnostic distortions.

Other key virtues that tint Shepard's plays are honesty, truth, loyalty and righteousness. Such values again may stem from Shepard's youth in the 1960s. The Vietnam War and Watergate impacted his entire generation, eliciting much cynicism and anger at the decrepit values that seemed to infest establishment life and politics. Bob Dylan, himself a visionary moralist artist who Shepard idolized, sang in 1964's "The Times They Are A-Changin'":

Come senators, congressmen
Please heed the call
...
There's a battle outside
And it is ragin'.
It'll soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'.

Loyalty often combines with truth and love in Shepard's work. In *Fool for Love*, a play that is something of a sustained meditation on truth, love and loyalty, Eddie and May demand in their own lives mutual truth and supportive love, a pact which has given them direction and stability through the deceitful tumult of their lives. Yes, they still retain traces of disquieting doubt and they are often unsure about what exactly to believe, but the siblings stick together, and at the end of the play, as their father equivocates about the "truth" of their past, Eddie – who himself "got it all turned around" (52) in his mind – rejects the old man's attempts to re-inscribe the past, and simply announces the truth that "It was your shotgun. Same one we used to duck-hunt with" (54) that Eddie's mother used to kill herself. With the truth in the open air, Eddie dismisses the confused, lying

old man with a simple “You were gone” (55), and does not say another word to him. We then see Eddie and May embracing, kissing tenderly, with gestures of affection that the stage directions tell us “never stop” during the last moments of the play (56). For Jake in *A Lie of the Mind*, the faithful impulse is equally simple – when Lorraine asks him of Sally “What do we need her for?,” Jake answers plainly, “I can trust her” (67-68).

Other instances of moralizing about truth, loyalty and trust pepper Shepard’s plays – with his approach allowing him to adhere to his moralizing impulse while embedding his evangelizing in an indefinite postmodern world where the very validity of these values can be questioned. In spite of this, Shepard evinces an appealingly straightforward commitment to truth for truth’s sake. Jake, in *A Lie of the Mind*, tells Beth, “Everything in me lies. But you. You stay. You are true.” (129). Cecilia at the conclusion of *Simpatico* modestly tells Carter, “Your money’s all here. You can count it if you want to. I only used a little bit for sandwiches and tea. I’ll pay you back, I promise” (135). In *Fool for Love*, May announces to Eddie early in the play in no uncertain terms: “I’ll believe the truth! It’s less confusing” (24), while later, Eddie, in a delightfully playful, but seriously moralizing, mood, challenges Martin by saying, “She suggests it’s a lie to you and all of a sudden you change your mind? Is that it? You go from true to false like that, in a second?” (51). In *Simpatico*, Carter and Vinnie expound at length on truth, “right motives,” and not a few other virtuous traits:

CARTER: (laughing): Scared and guilty?

VINNIE: One or the other. Or both.

CARTER: Scared and guilty!

VINNIE: Neither one is the right motive.

CARTER: Oh, well, I apologize for that!

VINNIE: Neither one has to do with kinship or brotherhood or any sense of another man’s suffering at the hands of a woman.

CARTER: Oh, so now we’re suffering! We’re suffering now!

VINNIE: One of us might be suffering!

CARTER: But the other has no conception of it! Is that the idea!

VINNIE: That’s the idea but the idea is a long way from the truth!

CARTER: Aah! The Truth! The Truth! And only one of us is able to have a

handle on that I suppose!

VINNIE: One of us is a helluva lot closer to it than the other one! (17)

Interestingly in Shepard, as with Simon, we find a strong commitment to family, with this the primary compass of Shepard's moral universe allowing characters to find their bearings in harsh worlds. Needless to say, this very harshness sometimes stems from broken and hurtful family relationships, some of which retain their toxic residue – Vince's announcement in *Buried Child* that "I've gotta carry on the line. I've gotta see to it that things keep rolling" is clearly not an unblemished commitment to unsullied fealty (70). In spite of grim examples like this, however, a more beneficial family love can be seen in Shepard's work. *A Lie of the Mind*, with its varied family connections, contains many of Shepard's most penetrating examinations of family relationships, and the brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers all remain close in their various ways (though again, their closeness sometimes has a gritty or injurious edge). Lorraine says of her son Jake, "He's not gonna hurt us. We're related. [...] Outsiders he'll hurt. That's guaranteed. But not us. He knows us." (27). Late in the play Mike shouts to Jake, "He's the traitor, not me! I'm the one who's loyal to the family! I'm the only one." (125), and earlier he had reassured his damaged sister Beth:

MIKE: You're safe here. Long as you stay with us.

BETH: What's "safe"?

MIKE: Safe. Safe from injury. You won't get hurt here. (48)

Often these family values and an array of universal virtues are combined and brought into sharp relief at the conclusions of Shepard's plays (a standard technique of the evangelizer that all "get their due in the end" and that a better world awaits those who persevere and do the right things⁵). Here we are led into moral worlds that feel completed, almost optimistic (if still colored with doubt and pain), and the characters who had been feeling such confusion and instability during the course of the plays are often given a

5 Recall that Aristotle "set... himself the task of giving an account of the good which is at once local and particular – located in and partially defined by the characteristics of the polis – and yet also cosmic and universal" (Macintyre 148). In short, all of the principles I am examining are of both particular and universal significance, and this is true whether they are couched in didactic and/or edifying terms, whether they are "for their own sake," or aimed at the cultivation of individual character, or components of "moral agendas" as I have discussed, or part of a larger socio-moral landscape in a culture.

taste of virtue and glimpses of futures that maybe, just maybe, will not be as bleak as they had been led to believe. Eddie appears to leave May at the end of *Fool for Love*, but their separation feels more like a necessary severing of their unfortunate past than an abandonment – something like the pruning of a diseased limb that may lead to regeneration (and I have already noted their tender attachment at this point in the play). In *A Lie of the Mind*, Jake kisses Beth softly before he exits, while Baylor, flush with the triumph of folding the American flag with his wife, kisses her on the cheek and, though unsure and awkward, tells her with some affection “Let’s go on up to bed now” (130). In the conclusion of *Simpatico* Vinnie turns to an endeavor he truly appreciates – meting out justice, which “fills [him] with purpose” (134). Even in *Buried Child* – no doubt the most baleful of the plays examined here, and anything but truly “optimistic” – Vince is seen in the end making plans to “[get] rid of some of the vermin in the house” and start “brand new” (71). Meanwhile, Tilden exposes to the light of day the murder that has tormented the family for years, while Halie revels in the “paradise out there” in the back yard. She is last heard making a plea for a “good hard rain” that will scrub the “stench of sin” from their lives, “[take] everything down to the roots,” and make way for “a miracle” and “the sun” in their dark existence.⁶ We see in the denouements of Sam Shepard’s plays at least hints of new, constructive moral orders, which perhaps should not surprise us, for as Hayden White asks, “What else could narrative closure consist of than the *passage from one moral order to another?*” (“The Value of Narrativity” 283, emphasis in original).

CONCLUSION

Neil Simon and Sam Shepard: moralist playwrights inscribing ethical frameworks for their American (and global) audiences. One, a fire-breathing sermonizer, a radical preacher and teller of horror tales, ready to denounce amoral listeners for illicit behavior; the other a friendly family advisor looking to the best sides of life for examples of best behavior. Vastly different they may be, but both emerge from an American artist-moralist tradition, a tradition that has existed side-by-side (if often uncomfortably) with more traditional methods of moralizing and preaching in the nation. For like it or not, America is a moral nation, a nation that from its founding professed to individuals and communities the necessity of “doing the right thing.” Edward Winslow, Mayflower pilgrim and first governor of the Plymouth colony, wrote for those who were beginning their new lives in Massachusetts –

...if there be any too desirous of gain, to entreat them to moderate their affections, and consider that no man expecteth fruit before the tree be grown; advising all men, that as they tender their own welfare, so to make choice of such to

6 The preceding text is from page 72, except for “stench of sin,” which is from page 58.

manage and govern their affairs, as are approved not to be seekers of themselves, but the common good of all for whom they are employed... (Winslow)

– while across time George Bush orated in his 2005 inauguration –

That edifice of character is built in families, supported by communities with standards.... Americans move forward in every generation by reaffirming all that is good and true that came before – ideals of justice and conduct that are the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Bush)

Beliefs like these have infused American society across the social and political spectrum for hundreds of years, moving outward from individuals and families to larger communities; from the local, to the national, to the universal. Such an environment has in turn influenced American aesthetics and arts, nurturing the artist-moralist impulse. Neil Simon and Sam Shepard, if influenced by a variety of other (and often conflicting) aesthetic, social, and political motivations, follow in this long line, and they pick up and transmit these aesthetic-moral traditions to their audiences. For Simon and Shepard, it's the right thing to do, for as Halie says in Shepard's *Buried Child*, "We can't not believe in something. We can't stop believing" (60).

