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2010 Whatley Award

In memory of George Whatley, a founder and early president of the Popular Culture Association in the South, the editor and editorial board of *Studies in Popular Culture* annually recognize the article published in *SPC* that in their view best represents the scholarly values Professor Whatley sought for the organization and for the study of popular culture.

The 2010 Whatley Award winner is

Adapting Shakespeare for Star Trek and Star Trek for Shakespeare: The Klingon Hamlet and the Spaces of Translation

By

**Karolina Kazimierczak
University of Aberdeen, Scotland**

From the Editor: Cultural Fragments, Cultural Flowers

Recently I read an argument (by Rana Emerson, in *PopMatters*) for the virtues of niche television. She is not the first, of course, to address the subject; I was paying particular attention because it was in the context of the study of Joss Whedon, an academic matter I am drawn to with an almost gravitational pull. I was also pleased to see follow-up discussion suggesting that television's network executives' gradual recognition of niche programming may have helped in the survival of that excellent Abrams/ Kurtzman / Orci series *Fringe*. We no longer live in the age of *I Love Lucy* (indeed, some of us never did), when one cultural icon united an audience that spread throughout the nation and beyond its borders. In a class earlier this year, I found that only half my students knew who John Wayne was; the Duke is receding into the past. Knowledge within one's own cultural niche is often sharp and clear (for survival as well as pleasure), but how many niches are there?

Connection, however, is still necessary. Our greater cultural fragmentation—or should I use the word blossoming? I should beware of my metaphors—makes the work more complicated and in some ways more difficult, but the very technologies that help create the multiplicity of these worlds make it more possible to collate them. That is part of our job as scholars. Do we see ourselves as living in a single cultural space? How single is any cultural space any more? Richard Dyer's seminal essay "White" reminded us to realize that some of us—many of us—were not even aware of our own blindness, not even aware that we used one frame of reference as a default. We need to at least try to glimpse a greater whole beyond the fragment; not just the petal, but the flower. At the same time, the best of aesthetics will see very specifically. We need to be able to focus both large and small. Probably it has always been so; we simply need to remind ourselves from time to time. So give me my niche TV, and I will try to convince you that it is as large as Shakespeare. After all, the Globe itself is not very big.

The scholars who undertake to meet the challenge in this issue start with a very prevalent cultural phenomenon many of us are aware of. Ananya Mukherjea writes on the social implications of the fiction of the Vampire Boyfriend as he is incarnated in a variety of popular forms—novels, movies, television. As she points out, he offers a fantasy of "an old-fashioned, generally wealthy, and socially dominant gentleman" as a reader deals with "the contradictory and conflicted relationship that many women have to feminism and femininity." His perfections are particularly appealing for the young female readership. Mukherjea explores many of the sociological implications of various texts. She demonstrates that in these stories in general, an equally important part of the appeal is that the focus is on the journey of the young female protagonist, rather than that of the superheroic vampire. Sabrina

Boyer discusses the adult HBO series *True Blood*, a modern vampire story set in Louisiana, as representing a kind of Southernness as a form of abjection, thus aligning it with the vampire's abjection. At the same time its protagonist is a not completely human woman, who represents another kind of abjection. The show also features a black gay character whom many viewers find appealing; and the network has used paratext to suggest a connection between gay rights and the civil rights of vampires. Boyer questions the success of the series as a social text, but honors its attempt to explore the issues. Katherine Gantz, in the third offering, also considers the status of women, in *Mad Men*. She focuses on visual elements, making a convincing case for the use of color as the "voice" of the women in this series set in the fifties. She includes statistical analysis of dialogue among male and female characters—and some thoughtful commentary on that dialogue. The black and white world of these men is part of what Dyer warned us about. Rather than speechlessness, Laura Jeffries examines the "Voice of Young Female Consumers" in a study of YouTube "hauls"—video blogs on particular shopping sprees. Her examination shows that many of the vloggers are actually highly sensitive to the quite stringent rhetorical requirements of format—but that those rhetorical requirements embody the necessary representation of American "nice girl" culture—"unpaid, unrude"—and unengaged in criticism. We move to the "white male adolescent" with Carey L. Martin's "Outsider Nostalgia in *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City*." These two films, set in the seventies, indicate the outsider focus in part with heavy metal music to cue the nostalgia. Both, however, choose to vary from the standard patterns of film nostalgia by not filtering out the hurts of the past. The importance of music is even more central in Steve Hamelman's "The Beatles and the Art of the Tambourine." Beginning with a look at the history of the instrument, Hamelman provides a detailed analysis of its significance in the Beatles' music as "the index of a highly innovative rock aesthetic"—and a legacy for succeeding musicians. Last in the issue is another essay that insists on the audience's attentiveness. Jonathan L. Crane examines the effect on the crime story genre of the inclusion of violence traditionally associated with horror—and its connection with the invasive violence of American culture. Each of the essays in this issue pay careful attention to the specifics of the cultural form being examined, to illuminate aesthetic and social significance: each sees the detail and the big picture.

As always, the issue as a whole owes a great deal to those named on the editorial page. Thanks are always due to the associate editor and the editorial board for their review work; in addition, thanks are due to other scholars who have helped with peer review, including F. Brett Cox, Janet K. Halfyard, Lorna Jowett, Kevin Moist, Mary Alice Money, Carlos Ramet, Matthew Sutton, and Ed Whitelock. Thanks, too, to all of you who read these words. You are helping to make the connections.

Rhonda V. Wilcox, Gordon College

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My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, “Perfect” Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance

Introduction

This essay examines the currently prolific genre of vampire-human romances¹ in terms of rapidly changing postmodern² gender roles and with respect to current trends of gendered and romantic ideals. I look at the casting of the romantic hero as vampire as a vehicle that allows the author and the reader to indulge a craving for an old-fashioned, generally wealthy, and socially dominant gentleman and a fantasy of stable and secure gendered expectations without fundamentally compromising or relinquishing hard-won and necessary, but also sometimes challenging, feminist rights and responsibilities.