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One Woman's Journey as a Medical Cannabis Patient

For much of my adult life, I have been a closeted cannabis user. I've nearly always kept a small stash of marijuana and a pipe hidden in a safe in the back of my bedroom closet. At the end of many a long work day, after I've tucked my six children safely into bed, cleaned, and completed a night's studying for college or a graduate school class, I would find some respite in marijuana. It more than the wine alternative I heard some call it. For me, marijuana was also a medication. During that "closeted" period of my life, marijuana functioned as a mild anti-depressant that worked better than the pharmaceuticals that had been legally prescribed, but which I found not just unhelpful but full of undesirable side-effects. The marijuana high I experienced relieved stress and eased anxiety, engulfed me in a calming sense of well being, allowing me to relax and sleep. A small dose of marijuana helped me prepare for another day in my life, as mother, wife, employee, student, friend, family and community member.

There were many reasons I spent years concealing my use of marijuana from others. The primary reason was fear—I was afraid of stigma that would come if people knew. I feared being viewed as a stoner or any number of stereotypes. I feared the legal or extra-legal forms of control, including imprisonment, removal of my children from our home, loss of status or job, or worse.

Regina Nelson is pursuing the Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies at Union Institute & University. She has a B.A. from Vermont College and a master's in leadership from the University of Oklahoma. Her article, "Framing Integral Leadership within the Medical Cannabis Community," was published in the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* (Dec. 2012), she has presented her research at conferences hosted by the International Leadership Association and the International Cannabinoid Research Society, and authored *Theorist-at-Large: One Woman's Ambiguous Journey Into Medical Cannabis* (Cannabis Patient Network Institute, 2015). Nelson is a founding officer of Cannabis Patient Network Institute, a patient-led and driven membership organization desiring to build awareness of the endocannabinoid system and cannabis' use as medicine and champion community-based research projects. After more than a decade in business consulting and two in training and development, Nelson established Integral Education and Consulting, LLC.

Much has changed for me over the years. I am older and wiser, my health issues have become much more significant, and I have become a medical cannabis patient. This article is an autoethnographic exploration from the standpoint of a female medical cannabis patient. It considers the narratives and performative acts associated with medical cannabis use in relation to the dominant public narrative that lumps cannabis users into the easily dismissed categories of “stoner” or “pot-head.” By sharing my story of medical cannabis use, I hope to demythologize the performative act of using cannabis while re-scripting the narrative about what it means to be a cannabis user in our society.

In the United States, cannabis remains a Schedule I controlled substance—classified as having no recognizable medicinal value and as a highly addictive substance—under the Controlled Substances Act. Decades of research, however, suggest cannabis helps to regulate immunity, inflammation, analgesia, neurotoxicity, appetite, blood pressure, bone formation, body temperature, gastrointestinal functioning, and physical and psychological responses to stress and trauma, among other potential affects (Baker et al., 2003; Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997; Holland, 2010; Courtney, 2012). Some research shows cannabis to be less addictive and relatively side effect free when compared to most prescription drugs (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997; Holland, 2010; Nelson, 2013). Recent polls show that 50 percent of Americans support the legalization of cannabis and more than 70 percent support legalizing cannabis for medicinal purposes (Newport, 2011; Mendes, 2010). Still, there remains a chasm between those who support legalization and those who remain steadfastly opposed. Even medical professionals seem to have little interest in the new science of cannabinoid medicine. Most with whom I've spoken blame the stigma instead of a lack of interest.

Cannabis patients find themselves between and betwixt, a liminal phase to borrow from anthropologist Victor Turner (1988). To begin using cannabis means an end to some semblance of respectability; you no longer belong to a society in which cannabis users are branded stoners or are imprisoned. Yet, your use of cannabis is a nominally legal use that has not yet been normalized. Patients like me live in ambiguity and a quasi-legal status that provides little encouragement or support. But there is also much potentiality within this liminal space as it offers medical cannabis patients the opportunity to make their private stories public.

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I had been struggling with chronic pain associated with fibromyalgia, osteoarthritis, and several other health issues that compound the pain I experience each day. My doctors had prescribed a cocktail of thirteen prescriptions. The routine added to my health conditions, as I had begun to experience a great amount of gastric distress.

With the help of my physician, I managed to wean myself off all prescription medications. Absent the medications, I found myself in only slightly less gastric distress but

still dealing with constant nausea and frequent vomiting. There was still daily pain in my hips, shoulders, arms, and legs. My tolerance for pain is rather high. I have experienced several natural childbirths and have recovered from serious surgeries. In all instances, I avoided pain medication when at all possible simply because I do not like the side effects. Opiates and narcotics leave me feeling as if I have no control of self—I am spacey, dissociated. More often than not I end up knocked out in bed and unable to perform my life. Pain medication makes it impossible for me to act.

For well over a year, I couldn't eat. I lost 30 pounds off an already thin frame. I couldn't sleep. I was lucky to sleep intermittently for a total of two or three hours each day. I spent nights in pain and roaming the halls of my home, praying for sleep and relief, and wishing the nausea would subside long enough so I could at least eat a couple of saltine crackers. Late one pain-filled night, I began to reminisce about how much better cannabis made me feel. Would it work for me? As I began to investigate online—academic and medical research, books, and patient and caregiver blogs, anything I could get my hands on. It did not take long for me to determine cannabis was worth a try.

I moved to New Mexico to be closer to my oldest daughter and three of my seven grandchildren. Just weeks after moving, I had emergency surgery; doctors discovered the twist in my bowel and expected its removal would remedy the gastric issues. A year after surgery, the nausea persists, I lose weight, I contend with the abdominal and gastric pain that is sometimes more than I think I can tolerate.

In early 2012, with my physician's approval—but not her recommendation—I took my medical records to a “pot-doctor.” Later that day, I mailed an application to the New Mexico Department of Health Cannabis Program. Five weeks later, I became a state-licensed medical cannabis patient under the Lynn and Erin Compassionate Care Act.

My health issues had negatively impacted my relationships with my children, grandchildren, and parents. I'd become isolated and depressed. Medical cannabis gave me relief from the symptoms that separated me from my family, and it gave me control of my life again.

I became a cannabis patient because I was tired of suffering, I came to a place where it was important to put self first, to care about myself and to care for myself—to take control of my medical needs and experiment with a safer option. I care about federal medical cannabis legislation because I am concerned about my health. As a cannabis patient, I also care for other patients, those who also find relief using cannabis, as well as those who may find this medication a viable option in the future, including my own children and grandchildren.

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Researchers say cannabis helps to regulate immunity, inflammation, analgesia, neurotoxicity, appetite, blood pressure, bone formation, body temperature, gastrointestinal

functioning, and physical and psychological responses to stress and trauma, among other potential affects (Baker, Pryce, Giovannoni, & Thompson, 2003; Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997; Holland, 2010; Courtney, 2012). Social scientist Amanda Reiman (2009) calls cannabis an exit drug that helps patients with alcohol or prescription drug dependencies find relief from addiction. Observation in the medical cannabis community supports the reduction of pharmaceutical treatments as a primary benefit for cannabis patients. Some evidence suggests cannabis is less addictive and relatively side-effect-free when compared to most prescription drugs (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997; Holland, 2010; Nelson, 2013). Observation in the medical cannabis community supports the reduction of pharmaceutical treatments as a primary benefit for cannabis patients. Some evidence suggests cannabis is less addictive and relatively side-effect-free when compared to most prescription drugs (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997; Holland, 2010; Nelson, 2013).

There remains much debate about the appropriate amount and strength of cannabis used as medication. I've heard many medical cannabis supporters jest that if cannabis were put in pill form, fewer people would react adversely to it as medication—and, perhaps alternative delivery methods that mimic standard medical practices will help reduce stigma. As the medical cannabis industry grows, patients like me have been afforded options that include non-psychoactive forms for cannabis. In videos published to his Cannabis Foundation website and in Washington Post interviews, William Courtney, a California-based medical doctor, recommends juicing cannabis as a preferred treatment for Crohn's disease, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, and other chronic health conditions. Patients now also have access to alternative delivery systems, such as vaporizers, edible products, oils, tinctures, and salves. Many of these alternatives, oils and salves more specifically, can be produced through an infusion process that does not heat the cannabis, which means the psychoactive properties of the THC are not activated, thus the patient does not experience psychoactive side-effects as the compound remains THC-a (the pre-THC cannabinoid with no active euphoric properties).

I have learned through experimentation that vaporizing instead of smoking cannabis is not only a healthier alternative, but also provides additional relief through pain control. Vaporizing heats the cannabis to the point that the plant evaporates. Patients inhale a mist or vapor—I find it similar to the nebulizer treatments I used to give my son for asthma when he was young. Through vaporizing, I experience a greater body-effect from the medication. In other words, when I vaporize, the aches and pains I experience deep within my joints are relieved more effectively and for longer than if I smoke the cannabis.

I have arrived at this steady daily dosage by adding other cannabis products to my healthcare supply: I have found that a capsule of cannabis oil or a small edible product, such as a cookie or a cracker an hour before I am ready to go to bed helps me sleep and often makes it unnecessary to vaporize cannabis before bedtime. I have also added salves

or topical products to my daily healthcare routine. Cannabis salve has multiple purposes (moisturizer, antibacterial, anti-fungal, and anti-inflammatory) and it is an excellent topical pain reliever.

Even as I experiment with alternative delivery methods, the questions linger: Does changing how one uses cannabis have an effect on the dominant cultural narratives that stigmatizes medical cannabis patients? Is a 72-year-old great-grandmother who uses a cannabis tincture in her tea still a “stoner”? Will others think less of me—a 50-year old grandmother, doctoral student, business consultant, and community leader—because I am a medical cannabis patient and advocate?

Before choosing to conduct research in this arena, I had to accept that regardless of how I perform in each of the roles in my life, others may view me as a different kind of person because I use cannabis. Public advocacy could easily cause me to lose opportunities for employment in my local community. “When any human being acts and interacts in a given context,” writes James Paul Gee (2001), “others recognize that person as acting and interacting as a certain ‘kind of person’ or even as several different ‘kinds’ at once” (p. 99). This explains, partially, why medical cannabis patients often avoid using or discussing their use of cannabis with those we believe would condemn our actions. Turner (1986) writes that

all human act is impregnated with meaning, and meaning is hard to measure, though it can often be grasped, even if only fleetingly and ambiguously. Meaning arises when we try to put what culture and language have crystallized from the past together with what we feel, wish, and think about our present point in life. (p. 33)

Normalizing the performative acts and narratives of medical cannabis patients requires that patients share their stories with others, so that the performances, acts and expectations of medical cannabis users become recognized in new ways—in the ways we feel, wish, and think about ourselves as cannabis patients.

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A study published in *Criminology and Criminal Justice* (Hathaway et al., 2011) examines the stigma associated with cannabis use. One-thousand and eighty-one respondents replied to an initial survey and 92 submitted to in-depth interviews. A two-stage mixed method design was employed to recruit and interview eligible respondents living in the city of Toronto. The researchers were not specifically interested in medical cannabis users; instead, researchers were exploring the recreational use of cannabis. However, as Canada has favorable medical cannabis legislation, a few medical cannabis patients became study subjects.

When asked about the disadvantages of using cannabis, participants in the Hatha-

way study frequently spoke of stigma as an informal source of control. Nearly 70 percent of respondents said they hid their use from someone, typically family or co-workers, to avoid conflict. A third of participants also reported “past encounters with non-users resulting in some status loss or social disapproval” (p. 456). The researchers found that “while ‘reefer madness’ attitudes were typically rejected in favor of more nuanced understandings of the practice, other mainstream sentiments were tacitly accepted or echoed” in participant responses (p. 457).

The researchers used Erving Goffman's work as a frame from which to view the theoretical distinction between normalization and normification to interpret “extra-legal forms of stigma” experienced by regular adult recreational cannabis users in Toronto. Goffman's 1959 work suggests personal identity “resides within the cracks.” Therefore, one's ability to perform in a given situation as normal or ordinary is not the same as normalizing the stigmatized behavior. For Goffman, “full normalization...requires that others be accepting of the stigmatized individual and the treatment of such persons as if they have no stigma” (Goffman qtd. Hathaway et al., 2011, p. 465).

Cannabis use does not designate “a sub-group with a distinct ideology or pattern of behavior,” but instead “its use is but one aspect of a person's daily life” (Hathaway et al., 2011, p. 454). Even while cannabis may not be my “master status” (Gee, 2001, p. 99), I am aware that its use “evokes a deeply-rooted sense of cultural anxiety” (Becker qtd. in Hathaway et al., 2011, p. 454).

When I was raising my family in Oklahoma and Texas, I spent many years fearing that my children might be removed from my home if others discovered I used marijuana. Although I am no longer plagued by this particular fear, I have spoken with many patients—particularly mothers—who are still quite fearful that their use of cannabis as medication will result in a similar fate. Patients have limited legal protection as cannabis is a controlled substance on the federal level and many states offer no protection for medical cannabis use.

Normalization, however, requires patients to risk stigmatization. Those who accept this risk will lead the way and be instrumental in changing the way society views cannabis use.

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As a closeted marijuana user, I concealed my use because I was fearful of social and professional stigmatization. Now as a medical cannabis patient and advocate I must highlight certain parts of my history that I have until recently kept hidden away. This shift in how I present myself to others is both frightening and freeing. I am fortunate to have the support of my friends and family; even my conservative parents have been accepting of my medical cannabis patient status, although they admit they are fearful of others knowing. These fears, as they've expressed them to me, primarily concern loss of

status. My parents fear that others will see me as a less competent, less intelligent woman simply because I use cannabis. Although I do not always find acceptance as a cannabis patient outside of the medical cannabis community, I become stronger and more resolute each time I share my story. In sharing my story, I have developed a stronger identification with this movement and a sense of community with fellow patients, which increases my resolve to find ways to help others. I'm confident that as more patients share our private stories publicly, others will come to have a better understanding of what it means to be a medical cannabis patient—and through this understanding the stigmas associated with cannabis use will dissipate and the use of cannabis as medication will become normalized in our society.

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Nomadic Borderlands

We all have a body; this is obvious. Our lives are structured by our body: When we are hungry, we eat. When we are cold, we cover up. When we are tired, we sleep. Yet how do we actually understand our relationship with our body? Is our body more than these physical indicators? Does our body extend past this physical form? What role does our body play in the understanding of our identity? Do we have only one body or do we create multiple bodies for ourselves? Where does our body end and our environment begin?

In postmodern thought the phrase “nomadic borderlands” refers to the undefined space between what we know as our reality and the “outside” (that which we do not know yet brushes with and influences our experiences). They are nomadic because the boundaries of this space is always moving and changing as the fuzzy edges of our own existence brushes with the fuzzy edges of this undefined space.

Nomadic Borderlands explores the relationships between our bodies and our exterior world, focusing of the shifting edges of where our body (interior) ends and the outside (exterior) world begins.

Jjena Hupp Andrews is an active studio artist and lecturer in the Department of Communications and Visual Art at University of Michigan-Flint, where she has taught both studio and theory courses for more than twelve years. She earned her BFA and MFA from Central Michigan University and is currently completing her PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies at the Union Institute & University.

The Divine (2007). Steel Fencing, Handmade Flax-Abaca Paper. Approx. Life-size.



A Dream of the Ideal (2008). Hand-felted Icelandic Sheep Wool. Approx. 28x16x9 inches.



Fullness (2008). Hand-felted Icelandic Sheep Wool, Trim. Approx. Life-size.



The Evidence of Things Not Seen

I was.

There you were and I was looking at a newspaper with my body in the body of your imagination. The hope of your return kept my blood running through windy plains. I paced up and down a nervous room of frail voices. What if you do not arrive! I assert that you are a cloud that collides with the red mountain. My death is your presence. I wait for the singular moment that will throw me out of gear. In body passing out of its senses I catch the fever of life. All that I lived, the love I felt in the eye, the pursuits of the soul – they happened in a moment when I was away to meet a friend without a name. I rose and fell as happens to waves under the spell of the moon. I rolled in the sand of phantasms. I leaned across railings of a bridge feeling the sensation of going into sunlit waters far below the edges of perception. I do not fall because I reconcile with you. The differences of a lifetime came to view. I could not go down without expressing ineptitude when it came to words. I held you the way a soldier needs to feel the hilt of a sword. I brandished the sword in the wind but the cold would not die. I fought you in the desire that ran through my skin. Your quietness had a deadly effect on me. You had a way of keeping rage within the shape of silences. My worlds that were a collection of images collapsed faster than day in the lap of night. All my losses put together came to one moment. I gave up the one moment to be freed of mortality. I gave up nothing. I was looking for the sound of happiness.

I moved into the heart of forms. I came out of a mirror glued to time. My suffering is illogical or it would never be mine. I squeezed the flesh out of music. I was sad as a

Prakash Kona is a writer, teacher and researcher working as an associate professor in the Department of English Literature at The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. He is the author of the poetry collection *Conjurer of Nights* (Waterloo Press, 2012); the nonfiction volume *Nunc Stans* (Crossing Chaos 2009), and the fiction books *Pearls of an Unstrung Necklace* (Fugue State Press, 2005) and *Streets that Smell of Dying Roses* (Fugue State Press, 2003).

person who misses a lottery by a single digit. The cursing of fate became a pastime for the heart's tongue. I kept pummeling invisible walls with bare hands. My hands turned into a semblance of skeletal images covered with flesh. It seemed unreal until I saw blood flow into the hollowness that became the life of my hands. The child I abandoned to the universe became a singer. The child that was mine suffered. I took the suffering child in my arms. I cried through my prayers. I asked for help. I screamed in the direction of the stars. No one heard me. The world was a lonely place. I asked the abandoned child to pray for her sisters. I regret the illusions that kept my youth occupied.

I was desperate to be normal. I wanted normal joys. I write my end as if I were on stage declaring my innocence to an audience that has already left. I called upon emptiness to vindicate the life I wrought in a moment. The hard part was giving up sadness that smiled through lips as if that is where it was born. Sadness slipped from the face and the dreamless sleeper came out of my death. In my illusion I escaped the clutches of death. In freedom I looked for death to release the face of the moment. The moment would not outlive me. Neither would I be able to come out of absence. The slender paradox of time and infinity was the dominating paradigm of my life. I let infinity replace time because I knew what it meant to be a person in the bliss of love. I took the illusions of living seriously. I go through the loneliness of infinity before I get past time.