The past 15 years (1996-2011) have seen an increasing surge of romances featuring vampire men, usually white vampire men. I will focus on some popular examples of such fiction, especially fiction aimed at the expanding young adult market. We are living in bountiful times for these stories, and there are many more texts that belong in this paper than I will be able to address. What I do want to discuss is some common themes concerning masculinity and female heterosexual desire³ in some of these

books and to offer an analysis of what these themes suggest about the tense and changing relationship women may have to power – overt and covert – in the United States today.

These vampire romances have especially proliferated in what is often called a postfeminist moment, at the turn of the 21st century (Siegel). “Postfeminist” is a highly contested term, used to refer to: (1) those contemporaries of Third Wave feminists who disavow feminism, finding it divisive or to have outgrown its relevance and appeal, and focus instead on the social liberties women have already won (see, for example, Sommers); and also (2) those Third Wave feminists who actively claim feminism but who are also working to transform it into what they hope will be an “updated” and more dynamic movement (see Siegel). (Editor’s note: See the Benjamin A. Brabon and Stéphanie Genz edited volume *Postfeminist Gothic* for a relevant exploration of the term.)

One major point at issue in the postfeminist moment is the question of whether feminism can still be beneficial to women *or* whether women can afford to give up the often difficult struggle of feminism. Postfeminism is, largely, a question of *mainstream* social and political matters and, as such, whether they subscribe to the language or not, these questions of the role(s) feminism can, does, or should play in contemporary women’s lives are widespread through U.S. society. Of especial interest to many women who value heterosexual partnerships or involvements in their lives is the way that rapidly fluctuating gender roles, sexual boundaries, and romantic expectations affect them, creating opportunities at the same time that they create new challenges and instability (see Hogeland and Levy for further discussion of this topic).

With changes in economic standing, domestic responsibilities, and political and media representation in the very early 21st century, there has also emerged an almost schizophrenic polarization of sexual ideals and accepted behavior. Careening somewhere between chastity pledges and the popularization of porn culture, many girls and women find themselves ambivalent about how to present themselves and what they desire. Ariel Levy writes, “[J]ust because we are post doesn’t automatically mean we are feminists.... It is worth asking ourselves if this bawdy world [of highly sexualized contemporary pop culture] reflects how far we [women] have come or how far we have left to go” (5). Meredith McGhan, however, echoes

many feminist advocates of the rebirth of burlesque when she writes that taking control over the display and use of one's body for purposes of seduction can be empowering for women. Several ardent *Twilight* fans I interviewed explained to me that Edward Cullen is appealing to them because they see him as a *gentleman*, atypical for today, who anchors Bella as she figures out who she wants to be and does not pressure her sexually. Conversely, fans of *True Blood* frequently praise its unabashed and explicit portrayals of sexuality (see Grigoriadis). Old-fashioned gender roles, on the one hand, and the mainstreaming of pornography, on the other, comprise reactions to each other, leaving little room for deep analysis or critique of either or both, and posing each as the soothing antidote to the stresses of the other.

My thesis is that many of the vampire romances that have become so popular in the 21st century so far, especially the ones aimed at a young adult readership, present us with old-school gentleman-vampires who are, certainly, sensitive and evolved in some ways, but who also offer the security and stability of old-fashioned gentlemen that some readers may now crave without being able to clearly articulate that craving. I argue, though, that such a yearning has to do with the contradictory and conflicted relationship that many women have to feminism and femininity and a perceived conflict between feeling protected and having the approval of visible femininity, on the one hand, and being self-determining and active, on the other.

Certainly, not all women at this moment in time perceive this conflict or, perhaps, feel it to be a problem, but many women voice that they do. This feeling is expressed, for example, in one way when Buffy Summers laments, at multiple points throughout the television series, that the enormity of her vampire slayer destiny (as a female protector of humanity), and the seriousness with which she deploys it, limit the scope for lighthearted fun in her life. It is expressed in another way when Stephenie Meyer defended Bella Swan's danger-proneness and clumsiness with her now much-cited quote, "We can't all be slayers," ("The Story Behind New Moon") to explain the popular appeal of a female character seeking a male protector.

The human girlfriends in the vampire romances at issue here seem to want both the approval and security of performing femininity well and also the augmented independence and options that feminism has brought many people. To have both seamlessly, it seems, it helps to have a supernatural

lover, one who is simultaneously very much of the past and of the future, but present in the present. Such a one would need his superhuman strength to exert the necessary control over the potentially problematic elisions that could occur between his efforts to be, at the same time, a vengeful and protective monster and also a sensitive, evolved guy and caring boyfriend.

What's So Hot About the Cold-Blooded?

My vampire boyfriend: what is he like and what makes him so riveting? As a longtime fan and scholar of Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), I take that series as a sort of urtext for this current genre of popular fiction. Although LJ Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* (1991-1992) and Annette Curtis Klause's *The Silver Kiss* (1990)⁴ are both examples of excellent genre stories that precede *Buffy* and Anne Rice's novels made vampires tremendously popular still earlier, the Buffyverse became so influential that few vampire texts following it could avoid an association with it, at least in its consumption and analysis (see, for instance, Johnson). I begin with a discussion of *Buffy*, then, and also consider *The Silver Kiss*, Meyer's *Twilight* series, and Ellen Schreiber's tween-targeted *Vampire Kisses* books. While these texts vary widely in terms of their crafting, popularity, and messages (or lack of intended message), they all share a distinctly sympathetic view of the love between a young, high-school aged human girl-woman and a blood-drinking boy-man who is taking pains to refrain from killing humans or to turn his beloved into a vampire. I will also comment briefly on some other vampire fictions such as the television series *Moonlight*, in which, as in HBO's Alan Ball series *True Blood*, the vampires have a more complicated relationship to the killing of humans, and the female protagonist and intended audience are adult.