Neighborhood.

We live among other selves. The person I feel for the most is my neighbor. I knew she was not one person. The friend together with the enemy became one body. When I say you must believe in yourself it means you are certain of the monsoons to come. In certainty of water running down the face we were young in the afternoon of our first days. The air absorbed our dreams. We walked down the road facing the sea. Backgrounds floated through our bodies. It did not matter where we stood. We could be anywhere in the cosmos locked in one thought that brought me into you. I felt the oneness of a life given to fire in water. I dream of living in the times of your body. Our friendship locks us in an unforgettable tune. One cloud and the wetness of dark feelings. We came out of time and passed out on a bed of straw. Tired we barely noticed the sun warming the room. Out of isolated happiness came the need of a friend. I encase my ecstasy in stories of the miraculous arrival of the guest whose lips I tasted in a dream. I wasn't dreaming. It could be an act of consciousness. I was attributing the quality of dreaminess to the lips of the guest. Love infects the air in the neighborhood. Stories upon stories and lips drunk with the sweetness of the guest who arrived at dawn. In clouds gently breaking apart to let in the light I took the guest into the formless body of the dark escaping into the belly of the sky. Were we ever separate at any point in time? I've little to offer as an individual. I owe the power of dreams to dissect reality to a parachute falling through the heavens. Nothing is faster than light and neither is the parachute. I speculated on the possibility of

moving beyond time. In a parallel lightless universe I had the tenacity of the blind. The neighbor is a body with my eyes. Through her is my knowledge of the sources of water in a traveler's deserts.

True to thyme.

Beauty is the background to cruelty. I reject the cruelty of the beautiful. What happens to man when power enters his bones? The man who seeks to preserve the beautiful is the cruelest of men. He preserves it in the violence of body against body. I prefer being true to thyme rather than beauty. In beauty I'm a man. In thyme I'm a possibility. Beauty is the dogma of truth. In thyme compassion is truth. Why do I need beauty if I can live without malice! The smell of thyme is all there is to meaning. The wars of the beautiful stain the earth with petals drenched in the blood of men. I give up the beautiful for the hills and the lakes. I drop down on the banks of the river and beg forgiveness from death that nature has spared me of. Cruelty I've given the earth that reciprocates with the calm of the mist. I've a long way to go before night catches up with memories of my beating heart. I pass towns where my open eyes barely see anything beside the long spell of the dark. My body is awake. I feel the soft breath of a child in my arms. I feel alive in thyme. I must've been dead for a long time. My passion for beauty died in the dream that over-shadowed sleep.

I came to terms with images to which I brought pain. The reconciliation was a revulsion I felt for the manhood I stood upon in the glare of morning light. Such was the beauty of the morning that my feet stuck to the ground. Injured in the foot I was seized with fear. I did not want to die no matter what. Habit brought the beautiful together with the cruel. I was lost to thyme. I was vindictive for the same reason that I brushed my teeth and took a shower. It was a sign of cleanliness. I cannot bear a polluted body. The body had to be rid of the pollutant. I took the moral burden of making a clean world. I was destined to torment the ugly until nothing of it was left on earth. I keep the beautiful the within bounds of the self. In murder I found the answer to the question of the beautiful. I lost nights to uncertainty. I regain them in the murders of the beautiful. I burnt and plundered villages and towns until the truth of thyme occurred in passing. I saw my reflection in the greater cruelty of another man. I saw who I am in the twinkling of eyes that spoke little even as they acted out the worst forms of sadism. The smile hurt me because it resembled mine and could've been me. The music of evil roused in me one last cry of loss. It is neither the beautiful I seek nor the cruel. I call upon the kindness of water to forgive men the unforgivable need to possess the scent of thyme.

Hide-and-seek.

I made it look like I was born to hide. Hiding is language as seeking is nature. I hide in what I say. I seek what I never find – the person that I'm not. The conviction of your

existence is in doubt. I feel you with the senses. I know the breath of your mouth coming out of my tongue. The need to believe is hunger and thirst with equal force pulling the body apart. In the need looking for succor I reject you though you are all that I seek. Your suffering deludes me into closing my eyes. I'm far from letting you tear the blinds covering my sense of self. I reconcile the personae of my body with the logic of superstition. I find that more acceptable than you being the person that I am. I cannot bear to believe that you are me. I cannot be normal. I fear the loss of sanity. I fear suffering in your place. My body is used to delusions of itself as a dreamer of elephants. The poor thing does not know better. I dare not disappoint the body by bringing you into my life. I seek you as death seeks life. I'm not willing to die so that you live.

Beneath.

I was standing beneath a streetlight watching rain fall with the smallness of rice. I'm willing to live in the pessimism of a body with no truth. I hide from you. I hide from love that escapes the prison of a word. I hide from all that is less than obvious. I know the world I'm intoxicated with. I am the dolphin in both air and water. I command fantasies to become stages for audiences to gaze at my childishness. What flows beneath the knowledge I acquired through replication of patterns of roses is an undercurrent of silence upon silence. I shirk away from what does not turn into sound. I was born with a cry and there was no need for silence. I was silent in the few moments when I did not hear my breathing. I jumped with fear in the bones. I cannot bear not being real and yet in wild undercurrents I could not recognize anything that closely resembled me. Silence was another world from a dark period. I'm used to accumulating feelings that burst into words when I no longer contain them.

Triumphalism.

Trite is the sun of yesteryears. Memory is the invention of culture. It is musical for someone like me who takes pleasure in tunes dancing in the head. The little devils that are sounds make the day go faster. I'm simplistic when it takes so much to be simple. I turn on my feet spinning through untimely orbits. I'm zigzagged for short of reasons to go in a straight line. I'm true to voices that are not mine. Alone I'm sinister. In company I'm as sinister as you are. Stranger to strangers I'm stranger to the one in the mirror that cannot hold itself from breaking down each time I look at it. I walk with a raised head to watch birds. I fall into ditches dug for nobody. I'm suspicious of my deviousness. I'm amazed by the ease with which I walk into stories of betrayals. My life is one long moment of complicity in a series of murders I did not commit. I do the most unforgivable act with innocence that makes you cry. The child in me cultivated a taste for triumphalism. I cannot help being the sweetness of all I see. For a hurt I eliminate villages born out of centuries of imagination. I cannot bear the isolation of beauty. I preferred the ugliness

of cities where I disappear into a lane with barely livable houses. I walk into the house with a cinema poster in it. The union of opposites happens behind closed doors. The boy who took me to the house straight from the bus stop pulled a cigarette out of my pocket. I wanted instant gratification in the body of the prostitute. The demands never come to an end. The prostitute knew what it took to be one. She referred to herself as the 'family type.' I smiled at the appropriateness of the term. The family created the prostitute. I never knew how wooden a body could be until I felt the one on the floor. I took her with vehemence of the dying. The rules were laid out and she was in no mood to compromise. A job had to be done as far as she was concerned. I finished my part and went out waiting for the friend in the other room. An old woman was threshing rice. I watched listlessly.

Compos mentis.

A good part of life goes with you out of your mind. Rarely do you go by the plan made in the clarity of twilight. You're posing for a photograph. The senses are deviants by nature. The critical thing in my body is a line of sensuality coming on the page with irony and transcendence. You never write for a person. You write for an abstraction into which a person is made to fit as one puts a photograph in an empty frame. Artists are makers of frames. I saw myself in lines of writers who never dreamt of my existence. No one is fully compos mentis. I weathered situations that left me crawling for my humanity. No one has seen a calm river and fail to repent for the excesses of life. The detachment of water is the mind absorbed in the dark. In waters far from thoughts we spilt blood that did not belong to our clan. We extended brutality to women that failed to keep the integrity of body and soul. Manhood is a process combining history and environment. No one is born a man.

Inflections.

In wine I felt the voice beckon me to dusk. The voice changed as night progressed in the intensity of subtle variations. I was counting the frequencies in a love maker's voice. At the point I felt silence I knew the answer to the night. It was a brightly lit room with a carpet in the middle. I promised myself never to experience the infinite without wine in the background to bring me back to the real world. I was afraid to transcend without the strength of wine. The wine in the voice took my heart. I rejected irony as I approached the body without limits. Through the voice I figured out the length of the night. Wine, myself and the night of the voice – three factors and the number of rooms kept increasing proportionately to accommodate the music from the window. I was bewilderingly close to the forgetting that kicks the bucket of time back into the dark well of the cosmos. Go any way you like but you come to the point that is outside the town. The outsider is an artist when it comes to memorizing ways. You never forget the ways of the body that become one with yours in the wine of forgetting. You return to the body as one remains

an outsider for no reason. I knew I was talking to the dust in a voice without inflections and light from the hills staring at me as I contemplated beauty that passion resurrected in the corpse of time.

Sketchy.

I collected rare instances of silence to make a sketch of a perfect life. I left it incomplete because I had dreams to dab the sketch. I was wistful during late afternoons and sensual as the night fell into my ears with the cricket in the background. The dance was the stroke of many feet in rhythm. At midnight there was nothing left but wait for the dawn. I asked for color to make the eye lively. I strove for memories of hands moving upon the skin of a lying body. In the marshes light takes the color of strangers looking for a time outside time. We were young and rivers ran inconclusively. The faith in creation was a moment. Something had to be created for such faith to be possible. The recreation was a face in a white moment of sunlight. The spirit of art came into hands that suffered. I held the raging heat of the times to my bosom. How could the mother let go the child in the surging tide to come! I preserved what I could of moments of madness in the soul. The waters took me past the rock. Consciousness had no meaning to me other than the spirit. The light I perceived was the abyss that rose from the cave of the spirit to worlds at hand. The spirit embraced bleak thorns with love of music from a sensitive hand. The knowledge of spirit is greater than the attempt at recreation. The joy of recreation is in imitation of the face envisioned in fire as it breaks out at the center of a forest in a valley. Light rose from the ashes to the stars. A prison without windows is a tomb. I'm entombed in the sweetness of spirit. I rejoice in stars shining through the ashes of the senses. In bodies across time I make homes. My aloneness is spirit that cannot be identified. In death I'm connected to life. The sketchy portraits I make are spirit in waiting for the gloom of shadows to pass away. It would not matter if I never existed to sing the song of infinite praise. My life is a frail occasion in a sea of occurrences. The sea and my life serve the blankness of imagination before death becomes sleep.

Time capsule.

I don't have a language of my own. I keep telling myself that such a language does not exist. Death has taken the irony out of words. Pain simplifies the truth. The mad person wants to go further than time. Madness was my life on roads where people are tokens of laughing faces. I'm touched by the seriousness of made-up rooms. I could die or kill for them. My self is invested in walls I bequeath children. My dreams are edgeless spaces. The negotiation I imagined taking place in the blood is false. Civilization is another name given to failures of the spirit. Contaminated legacies are unnatural. My humanity is my will to renunciation. I negate the illusion that comes in the way of the spirit. I create for the joy that connects my body to the dead and the unborn. I associate the security of

comfort with the distance it creates between past and future with me lost in an isolated present. I don't reject technology. I reject inequality. I don't reject the senses. I reject sensuality. I don't reject the body. I reject whatever forgets the spirit. I don't reject happiness. I reject the happiness that comes without sharing. I don't reject pain. I reject that which drugs pain to sleep in the guise of ideology. I reject desire but not passion. I reject attachment but not love. I reject institutions but not people. I could never reject individual persons. I embrace the communes of strangers even if they are made of two persons who believe that a single act of sacrifice is meaningful to the universe. Interestingly I'm the novelist who likes to parade her likes and dislikes. Either I reduce the scope of the novel or poke fun at the simplicity of the genre. I did both, which is what Solomon the wise or the Buddha would've done.

Decanter.

The instant I forget wine I've given up thinking of decanters. Liberation is a comic instant of merriment. You catch me dancing without a glass in hand. What flows in my body is wine not blood. I respect intoxication. I cannot be a poet but for that. I make a stone sing but I cannot think in an orderly fashion. I blame the drunkenness of the body for that. I die in an odd corner of the night. I wouldn't know what took me away while I was praising you with lips of the spirit. You're my drunkenness and without you I'm a useless decanter meant to be recycled in a factory.

The Door and the Staircase.

I was elusive when it came to descriptions. I narrowed the degree of visualization to monkish levels. I was an ascetic in the sparseness with which I took objects seriously. It is never easy to be voluble about what you face each day – brutalized landscapes that are masculine in bitterness. My description is facile. It is easier to betray than be factitious. Betrayal is performance that goes against self-preservation. There is no heroism in being untruthful to an audience of liars. I got the idea of a door and a staircase from a movie. The misreading of the colonized is unwittingly profound. The door I enter does not lead to the staircase. The staircase is nowhere near the door. In the imagination I see both of them standing parallel to each other. I feel as though I must go through one magically only to realistically come out of the other. That is how I see words. Each sentence is parallel to the other one. A sentence is either a door or a staircase. The disconnection is maintained. I make a frame of disconnections. I keep alive the paradox that makes me an alternate writer. I see the thing so obvious that it blurs the eyes like the poverty of the poor or the domination of men. Passion makes me say things in spurts. I cannot imagine doing things any other way without being pretentious.

§§

Prime Mover.

Everything boils down to the eyes. Cool water on a summer afternoon and the eyes bursting with life. My fainting fits begin with the eyes. I'm exhausted because I haven't eaten all day. Bread and salt dilemmas are real as far as the eyes are concerned. Who knows the hunger of the heart better than the creature sleeping beyond my eyes! At some point I ignored my eyes. I refused to look in any direction except inward and then I wasn't looking at all. I moved the world that I saw in the blindness I was born with. I often thought about the real world – if it really existed at all. How different was that world from the one I saw with the eyes used to making stories. Was childhood real? Were pain and anger real? Was the 'I' who imagined death in the bones real? My hatred of God – was it real? Were the eyes of friends that hurt my sensitive skin real? Was the music or the love real? The millions of times I felt mocked and forgotten for no reason – were they real? They are real in the compassion I feel toward strangers. I'm no stranger to myself. I inhabited this body all my life. If death is a process of quitting I make peace with the stranger I feared without reason. I gave my blessings to the eyes that barely uttered a word. I saw beauty in the ugliness of life at the bottom where men and women managed to keep their humanity from drowning in a bile-green sea. From a scholar on the gaze I became a poet of the eyes. The inhumanity of others is the possibility of what I'm capable of doing given the situation of the other person. This does not justify inhumanity. It is one reason why I must love you unconditionally or not love at all. I'm moved by all that I do not see with the faith that I'm at the center of the troubled heart of the world. Eyes in the dark float upon silence.

Captivity.

Admonish me as much as you like and I stick to surfaces. The insecurity is obvious. I say things and leave them incomplete like a broken track in the middle of a forest. I think it is strategic. You laugh at my impunity. Time is not a factor. I don't condemn the pleasure of dreaming. I invested my being in dreams. The love I believed in came from streets that did not make a fetish of the past as I do. The oppressed squeezed through life as through prison gates. I'm struck by the dream that makes them human in their quirkiness. In the demeaning dirt of the world there is a timeless moment for one who shares the plight of those pushed into drudgery. I broke the power of drudgery with love I felt for the poor whose work gave reality a basis in truth. There's a point beyond which a person embraces death rather than accept to live without reasons. That is an intensely human moment for any person. You're encountering death that is musical as life itself. Bred in captivity the bird chose to fly into the dark. I drew the contours of my kingdom from the moon to the horizon. I was centered in the moon. I changed with progression of cycles. In the horizon I saw the circumference of dreams. I grew old looking at faces as I traveled while being looked at in the curious way that we identify with strangers.

Years.

Rain spread into the makeup giving a distorted look to the face. I don't sleep easily for lack of music in the eye. I look straight to impose thoughts on you that avert my gaze. I was trying to learn what you felt about me. My breast aches for a clean face. I never saw how my face looked without makeup. I touch it with a slight gesture before I look in the mirror. Years melt the faces of my face. No music comes out of distorted lines. An unbridgeable gap is formed between thoughts of others and who I am. I dig a hole in the earth of my soul that I may find you in the gray sea. I saw the road to you within myself. The web of past tense lost its charm. It kept me too much in closeness to the color of sensation. Green leaves turn gray with spring bequeathing her child to autumn. Things go by and the return does not assure that the letters you posted bring answers to questions as you drink music of swaying cornfields with lips of wine. Hands made histories that isolated language and the mind from working hands. I restored morality to the hands of history. The future belongs to children that I did not bring into this world. There might be other worlds, but going to one without children is a pointless one. Timelessness is a dream of the body. Nature refuses persistence. The mind bends toward death. The longing to cross the sea is a feeling that I could find the horizon. Islands along the way and countries where the sad eyes of men are momentarily awake to the sight of a rose from a distant past. I lived your past. I dreamt your future. Your look made me cry. It wasn't your look. The way you placed your hands close to your breast and looked at the sea. It was a scene from a movie I imagined. I stopped fighting my changing body. The romantic turmoil of my hungry body showed me the excesses of stressing through sleep. I counted midnight hours to make the years of my life. The instants before sleep were particularly poignant full with expectations. I talked to you before the dark took me into the eye. I'm vulnerable to the dagger in your hand. The dagger is vulnerable to my sleeping body. I leave stains that change the color of the dagger forever. Out of grayness of age I made red kites that flew in the breeze of infinity.

Flotsam.

My heart accommodated spaces in the suffering of the spirit. Though I never went past the shore I was nowhere within visibility of passersby that had homes to reach before night. Without looking forward to home I fall asleep at odd places out of exhaustion of keeping the eyes open to dust, smoke and litter. Home has a bed and a body in bed. I took bodies as they passed my sight. I gave bodies names and made stories out of lives. No one reaches home just like that. There was something missing before I left for the outside. I bring that missing sensation to the house I step in. I rest on a full belly. I sleep and wake to fears of what might happen to the body. The fact that nothing ever happens kills me. This nightmare of a walker past midnights, a friend of dogs and beggars, one who sleeps to die, the body denied of being, the silent philosopher, one that is no one, dis-

carded by idiocies of histories, not useful to prisons or madhouses, out of the spectacle, essentially a non-performer, one that haunts mirrors, an existence without language, the zero of vacuum, I embrace the death before life set in.