Scholars of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have discussed the fact that Buffy's romantic relationship with the human Riley Finn, while very important to the series, suffered in comparison to her relationships with the vampires Angel and Spike (see, for example, Stokes 2004). The quality of these latter relationships was enhanced by the fact that these vampire boyfriends could match Buffy in her physical strength and her knowledge of the many literal and figurative dimensions of our world. However, this paper is more concerned with the qualities of vampiric *character* than of vampiric *exist-*

ence and in how these qualities are at the heart of what makes these men into such page-ready heroes. As is often the case, Whedon's stories are noteworthy for their willingness to upset or complicate gender types, and Buffy's vampire boyfriends are more willing and able to let her be the leader and to have the upper hand than is any human boy, including Riley, that she dates. The protean quality of vampire masculinity – old-fashioned and rigid in some behavioral respects but endlessly evolving in the essential principles – is crucial to what makes these vampire men perfect lovers. (See Lorna Jowett on varieties of masculinity in *Buffy*.)

Much has been written on the questions of vampire leading men as Gothic or Byronic heroes (recently, see Abigail Myers' and Robin Brande's treatments of *Twilight*), but I wish to consider these figures in terms of their contemporary social resonance rather than as timeless literary tropes. To begin with, for example, I argue that even human leading men in supernatural fiction can have vampiric qualities. Riley Finn thrives in the nighttime, gains superhuman physical strength from transfusions of chemically altered blood, keeps dark secrets, and lives underground for a time. In his penultimate episode on the series, Riley's descent into darkness exceeds the habits of the actual vampire Spike, who is still grocery-shopping for junk food snacks and watching daytime television while Riley slips down, out of control, becoming increasingly solitary and allowing vampires to feed on him in order to feel the rush of the connection. He is undeniably human but, at this point, it is both his vampire-like qualities and his quest to understand how it feels to *be a vampire* that are significant, especially in Riley's own understanding of Buffy's desires and their relationship. Consistent with Whedon's firmly feminist world-view, though, Buffy's relationship with Riley does not last. More lasting is her relationship with Angel, whose own muscled and brooding vampire masculinity is winningly undercut by his unhip fondness for Barry Manilow's power ballads and tendency to mute social awkwardness. The vampires provide more intricate characters than the human Riley, who is solid in either his darkness or his goodness. Buffy's arc of personal development, meantime, is only partially tied to her romantic life and weaves in and out of these relationships, progressing in conjunction with her partner – human or vampire – while she is in a relationship but continuing apace when she is single as well. *Buffy*, therefore, stands apart from the other

texts discussed here in that the romances in the story are important to the narrative arc but only one piece of it.

As Riley, in company with a variety of Southern Gothic literary heroes, illustrates, the old-fashioned gentleman with dark secrets, hidden danger, and passionate devotion to the *right* woman is not an uncommon literary type. It is, however, a type that the contemporary vampire plays to perfection because the qualities of his *existence* greatly heighten the necessary qualities of *character* for such a hero. In general, this dark gentleman also functions as a foil for the protagonist and the reader to work through the contradictory aspects of the contemporary woman's roles, desires, and needs. A paranormal figure is ideal for playing the multi-faceted, constantly evolving, but deeply reliable male lead for today's postfeminist heroine as she navigates the shifting array of gendered prescriptions, proscriptions, and desires before her (for other considerations of feminism and female agency in the vampire romance, see articles by Coker and Stevens). As Meyer tells us in *Twilight*, for example, Edward is already frozen in his development, although the books do reveal him to learn and change. They are, however, primarily driven by Bella's personal growth and human choices. The story's focus, then, can be less on *his* moral journey — as is usually the case with superhero fiction — than on *her* human, emotional development and satisfaction, which I argue is the real story being told in this genre.

Dating an Older Man: Vampire Boyfriends and the Implications of Age

Simon, from Klause's *The Silver Kiss*, is, like Whedon's vampire Angel: beautiful; quiet; dressed in leather; and, completely miserable in his lonely vampire existence. Like Angel, Simon dines on small animals when necessary to spare human death and is preoccupied by the emptiness of eternal life. Jennifer L. McMahon, in an essay on "our fatal attraction to vampires," cites Sartre's *Nausea* (a book the viewer glimpses Angel reading in the season 3 *Buffy* episode "Helpless") to describe mortal unease in facing our aging bodies and to explain part of the appeal of literary vampires. As she writes, "Aging arouses anxiety not only because it is outside conscious control and yields diminished performance, but also because we idealize

youth.... the appeal of vampires lies not only in their immortality but also in their eternal youth" (195). Indeed, the vampire boyfriend usually appears as a young man no matter what his age is. To some extent, the reader must accept this appearance of youth as just as valid as the vampire/man's actual age; otherwise, his relationship with a young woman loses its romance in becoming perverse. However, this age-duality of being ancient in experience while also youthful in impulse renders the vampire boyfriend both wise and passionate. His beloved can benefit from the intensity of his desire for her but not suffer from his inability to control it or to express it elegantly. This is the inverse of current media trends of grown-up men perennially acting like boys (see Hymowitz); rather, this is the physical glory of youth combined with adult accomplishments and restraint.

In *The Silver Kiss*, the human girl Zoë's mother is dying, and she is struggling to accept mortality and finitude as an inevitable aspect of humanity while she also struggles with adolescence and the transition to adulthood. Simon, still mourning his own long-dead mother, elucidates the nature of her grief, saying to her, "It's death that frightens you so.... I've seen its effect on people before now" (Klause 56-57). Zoë is isolated in her loss and her awkwardness, but Simon, eternally solemn and having witnessed the world for centuries, renders those qualities romantic, less of a piece with our mundane, material world and more a sublimity that fosters uncommon intimacy.

As well, Simon's ability to be surprised by the young, mortal Zoë, despite everything he has seen and done, makes her specialness, as the object of his desire, seem unique and important.

He pulled her to him. Take away my cold, he thought. Make me warm again. She trembled, and he thought perhaps it was not from fear [but from attraction]... How long, he thought, since a beautiful girl trembled for me alone, and not because of my power to hypnotize. (Klause 118)

Later, Simon says of his connection with Zoë, "I didn't know I needed this so much" (129). When he muses about her pretty legs, it is not simply the mark of a crush but also of chivalric and ultimately unfulfillable love. We see this theme repeatedly in vampire romances: when Angel tells Buffy that she is the only woman he has really loved in his 240-plus years ("Ear-shot," season 3 of *Buffy*); or when Edward Cullen reveals to Bella that she is both his first love and his first romantic partner of any sort (Meyer, *Twilight*).

light 311). One might want to extrapolate from such examples a progressive message that the developed love of experienced adults is particularly desirable and that aging is nothing to fear in itself. The dominant message in most vampire romances, however, remains a valorization of first loves, an elevation of teenage ardor and teenaged desirability, and of the notion that loving a very good (young) woman can save even an extremely “bad” man.

Simon’s constancy and commitment to Zoë are compelling, but they are never tested by time; they are a given because the two have a brief but transformative period together. Simon is an idealized romantic hero. His relationship with Zoë, as with most great tragic romances, does not end until one of them does, and this only happens after Zoë helps Simon accomplish the mission that has driven his centuries of undeath, and the recently reissued version of the novel is bookended by two lyrically crafted short stories, which suggest that, while true love can bring life even to the undead, death cannot stop true love, which continues on in afterlife.

As mournful and minor key as is Klause’s elegant novel, the current *Vampire Kisses* series of youth fiction is very light, quick, and upbeat. Raven Madison, the narrator of Ellen Schreiber’s self-consciously, stylizedly Goth (though not so Gothic) books, spares no detail in describing her vampire boyfriend, Alexander Sterling. She tells us exactly what he is wearing, describes his cologne, his chocolate brown eyes and shoulder-length dark hair precisely. We hear about his car, his motorcycle, his home, his coffin decor, and his boots in detail, and Raven, as the narrator, informs us of each teenage girl in her vicinity who also describes Alexander as “hot” (and there are many). Like Edward Cullen, Alexander Sterling could produce his own style guide for men. Also like Edward, Alexander is not only desirable to his girlfriend but generally desired by all girls. As in *Twilight*, heterosexuality and chastity are presumed for the major characters in *Vampire Kisses*. Raven, like Bella, is presented as virtuous and virginal, unique, and notably brave and insightful amongst her peers; Alexander is her reward for possessing these qualities.

Schreiber’s books are sweet, breezy, and somewhat campy in their heavy stylization. Raven has some impressive qualities, especially considering the intended readership of tween girls, but the Goth nature of these books relies on heavy-handed commercial consumption even more than on carefully rendered “atmosphere” or plot lines. Just as Raven literally wears

her Gothness on her sleeve, undermining its rebellion with its *prêt-a-porter* price tag, her independent spirit, refreshing self-confidence, and energetic physicality are undercut by her frequent need to be rescued by Alexander or to defer to his better judgment. Alexander, too, has many believable characteristics – such as the shyness and loneliness of the isolated boy that he is – but he is largely a confection of perfect masculinity who is presented as Raven's just desert for her courage to stick to her own principles of style and behavior in their small town.

Unlike most fictional vampires, Alexander resembles the *lamia* from LJ Smith's *Nightworld* in that he was conceived by and born to vampire parents and grows at a normal, seemingly human pace for much of his life. Thus, he shares with Raven the sneaking out and getting grounded. Unlike Raven, however, he is a model student (home-schooled to keep him safely in his coffin during daylight hours), knowledgeable, circumspect; and he acts, as she puts it, like "a Southern gentleman" (Schreiber *Dance* 18). He also wins fist-fights to protect Raven's honor, makes personal sacrifices to do what is right, and channels his unhappiness at his own lonely immortality into painting beautiful pictures of his human girlfriend and planning elaborate cemetery picnics to woo her. As a Goth teenage boyfriend, he is pretty much awesome.

As Raven repeatedly notes, Alexander always knows the right thing to do and, regardless of the disagreements they often have, only looks out for Raven's best interest and, towards that end, often "scolds" or "instructs" her (for example, Schreiber, *Dance* 25, 26). Though he is only two years older than she (not a significant difference by the standards of vampire-human romance), Alexander is very much presented as the responsible figure who has experienced the world and who understands consequences, mitigates Raven's loneliness, and also keeps her feet on the ground, protecting and guiding her. He is her passionate first love but also the adult figure who protects her from the possible excesses of that relationship. As with Bella and Edward in the *Twilight* books, Raven, for all her independence, quickly grows deeply reliant on her vampire boyfriend. Coping with just a few days away from him at one point, she narrates, "I tried to find comfort in Alexander's handmade bracelet, like a baby does a blanket. The wooden masterpiece remained wrapped around my wrist in the shower and

during sleep, but it was no substitute for my boyfriend's arms" (Schreiber, *Royal* 34).