Gossamer.

In joy I was light as an unsaid word. I imagined the word waiting behind the lips of my friend. My friend teases by never opening the lips lest the word should escape and come to me. Teased to the point when I'm about to cry I felt the word dancing with light steps behind lips that smile. In a smile that conceals a word I felt the greenness of hillsides and blue wind across plains coming from the sea. These are scenes that one locked in the frenzy of cities imagines to keep moods alive. The friend is real. So is the sea, the green and the blue. I build scenarios as acts of meaningful resistance. I argue against cities as I do with the patriarchies of villages. I speak of communes. I understand communes as a society free of the evil of money and markets built on money. A society that rejects power as a basis to seeking love is the alternative. In suffering is a dream-like sweetness. Among friends I work out the basis of a life that retains the lightness of gossamer.

Nil.

When the spring of death arrives lovers turn betrayers. I'm on the verge of celebrating the coming of roses and poses appropriate for red, pink and blue. I forsook joys of arrival for the pain of departure. I was playing one game with different names. Water and light are preliminary intuitions. I fell for the wisdom of dark with a tinge of dryness. The cry of birth echoes in the silence of death. The mediocre think while the sensitive imagine. I'm the persecuted one tempted to hold my breath and save the thought of persecution from moving out of my body. Without an audience I'm in a desert of white moonlight. I build a stage where I breathlessly watch myself perform the last tango. What I was doing was a parody of a parody. I made jokes on masks. I made jokes on jokes that were not funny. I cared for the audience I loved. I laughed at how I could care for such a bunch of losers. I laughed louder than ever at my passivity that I took seriously for a profound gesture.

Choreographer.

The masks of the dying are fabulous in comparison to the colors of living. I don't meet my friend in death. I meet the friend in life. In death for a moment we're actors with the smile of oneness. The two dancers are the function of diverse intensities. There are moments of union that never complement one another. Call it one dance with two dancers or one face with two eyes. If I look in two directions they would be two dancers on two stages. In the mind I feel diversions. My friendship is closer to death than flowers on street corners for lovers on the way home. The signs of affection do not disturb the

twoness of things. I choose dying as much as living for you. Either way I'm drenched in rain of love. The dance of disunities comes alive as a spot in the eye. I dissolve and come out as two different beings. Either I'm male or I'm female. You fall in love with one body. In case I'm female you love the dance of resistance. In case I'm male you love the power of motion in the body leaning to the feminine. Oneness is how my body swells in making love to images. The disunity of forms is in the nature of things. The written word is not the same as silence. They are two snakes wound together on the dancing floor. I wait for music to stop because disunity kills me. My body is hurt. My neck is broken and dying is not easy. I stay awake until one sleep moves into another.

salvage

And Muss saved, rem salvavit,

in Spain

il salvabile.

Canto CV

you have the story of the shipwreck
engrained upon you as the suck of babes
from the mother's womb practically
and so forth and the remedy so there all of us are
and the conditions of the shipwreck the exploiters

ahoy

throw out the lifeline with Giotto's O at the end of it
O O O that Shakespeherian Rag
you know the one
brush up your Shakespeare and the women you will wow
hum a few bars and the boys in the band will fake it

shipmate

I give you these mates lively on things as masts
casks rigging sails truncheons you mean davits
I mean belaying pins boy and don't you forget it
on the briny sea waves on wind and weather boy and clouds

the wreck of the Hesperus

or what's it called in Humphrey Jennings
half-sunk in Thames with the river down
and no water in the hoses for the incendiaries
ay they drew upon it then for God's sake
there you have the answer Son the celestial city

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of the Union Institute & University PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies Program**

The Old Yellow Dog

Nathan was frozen. He carried a cold shotgun with mittened hands. He followed the procession out of the woodland of his childhood like a performer in a parade. It was a sad parade, like a funeral parade. The weary men tramped through the brushwood on and on across treacherous uneven ground leaving their tracks in the fallen snow. Nathan was by far the youngest of them. He was only a boy, and he watched the medical techs up ahead through a boy's eyes. Those uniformed men were breathless and resting of their burdensome load. Nathan circled around them with the other frozen fellows. All of them were armed with rifles. He could see the labored wisps of breath coming from the mouths of the responders as they leaned heavily upon the stretcher. And upon that stretcher was strapped the covered body of his friend and neighbor, Butch Lester.

At last the troop was rested. The men moved once again through the snowy thicket. Nathan caught a glimpse as they trudged along, or perhaps the shadow of a glimpse of yellow fur through the brush. Get away! He tried to project the words in silence. He glanced around wondering if anyone else had seen the dog. It seemed that no one had. No one was talking. Everyone seemed lost in their thoughts. Heads were cast downward. Steps were being minded on the slippery forest floor. Nathan risked another look but didn't see any other sign of the dog. Maybe he hadn't seen anything at all.

Finally, the crowd of hunters made it out of the woods. Nathan noticed that shards of ice clung to the beards of the men. Their camouflage clothing clashed with the he police-like uniforms that the medical techs wore. This time, the medical techs sat their load on the frozen ground beside Nathan's grandfather's hog lot. They stood catching their breaths. Jay Lester patted his brother Rolland on the back and then draped an arm across

Robert Ratliff has a BA in Writing and Literature and an MA in Creativity Studies from the Union Institute & University, where he is now pursuing the PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Humanities and Culture. He is the author of two short novels, *The Dinner Party* and *The Bookmakers at Eden*, both published in 2013.

his shoulders and held him close for a moment. Then he broke that embrace and walked on, passed the hog lot. He did not slow down as he passed by the smoke house and the peach trees. The bee hives standing between the trees were quiescent and covered in six inches of new snow.

One by one, the others left too—a dozen in all—thirteen in, twelve out. They all left silently. There was no talk. There wasn't anything to say. Soon they'd all made their way across the barnyard to the driveway. They got into their trucks and started them up, and then vanished down the snow covered road toward Jay's farm. The Overbays were the closest neighbors. Nathan watched them pulled into their driveway a hundred feet down the road.

The two medical techs once again heaved up the heavy stretcher and sallied on across the snowfall to where their ambulance was parked in the pull-off just across the road. Nathan's grandmother strode out of her kitchen onto the back porch of the farmhouse alert to the uneasy quietness. Across the bare garden space, that same uneasy quietude brought Hazel Lester out of her house. The wind blew through Hazel as she stood like a wraith staring across the way at Rolland. Then her eyes followed the trail of the medical techs to the ambulance, into which they were loading Butch's body.

Hazel's cry pierced the crisp snowy afternoon. Nothing had been said, nothing needed to be said. The silence said it all. Nathan soldiered across the barnyard bearing his shotgun in tired arms and climbed the concrete steps to the back porch where his grandmother stood like a statue in her long-sleeve cotton print dress. She put an arm around the boy and hugged him to her side. "You're just about froze," she said. "You come on in and get warm by the stove."

Nathan and his grandmother went inside to a warm kitchen while his grandfather and cousin Rolland talked in the cold of the morning. His grandmother busied herself making hot coffee. Nathan propped his 410 shotgun gingerly in the corner by the tall stool upon which he usually sat at mealtimes. "I don't want that shotgun no more," he said. He pulled off his hunting mittens and laid them on the painted stool. He unzipped his camouflage hunting jacket. He pulled it off his shoulders and laid it atop his mittens.

"What happened out there?" his grandmother asked.

"Butch fell on his shotgun and killed himself." Nathan said.

"I knew you were too young to go on that hunt," said his grandmother. "Why did Basil take you along? You're only ten years old."

Then the screen door screeched open and Nathan's grandfather pushed inside and closed the cold wind out behind him. Nathan took up his shotgun from the corner and held it out to his grandfather. "I don't want this shotgun no more," he said.

Basil eyed the boy thoughtfully. "You clean that weapon and put it on the rack," he said. "And I don't want to hear no sass."

Nathan nodded and carried the shotgun down the hallway. His footfalls clunked

upon the parquet floor. He took off his snow boots and sat them in their place. He gathered his cleaning kit and sat at the mirrored desk in the corner of his bedroom. He carefully unloaded the weapon just as his grandfather had taught him. And then he took up the brush from his kit and dabbed it in a little gun oil. At last, he began scrubbing the carbon off the weapon's bolt.

At last, Nathan ran an oiled patch through the bore of that shotgun. He remembered the day that his grandfather first taught him to shoot. It was back in the summer when Nathan's days began early. He and his grandfather were up long before breakfast. They milked the old Jersey cow. Nathan squirted warm fresh milk at the barn cats and laughed. Grandfather scolded him a little for being wasteful. Then he grinned. They took grain to the steers in the pasture. They fed the chickens. Fed the hogs. All before his grandmother called them in to breakfast.