As a fifteen-year-old, Raven's status as a young adolescent and the intended tween audience for the books are ever-present factors in the series, which is filled with life lessons for the young, such as the importance of maintaining integrity and courage in one's self-presentation and loyalty to family and friends. However, the romantic appeal of the books becomes a lesson in itself. Raven finds the perfect boyfriend – model gorgeous, doting, creative, and able to express his emotions clearly, but also tough, experienced, a leader amongst his peers, and a guide and protector for Raven. Finding such a very complicated individual amongst mere humans might be difficult enough, but it also points to Raven's own highly reticulated positionality *vis à vis* gender and romance. As the books revolve around her efforts to discover a comfortable identity and life-path for herself, she needs Alexander to be all things to reflect or anchor the many roles she tries on for herself throughout the series. This complex, dynamic nature of gender play and identity for both vampire boyfriend and human girlfriend is an important feature of this genre.

In terms of gender, Raven's bold first moves in their relationship, which include actually breaking into Alexander's house, are presented as lively and positive and received that way by Alexander himself, who is intrigued and captivated. Their first date, however, is orchestrated in quintessentially chivalrous style, with the family butler delivering a printed invitation to Raven's house and then serving them dinner at the Sterling mansion, after which Alexander walks Raven to the car and kisses her chastely on her cheek despite her wanting more. She writes a riot grrrl introduction for their relationship, but he, ultimately to her delight, offers a traditionally courtly first chapter.

A repeated motif in the books is Alexander's intense desire to bite (penetrate?) Raven and her intense desire for him to do so. In this mythology, his biting her will instantly make her into a vampire also, which she badly wants. However, Alexander, as the mature decision-maker for both of them, refuses to bite her, to become someone who feeds off of her (uses her for sex?) and completely transforms her life. Alexander is deeply ashamed when the nature and intensity of his desire for Raven are revealed by a mind-reader who says, "Alexander is a vampire, after all... He's hungered

for your [Raven's] flesh, blood, and soul since he laid eyes on you" (Schreiber, *Dance* 161). For such a chaste series, sex, power, and risk are implied constantly, and the reader is repeatedly made aware, as are Raven and Alexander, that passionate love and sexual exploration come laced with the subtext of potential harm. It is the vampire boyfriend who enforces restraint and responsibility and protects the heroine's innocence for as long as possible, who acts as father-figure as well as lover, desiring the woman but also policing that desire.

Multiple Masculinities: The Contradictory Nature of the Idealized Man

If the contemporary, heterosexual woman finds herself flummoxed in the face of all the various roles, often at odds with each other, that she must play — professional, partner, mother, never-aging vixen, moral leader, etc. — then it only makes sense that her fantasized mate must also negotiate a highly convoluted personality. Vampire boyfriends are noteworthy for their extraordinary ability to be all things at once, embodying masculine ideals from multiple classes and eras, for multiple age-groups and subcultures, offering an array of characteristics and abilities from which their human girlfriends (or reader proxies) can choose as they grow and develop themselves.

Edward Cullen saves Bella's life repeatedly, carries her books and, when necessary or convenient, carries Bella herself, rocks her in a rocking chair, sings her to sleep with his lullaby, scolds and essentially grounds her in *Eclipse*, and even completes and mails her college applications. As discussed above, Alexander Sterling, similarly, acts like Raven's older, sterner brother as well as her boyfriend. In LJ Smith's novella "Secret Vampire," the young *lamia* James puts himself at great risk to execute an elaborate plan to save his beloved Poppy's life and then gently but firmly guides and protects her into the future. Angel is Buffy's great love but also is an important source of information and support throughout the series while she learns the true scope of her destiny, helping her with existential quandaries or in difficult fights and comforting Buffy after her mother's death.

Again, I do not mean to suggest that only vampire men are able to be stalwart guardians and custodians for the women they love. These are, after all, classically gentlemanly traits. The particularities of vampire nature, though, allow vampire men to manifest these qualities with ease and perfection: melting out of or back into the night; using a highly developed, and somewhat weird, sense of smell to always keep track of where their lovers are; winning every fight; and remaining unflappable through crisis after crisis. By giving the entire story a fantastical premise, such exacting gendered expectations are rendered less fantastical themselves. The vampire nature of the characters and the fantasy element in these stories make these actions more believable, but they also make qualities desirable, which, in actual men in real relationships, might be quite unsettling.

I argue that the vampire boyfriend's almost ubiquitous dissatisfaction with his own vampire nature might actually represent the dissatisfaction that many heterosexually involved women would like to see their male partners feel about their own gendered dominance and the ways in which they benefit from an unfair, sexist social system; however, the appeal of masculinity is a complicated matter, and benevolent but incontestable male dominance continues to be widely socially approved and desired. One loudly voiced postfeminist criticism of feminism, in fact, is that the latter movement has emasculated men and confused boys (see Suzanne Venker's 2011 book with Phyllis Schlafly, *The Flipside of Feminism*), depriving them of their birthright dominance. Vampire boyfriends are usually expected to wear many, contradictory hats at the same time, to offer multiple expressions of masculinity at all times. They must be protective but also nurture the heroine's independence. As the older, more experienced partners, they must be wise advisors and somewhat paternal but not to the extent that this seems untoward or that the heroine feels coerced. They must be capable of spontaneous and successful acts of violence in order to protect the heroine but also be extremely gentle by nature. They must be best friends, eager to talk for hours, but also masterful lovers who, though always interested and ready, are also in perfect control of their own sexuality and self-restraint. They are, in short, fantasy men – both very hard and very soft and fantastically flawless in a way that even very few fictional human men could possibly be.

For example, the much adored leading men of Jane Austen and the Brontës were thoroughly flawed. Their saving grace, like that of most actual humans, was in being loving and beloved despite, or because of, those flaws. When Mr. Knightley in Austen's *Emma* relents to tender solicitousness at the end of the novel, both the reader and Emma are beguiled because his knightliness, up to this point, has been only so much stern, formal chivalry. While vampire boyfriends may have their shortcomings, they are generally perfect, and their ability to love and be loved is just another aspect of that perfection.

I believe that vampire romances are important in recognizing and validating feminine (or feminized) desires and, as well, that many or most readers interpret these texts with enough critical reflection to see them for what they are: fiction. I sympathize with the relief that many fans felt when Bella Swan did, in fact, get everything she could have wanted at the end of the *Twilight* series, and I appreciated the fairy tale aspect of the saga's end. I do not, however, agree that these texts are "just stories" or that, as popular fiction, they do not imply anything more than passing entertainment. If that were the case, the fandoms built around them would not be so passionate, committed, or, of course, so very lucrative. I have written elsewhere about the many layers of emotional investment and social meaning that *Twilight* fans bring to or derive from that franchise (Mukherjea "Team"), and several authors have done intensive literary analyses of the books (see, for example, Granger and Wilson). Youth fiction has long been meant to be at least somewhat instructive (such as *Little Women*), so it is worth appreciating the yearnings and needs to which popular literature responds and, also, worrying about the expectations these texts nurture with respect to gender, sexuality, and intimacy. As a feminist myself, I know it is important to treat girls and women, their interests, ideas, and emotions, with seriousness and, as well, to attend to the politics of narrative interpretation — especially when popular (and, thus, widely consumed) texts are at issue.

Summing Up the Vampire as Romantic Lead

In an essay on the Goth sensibilities of the 20th century vampire hero as he evolved (away) from Stoker's evil Dracula, Nancy Gagnier calls this new vampire, "a tortured instance of the romantic antihero," and writes, "as

the twentieth century progresses, the focus is less on his evil nature and more on his romantic allure” (293 and 303). Gagnier argues that, by the end of the 20th century, Goth subculture had taken on some of Stoker’s aesthetic for Dracula — the nails and fangs and deep, basic colors — but the ethos of his *victims*, “... a private, underground affair, fraught with experiences of death, madness... and an overwhelming eroticism” (303). Through the first decade of the 21st century, as the style and substance of Goth and other subcultures have been diluted, mainstreamed, and commercialized, the evolution of the vampire from evil undead to tortured antihero has emerged into the lucrative light of the morally upstanding, terribly good-looking, romantic lead.

These vampire boyfriends are literary “bad boys” in some ways, but they are also extremely successful; these are not the scruffily alluring boys from across the railroad tracks. These are sophisticated men who tend to live in mansions and tricked-out urban lofts and drive fast, shiny vehicles. Such socioeconomic privilege augments their supreme masculine dominance, along with their physical prowess, fighting skills, chivalrous manners, and eternal, gorgeous youth. Far from godless, Tanya Huff’s vampire Henry Fitzroy is a devout Catholic, and some have argued that Edward Cullen seems to stand in as a member of the Mormon priesthood (see Granger and Shaw). These vampires are idealized leading men, and they are more manly than mere men could be or, perhaps, than we would want real men to be. This is evident as the female protagonists of these stories repeatedly choose vampire boyfriends over human ones. The vampire private detective Mick St. John of the television series *Moonlight* demonstrates this each time he rushes in to rescue the winsome reporter Beth. The strength of his love for her shows in his ability to bare fangs and leap enormous distances, unlike her human district attorney boyfriend, who can only lecture and prosecute. Ultimately, Beth chooses Mick.

In her book *Stuffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, Susan Faludi comments on the unease that accompanies rapidly changing gender roles, especially for men, as the many opportunities opened up by such change can be eclipsed by instability and uncertainty. Despite new ways to engage with fatherhood, sexuality, and emotions — which many men hail, as Michael Kimmel reminds us, as expansive and liberating — some men find that the lack of a clear masculine path can impede their self-concept and their rela-

tionships. Such instability is resolved in vampire romances because most of these men grew up long ago. They hearken, in their speech and habits, to a moment into which we now, with hindsight, might project a certain comfort with stable, lucid gender roles. However, these stories primarily comprise fantasies *for female readers*, and the vampire boyfriends in them do grow and evolve. Again, Joss Whedon's vampire boyfriends are notable for the heroic efforts they make to continually learn and grow throughout their undeaths, particularly with respect to women. But Edward Cullen, too, slowly learns from his mistakes, alters his own notion of what a good man should be, and develops personally, at times doing so while most other characters in the books seem to be regressing. The issue most at stake in these stories, then, is not the uneasy instability of changing *masculinity* but of changing *femininity*.

In *The Silver Kiss*, Zoë responds intensely to her first kiss with Simon, and she is unsettled by her response.

She had never enjoyed a kiss like that before. She climbed up beside him on the couch, but *embarrassed by her desire to be kissed*, she found she couldn't look at him directly. She absently brushed her mouth, and it left a smear of blood on her hand. He leaned to her and gently licked her lip. She felt like she was melting, but he shivered as if he were cold. *She pulled back, afraid of her response.* (102, emphasis added)

The female protagonists in these stories are caught in a tight spot. They are enjoying the typically masculine pursuit of specularly — spying, sneaking glances, and relishing the gazing upon their beautiful vampire boyfriends — and they are making their transgressive desires known, whether that constitutes desiring the vampire or desiring to be the vampire. At the same time, they seem to need to be morally upright, self-sacrificing, and fundamentally “good.” Raven's scrappy impulsiveness in the *Vampire Kisses* books is novel and appealing, given this, but even she needs to constantly defer to her vampire boyfriend's better judgment, be rescued by him, or simply feel satisfied with their chaste relationship. Many of these romances are chaste, or the women in them — Bella, Raven, Zoë, Poppy, Buffy with Angel though not with Spike — come to them without prior sexual experience, as “good girls.” The human female leads in these stories love their vampire boyfriends *despite* the mansions and fancy cars, as Bella declares to Jacob in *Eclipse*. As she puts it, she loves Edward simply for his de-

gency and would much prefer that he had less wealth so that they could be more equal (Meyer, *Eclipse* 110). Regardless, Bella and many of the other human girlfriends can avail themselves of those material perquisites *and* stay morally pure through their affiliations with these vampire men.