For her part, Mary prepared fried eggs with salt and pepper and gravy. She baked fresh biscuits. She fried ham and sausage. There were sliced tomatoes on the side. There was fresh blackberry jam. And honey. Nathan was starved and ate a heaping plateful. His grandfather enjoyed a plateful, as well, and, afterward, sipped a cup of hot coffee while his grandmother washed up the dishes. Nathan had fresh milk to drink. After breakfast they all went out to work in the garden, Grandmother too.

In the garden there were long straight rows of sweet peas. There were half-runners attached to stakes and cucumbers growing in mounds. There was a lettuce patch and hills of yellow squash. There were rows of pinto beans. Rows of zucchini. There were tall tomato plants and potato hills. There were turnips, corn, and beets. The three weeded with hoes. Nathan took a break about midmorning and peeled a fresh turnip, and he ate it with a little salt from his grandmother's kitchen. His grandmother brought ice water and fresh lemonade to the shade of the big weeping willow in the yard beside the garden. Nathan had played under that old tree since he could remember among the ants and spiders and all sorts of bugs that loved that tree too.

After supper, his grandfather got Nathan and took him out past the smokehouse. "We need to have a talk," he said.

Nathan looked up at his grandfather solemn-like.

"Roland tells me that you've been feeding that old yellow bitch from the woods out back of the hog lot. Is this so?"

Nathan shook his head no.

"Don't lie to me, boy. Now, have you?"

"I like that dog," Nathan said. "She got between me and a sick fox once and saved me from getting bit. So I friended her. I fed her just like you said. But I bet it was Butch that told on me."

"That's a wild dog, boy. And it runs with a pack. Roland's afraid they'll start stealing chickens."

“That old yellow girl ain’t stole no chickens. Maybe a weasel will steal a chicken. Maybe a chicken hawk will. Maybe a fox will.”

Basil sighed; he ran a hand through his shock of gray hair. “You wait here, boy,” he said. “It’s time you learned to shoot.”

Nathan thought he was about to get his hide tanned, but no, his grandfather was really going to teach him to shoot. Nathan had waited for that moment all his life. He remembered all the times when Jay and Rolland and the neighbors had come to his grandfather’s after work. Or sometimes they came on Sunday afternoons. Sometimes they brought guns to show or to trade. Nathan’s grandfather had one of the finest gun collections in the county. Sometimes they came without guns to talk and look at his grandfather’s guns. Nathan had always been there. But nobody had paid him any attention much. But now he bet they would. Now, he’d know how to shoot.

At last, his grandfather showed up with a .22 lever action rifle. “Look here,” he said. He showed Nathan how to load cartridges into the ammo tube. Then he put the weapon in the boy’s hands.

“What do I do with it?” Nathan asked.

His grandfather showed him how to hold the weapon firmly in the crook of his shoulder. “Now, focus on the front sight, and line it up in the center of the rear sight. Now hold the front sight in front of your target. Now stop breathing and squeeze the trigger.”

Nathan took aim at a bean can on a post and fired. He hit the target dead center. His grandfather smiled. Nathan cocked the weapon and fired again. A miss. “You lost your form,” his grandfather said. “Get back in your stance.” By evening, Nathan was shooting fairly well. His grandfather’s coaching had paid off. The busy summer days passed quickly. Some shooting was a part of Nathan’s daily routine most every day.

Fall of the year came around and, before Nathan knew it, the garden was picked clean. His grandfather had killed a hog, and the hams and shoulders were hanging in the smokehouse. The tang of thick camp smoke was in the air. His grandmother had stocked the shelves in the basement with canned tomatoes. There were canned green beans and potatoes. Canned beets. Canned pintos and corn. There were canned carrots and squash. The freezer was filled with Turnips. There was corn on the cob. There was bacon. Sausage. Side meat and tenderloin. There was wild game that Nathan and his grandfather had brought home from the forest. Turkey, Venison, and Rabbit.

Outside, the summer greenery had turned to ruby red, sparkling gold, and lavender. Nathan spent his days in school, which he liked almost as much as he liked shooting. He spent his evenings communing with those brilliant fall colors. Then a chilly wind sent Nathan indoors. It blew all those russet leaves to the cold ground.

A snow took pity come November and covered all the auburn undergrowth. One Saturday morning his grandfather woke Nathan up early. “Dress warm,” he said. “And load your shotgun with some buckshot.”

Nathan was surprised to see Jay Lester and his brother Rolland when he made it to the kitchen. Earl and Jerry and Carter were sitting at the table sipping coffee. Butch was sitting on Nathan's favorite stool. Nathan was uneasy. He'd never been around Butch much except when he was about to get into trouble. Graham Overbay and his son Michael and three men Nathan didn't know were in the dining room at the big table that was used only for company. His grandmother was busy keeping all their coffee cups filled. She gave Nathan a jelly biscuit, and then she gave him another one wrapped in a napkin to go in the pocket of his hunting jacket.

At last, all the men drained their cups. There was much nervous talk. Nathan could feel an excitement he'd never before felt. Everyone had their hunting rifles with them. Carried like weapons of war. He noticed that his grandfather carried his Benelli semi-automatic 12 gauge. It was the first time Nathan had ever seen him carry that prized possession. Out the door the men filed into the bite of the frigid winter morning.

Across the barnyard, they trudged through the stinging wind toward the woodland. Nathan's retreat and refuge. That enchanted forest where he'd roamed and played since he was old enough to walk. He had hunted there with his grandfather many times. But now he strode silently with the others. Each man was an experienced hunter and knew the value of a noiseless approach. Past the chicken house they marched in a single-file line. Past the smokehouse. Past the peach trees and the beehives. Past the hog lot and into the snowy wood, they walked.

Nathan's grandfather was known to be a skilled tracker. It was said that Basil Ratliff could track a snake across the surface of a pond. So Basil led the way. On and on the troop traveled through the dense snowy forest. At last, Basil stopped short and pointed to his right. Jay Lester headed that way, Rolland and Graham Overbay followed close behind. The others followed suit moving in single file. At last the men encircled a thick patch of wild blackberry.

The brush was thick, so Nathan couldn't see his grandfather over to his left. But Butch was crouched about forty feet to his right by a Hawthorne tree. Then the dogs caught wind of the men and the howling began. Nathan didn't know exactly how many dogs there were. He guessed about a dozen or fourteen. About the same number as the number of men who were there to kill them.

Then the first shots rang out, some of them finding their marks. High pitched wails of pain reverberated through the wood. Then the thick brushwood in front of Nathan began to rustle. A large brown and white dog ran in a panic straight toward him. A big male. The dog saw him and turned and scrambled the other way, toward Butch. Nathan waited for the animal to turn again, but it growled a fierce growl instead and continued straight for Butch. Butch raised his weapon, but Nathan heard no report. The terrified look on Butch's face told Nathan that his weapon had misfired. Still the dog dashed onward.

Nathan raised his shotgun and trained his sights just below the dog's right ear and squeezed the trigger. The dog jerked his head once before falling over and lying still on the frozen forest floor. Butch stood staring at the dead animal as it lay just a few feet from him. A crimson patch formed on the snow around it. Then the thicket in front of Nathan began to rustle once again.

This time it was the old yellow dog that Nathan had befriended. It was breaking toward the area between Nathan and Butch. Nathan decided quickly to let it pass. All it wanted was to get away. To his horror, however, Butch had his sights on the dog. "Don't shoot," Nathan yelled. He headed over toward Butch.

Butch eyed Nathan coolly. "You shot one," he said. "I get to shoot one too." He fired and barely missed the animal.

Nathan closed the distance between them. "I said don't shoot." He stepped up and put a hand on Butch's weapon knocking his aim askew.

Butch pushed Nathan back and set his sights once again on the dog, but it was too late. The old yellow dog had disappeared into the thicket. Butch ran furiously over to where the dog had vanished. "Let it go," Nathan yelled.

That's when Butch stepped in a hole obscured by the snow and tumbled headlong down an embankment. Nathan ran toward where Butch was floundering in the snow drift. But something was horribly wrong. Butch's shotgun cart wheeled under him and the barrel wound up pointed under his chin. His finger was still on the trigger. Nathan saw the blast like it was a gory figment of war. He didn't remember hearing it.

Nathan saw that muffled, exploding blast again as he sat at his desk. He steadied himself by focusing on cleaning his shotgun. At last, he considered how the men had reacted to what had happened. They'd been sorely aware of the gravity of the nature of the accident. There was no doubting this. But the thing that surprised Nathan was that no one examined the role the gun played. No one seemed to have given this a single thought. The gun was an accepted fixture in the household. He gave his own shotgun one last polishing, just as his grandfather had taught him to do, before hanging the weapon on the gun rack.

Sergeant O'Donnell

For Charles

In the photo
Your camouflaged face, green-brown,
a smile,
an AK47.
Somalia.
In one month,
in the bullet-pocked hospital,
you delivered eighty babies.
All dead.
And they called this a relief mission.
Who exactly were you relieving?

Marianna Boncek is an English teacher and author of *Gone Missing in New York* (Schiffer Publishing, 2011). She who holds a BA from Vermont College, an MA from Goddard College and is pursuing the PhD at the Union Institute & University.