They can have the satisfaction and security of wealth without the inconvenience of any unfeminine greed or ambition. Of course, another casualty of rapidly changing gender roles is the confusion and disappointment many women feel as they reach professional plateaus and find there is no fairy tale knight in shining armor to offset the difficulties of their daily work lives. Instead, in fact, the mass media offer up such idiotic, anti-feminist, bogeyman warnings as the Oscar curse that apparently drives the male partners of successful actresses to cheat egregiously. Many people would agree with me that equal partnerships of all gender configurations are the most desirable, but they are also always untested ground, by their nature requiring the suspension of presuppositions.

Vampire boyfriends, on the other hand, offer us known territory and the reliability of men with vast amounts of experience to hone their principles and actions. They are immensely romantic, laying out decadent picnics they sometimes cannot eat and remembering even minor anniversaries. They are wealthy and influential alpha men, earning the respect of other men as well as the desire of other women, which, however, never interests them. And, they are also *benevolently* paternal — whether this is Edward rocking Bella in his lap, Alexander helping Raven with her homework, or Mick first meeting Beth when he rescues her as a young girl — though never lecherous.

Vampire boyfriends are complex instantiations of every positive aspect of masculine privilege, without personifying those more threatening facets of hyper-masculinity — the violence or the uncontrolled sexuality. The great popularity of this genre suggests that many female readers are seeking certainty and protection and to maximize their options as women without curtailing feminine pleasures, a desire that is definitely worth acknowledging and addressing. The actual embodiment of such a fraught blend of characteristics, though, would be unwieldy, overbearing, and potentially explosive. We know very well that no human man *could* emulate a vampire boyfriend, but I would argue, too, that no human man *should*.

Ananya Mukherjea
City University of New York, Staten Island

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Notes

¹In particular, this paper examines those romances between vampire men and human women or girls rather than stories featuring the opposite configuration. I focus on the former type both because such stories are far more common and because my research finds the gender characterizations to be more consistent from author to author when the vampire is male and the human protagonist is female. While there is a rich subgenre of human-vampire romances featuring gay or otherwise queer partnerships — Poppy Z. Brite's books provide an obvious example — this subgenre has not (yet) achieved the sort of mass market, young adult niche that the fictions addressed in this paper have.

²I use "postmodern" here to refer to the contemporary era — following the two world wars, the rapid (though incomplete) decolonization of the late 40's, 50's, and 60's, and the increasing shift from an economy based on industrialization to one based on finance and service. This era is strongly marked by very rapidly evolving communication technologies and by the pervasive awareness that mass arsenals of nuclear weapons threaten the existence of viable life on this planet. This era is significant to this paper both for those qualities and because it has witnessed the rise of modern American feminism and has been a time of fluctuating gender roles and sexual expectations. "Postmodernism" is often used to broadly refer to poststructuralist theory or its concomitant social liberation movements, but such sloppy conflation generally does a disservice to both concepts.

³Certainly, there are popular representations of lesbianism in vampire fiction — such as the 1983 film *The Hunger* and the 1872 story *Carmilla* — but the current rash of vampire romance straddles the genres of fantasy, not horror, and mainstream romances and tends to focus on the heterosexual interests and experiences of young women. In my interviews with fans of these stories, however, I found that

gay, male readers often identify with the protagonist, especially of the most popular novels. The vampiric lover is generally described in much finer detail than is she, so many readers feel invited to take her perspective, experiencing the text as the desirer and desired of the vampire boyfriend.

⁴Interestingly, *The Silver Kiss* was recently reissued with a *Twilight* style cover to appeal to Meyer's fans, although Klause's book precedes Meyer's series by 15 years.

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“Thou Shalt Not Crave Thy Neighbor”: *True Blood*, Abjection, and Otherness

We are told to be wary of vampires. Some critics remind us that vampires can infect us with their otherness, beguile us with their depraved intimacy and exhaust us with their embraces. Others warn us against accepting the images of fear that the vampire is held to represent. The vampire is a voraciously sexual woman, and a hyper-sexual African, a hypnotic Jewish invader, an effeminate or homosexual man. The vampires of the West exist to frighten us into acquiescence, to reassert patriarchy, racial superiority, family values and chaste heterosexuality. We have long been urged to exorcise the vampire from our imaginations, or, at least, not to get carried away with it. —Milly Williamson (1)

What does the vampire represent, and why is it a lasting monstrous image that permeates our culture? With the explosion of *Twilight* mania in conjunction with a number of recently released vampire films and television shows (*Let the Right One In* [2008], *Thirst* [2009], *Cirque du Freak: Vampire's Assistant* [2009], and *Vampire Diaries* [2009-], to name a few), the representation of the vampire in popular culture is one that, like its monster, seems eternal. One such vampire television show based on a series of books by Charlaine Harris is *True Blood*, HBO's vampire take on southern culture, vampire culture, and the supernatural (2008-). Often represented as an outsider or “other,” the vampire archetype is one that has established itself in our collective unconscious to represent difference.

So, how is this representation of the vampire created in tandem with and opposition to the setting and characters of *True Blood*? How do representations of Southern place, race and sexuality/gender fragment when coupled with the classic vampire archetype? Williamson states, “far from the vampire frightening us into rejecting its difference (and thus all the differences that it symbolises), the vampire has become an image of emulation, a glamorous outsider, a figure whose otherness we find versions of (sometimes ambivalently) in ourselves” (1). Thus, intertwining concepts of otherness and vampire, as *True Blood* does, can allow the viewer to embrace and reject these notions of otherness and difference simultaneously, permitting the existence of ambiguity.