Now, years later,
you sit across from me
in a chic Woodstock restaurant
eating tiny rolled grape leaves,
drinking sparkling water
with lemon.
You remember the Thanksgiving
one of the other nurses
spent the whole day
sifting worms from the flour
with a rusty window screen
because for just one fucking day
you should have bread without worms .
When the waiter brings us warm
pita with hummus, I offer you some.
You turn it down.

The day you had to guard
the front gate of the hospital
from an attack,
back against the door
clip in your mouth,
your surgical mask still hanging under your chin,
you wondered if
you killed more than you ever saved
because you didn't save many.
For one moment, you look across
the table at me,
forget where you are
forget my name.

Tonight you will dream
of the last transport
leaving Mogadishu.
No matter how many times you
try to get on it
you never seem to be able
to leave.

An Afrofuturist Africana Womanist Affair

The Sexy Part of the Bible

Kola Boof

Akashic Books, 2011

It's easy to assume that Kola Boof's 2011 novel *The Sexy Part of the Bible* contains long-lost messages from ancient sages, and perhaps it does, but not in the way one would think. The title, according to an audio recording of Boof discussing the book, comes from seventeenth century sermons delivered by priests of the Church of England and other churches to remind sailors and traders who were taking African women as wives that "white women are the virtue in the bible, her hand is fair; but the black man's mother is the sex in the bible, her hand was wicked" (Boof). The title serves as an assertive reclamation of African women's bodies against the back-

drop of colonial history. Reclaiming oneself, or a group of people, pushing back on the dominant cultural hegemonic narrative and reappropriating discourse as a way to not only name yourself, but place yourself in a space that upends the dominant narrative is powerful. What Boof does, in titling her novel, is confront the historicized devaluing of Black women and their bodies. She also challenges the notion of the binary construction of Black womanhood versus white womanhood. In *The Sexy Part of the Bible*, Boof uses an Afrofuturist and womanists metaphorical constructs to contest and up-end the notion that Black women, and thus their bodies, are wicked.

Afrofuturism engages in a "critique [of] not only the present-day dilemmas of people of color, but also... interrogate[ing]

Aiesha Turman is the founder and director of The Black Girl Project, a New York-based grassroots organization that offers workshops, labs, a Leadership Academy, as well as an annual Sisterhood Summit to more than 100 young women from the metropolitan New York and Mid-Atlantic regions. Turman has an MA in liberal studies from SUNY Empire State College and is pursuing the PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies at Union Institute & University.

and re-examine[ing] the historical events of the past” (“Afrofuturism,” 2011). I contend that Boof’s novel is an Afrofuturistic vision of west Africa that is a warning to readers about what can happen when colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, colorism, homophobia, patriarchy, and misogyny go unchecked and unchallenged. Academically, Afrofuturism has roots in the black American experience. However, with the spread of the American brand of blackness across the diaspora, its definition— “[s]peculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century technoculture—and more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future” (Dery 182)—is also not only applicable to Africa, but wherever Africans have been dispersed across the globe. Afrofuturism both in the academy and in the arts utilizes speculative fiction as a framework, and the end goals are also political in that they seek to “recover lost black histories,” “think about how those histories inform a whole range of black cultures today,” and “think about how these histories and cultures might inspire new visions of tomorrow” (Yaszek 2). In *Sexy Part*, Boof pursues the routes of Afrofuturism and Africana womanism to reclaim a space for black women, position them in a location of power, and envisions a tomorrow where black women are not objectified, or externally constructed as the other.

Womanism positions black women at the center, the norm. It allows her

to engage in the process of individuation, which positions her as a full human, worthy of all the rights that come with humanity. Womanism respects her as an individual and by centering black women, womanism also removes the white gaze, the lens through which much of the Western world is viewed (Phillips, 2006). While womanism is a space to begin to explore Boof’s work, Africana womanism, which was coined by University of Missouri professor Clenora Hudson-Weems in the late 1980’s, Hudson-Weems writes:

The first part of the coinage, Africana, identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered, and this reference to her ethnicity, establishing her cultural identity, relates directly to her ancestry and land base—Africa. The second part of the term Womanism, recalls Sojourner Truth’s powerful impromptu speech ‘Ain’t I a Woman?’, one in which she battles with the dominant alienating forces in her life as a struggling Africana Woman, questioning the accepted idea of womanhood. Without question she is the flip side of the coin, the co-partner in the struggle for her people, one who, unlike the white woman, has received no special privileges in American society. (22-23)

Kola Boof, herself, is an Afrofuturistic womanist and this is reflected in *Sexy Part*. Born in 1969 as Naima Bint Harith in Omdurman, Sudan, Boof’s parents “were

murdered in her presence for speaking out against atrocities in Sudan” (Boof). After being taken to London, she was eventually adopted by an African American family in Washington, DC. Boof’s renaming allowed her to claim a space for herself in a world where she became alien. In a foreign land, amongst foreign people, she was able to create a black womanhood for herself that was pieced from past histories—Sudanese, Egyptian, and African American.

As Afrofuturism is grounded in speculative fiction, so is *Sexy Part*. The novel is set in a fictional country called West Cassavaland (then later the U.S. and Europe) and is centered around a female character named Eternity Frankenheimer, a pure black girl, whose name is an obvious ode to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. We later find out that she is a clone of a woman named Mother Orisha, who was beaten to death in the streets by a mob because she was an outspoken critic against skin bleaching. Here, Boof is reclaiming and re-examing events of the past—the murder of Eternity’s parents. As Boof was displaced, so is Eternity who has no history to call her own and only knows what she has been taught by the couple who raised her—the white scientists who created her. Eventually, Eternity becomes a supermodel, actress and activist who opposes skin bleaching and later she becomes the partner of a wildly successful rapper turned politician, Sea Horse Twee, who becomes ruler of West Cassavaland.

The novel is strongly Afrofuturistic on several fronts. First, its location, racial makeup, and historical placement: the

novel is set in “West Cassavaland,” where the “white ruling colonialists moved out, and the tiny mulatto elite ... braced in horror at the thought of being ruled by the very blacks they’d been bred to look down upon” (106). Boof confronts what seems to be the constantly recurring postcolonial conflicts on the continent, particularly in West African and Sub-Saharan nations. The novel is grounded in a realism that causes the reader to critically engage what they know about Africa, specifically in places that have had ongoing deadly clashes within its borders such as the genocide in Rwanda where the German government in 1884, then Belgian government in 1919 created a divide by favoring the lighter-skinned, more European-featured Tutsi peoples, thus eventually instigating a war that would ravage Rwanda and surrounding nations (Prunier 23-6). Boof’s ruling class of West Cassavaland, a light-skinned group who are of mixed European and African heritage initially called themselves the “Bastars Elite” then “renamed themselves the Pogo Metis Signare in 1720 and proclaimed their allegiance to some unforeseen Fatherland in lieu of the Motherland (Africa) they felt ashamed of” (112).

Both the Pogo Metis Signare and Eternity speak to a central theme of Afrofuturism—alienation. Eternity’s alienation is derived from the fact that she is a clone, created in the laboratory of western scientists. The Pogo Metis Signare, though elite, are alienated as they are not fully African, nor are they European. In fact, West Cassavaland is a site of alienation as it is populated with distinct groups who

are alien, detached, and inhabit a liminal space—the Ajowan who are killing themselves via the use of toxic chemicals and the “Michael Jackson pill” to bleach their skin, western scientists whose primary duties are HIV/AIDS research, foreign dignitaries, and the Pogo Metis Signare.

Eternity is not only the primary character, she is the narrator and the embodiment of Africana womanism in that she, in keeping with Weems’ definition, “battles with the dominant alienating forces in her life as a struggling Africana Woman, questioning the accepted idea of womanhood.” As a clone who presents as a woman, Eternity grapples with her identity as woman, African and human. As a dark-skinned, world-famous actress/supermodel, she also wrestles with the notion of being regarded as beautiful when the women who are prized in her country are either mixed raced or “boiled orange-colored” from bleaching (108).

In speaking of and for herself and the community that she belongs to, Eternity is practicing Africana womanism—having her say about herself as a Black woman, as well as the collective history of her people. While the language is simple, it evokes immediately recognizable imagery. In referring to herself after being passed up for a role about an African woman which was eventually filled by a lighter-skinned, more ethnically ambiguous actress, Eternity says, “My look, mind you, is not chocolate like Lauryn Hill, Whoopi Goldberg, or Naomi Campbell—it is pitch black shimmering like the purple outer space of the universe. I am the charcoal that creates

diamonds” (41).

Boof told interviewer Jason Page that a white female reader contacted her because the reader identified with the pressure of trying to fit in and being something other than who you are. And that is what womanism does; it begins with the individual Black woman, allows her to be at the center of herself, but then pushes against barriers of gender and race to create a new world.

Once Eternity is free from the constraints of a world mired in racism, sexism, colorism, and corruption, what happens? How does the world work for her and her descendants? Easily, *Sexy Part* could be a trilogy or longer, however, in the end, I am satisfied, but like a gourmand, prepared and willing to overeat.

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