This ambiguity echoes what Stuart Hall argues in the production of identity; on the one hand, there is an assumption that there is an intrinsic and essential component to identity which can be traced back to a particular origin; on the other hand, the second assumption emphasizes the impossibility of having one innate identity, and of “such fully constituted, separate, and distinct identities. It denies the existence of authentic and originary content based in a universally shared origin or experience. Struggles over identity no longer involve questions of adequacy or distortion but, rather, of the politics of difference and representation” (Grossberg 13). In other words, identity is always a temporary and fluid endeavor, an unstable difference; the concern then is to question how identities are produced and engaged through the process of representation. Therefore, “the identity of any term depends, for all practical purposes, totally on its relation to, its difference from, its constitutive other” (Grossberg 13). If identity is fluid and involves a question of difference and representation, then how does the vampire archetype—this identity-defining “other”—change and manifest new meaning and significance when placed in the world of *True Blood*?

Characterized as “southern vampire mysteries,” Charlaine Harris’s Sookie Stackhouse series adapted for HBO, now called *True Blood*, is set in the down-under swamps of Louisiana in a small town called Bon Temps. Based around the telepathic character Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin), the series centers on the fact that vampires have “come out of the coffin” to proclaim their existence and work to become equal in the eyes of the law and society. (Editor’s note: Cf. Laurell K. Hamilton’s Anita Blake series, 1993- .) This change has happened internationally, and while the rest of the

world, for the last two years, has interacted with the mostly friendly undead, the small town of Bon Temps gets its first vampire-in-residence with the arrival of Southern gentleman Bill Compton (Stephen Moyer) two years after "the reveal" has taken place. No longer needing to feed on humans for sustenance (Japanese scientists perfected a synthetic blood formula known as "True Blood"), vampires are free to roam among humans, seeking to become part of the mainstream. Sookie Stackhouse, ostracized in her small town for her rumored telepathic abilities and "weird" ways of knowing, is shunned by most of the town. Always able to hear the thoughts of others, Sookie must constantly work to keep out these supposedly private moments. However, when Bill Compton shows up at her place of business, Merlotte's Bar and Grill, Sookie is immediately drawn to him; even more so when she realizes that she cannot hear his thoughts; that for once, it is quiet.

The series, having just wrapped its third season, explores the relationship between Sookie and Bill within the context of Southernness, their relationship with "others," (both human and supernatural), and notions of sexuality. Though the series draws on traditional notions of horror about the dead, it is not, in fact, like traditional horror concerned with the dead. As Hutchings states of horror films, vampire stories "are so obviously fantasies set in unreal locations that they do not have any significant implications for our own belief systems; there is no conflict of judgment" (70). Instead, however, I argue that the world of *True Blood* and its vampiric representations do have significant implications for our belief systems; like Williamson, Nina Auerbach, and others, I see implications for how we come to understand both historical notions of difference and otherness surrounding race, sexuality, and gender. (Editor's note: See Mukherjea, this issue.) Additionally, I problematize these notions of otherness in the world of the South, in Bon Temps. To do so, I frame this representation of otherness and difference in relation to Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection, Barbara Creed's analysis of the monstrous-feminine, and Giroux's notion of border identity.

Kristeva's, Creed's, and Giroux's notions are further complicated by the presence of the vampire, a notorious historical "other," who represents a clear difference from the living, as well as a creature that exists within the border of life and death. Eternally separate, the vampire

offers a way of inhabiting difference with pride, for embracing defiantly an identity that the world at large sees as "other." But to embrace the vampire is also to embrace pain; a painful aware-

ness of outsiderdom, a recognition of inhabiting an unwelcome self, a life at least partly lived at the edges. Richard Dyer elegantly captures this ambiguity in the vampire when he writes “if the vampire is an Other, he or she was always a figure in whom one could find one’s self—the despicable as well as the defiant, the shameful as well as the unashamed, the loathing of oddness as well as pride in it.” (Williamson 1-2)

As a creature that exists within and by borders, what happens when a vampire is placed in a space as historically border-conscious as the South? Additionally, what kinds of identities are produced in these representations? To explore these questions, I will break this essay up into four sections. Section one will be a summary of my theoretical framework and a brief history of the vampire in film and television; section two will apply the theoretical framework to the setting of *True Blood*: the South, or, more specifically, southern Louisiana. Section three will offer an analysis through theory of the main “othered” characters, while section four will problematize these intersections of race, place, sexuality, and gender within the archetype of vampire.

Vampires, Abjection, and Borders

According to Hutchings, Stuart Kaminsky distinguishes horror from science fiction by defining horror as ““overwhelmingly consumed with the fear of death and the loss of identity in modern society”” (1). Furthermore, horror films and monsters serve as expressions of social fears and anxieties, allowing the audience to locate these fears onto the monster, “to deal in imaginative terms with some troubling aspect of their social existence” which become “our collective nightmares” (Hutchings 38). Frequently, our collective nightmares deal with the notion of difference or those who are separate or “unlike” us, creating an us-vs.-them duality. We often fear those who do not fit into our group. If these nightmares include a repetition of important cultural themes represented within the monster, he or she is now representative of many conflicting meanings and interpretations of these differences. This is the case with vampires. If otherness, according to Hutchings, is the product of a repressive society, “a society in which powerful groups impose or project identities upon subordinate groups in a manner

that underlines the 'superiority' and 'normality' of the powerful," then it makes sense that the popularity and self-identification of the vampire has endured to help us explore our fear of difference and otherness (96).

Furthermore, for Williamson, the vampire has endured because it resonates with many experiences of the self for those "who do not occupy the normative identity—white, middle-class, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, and successful and it combines arresting pathos and a glamorous pose" (2). Lost in its border status, the vampire offers an escape to a land of dualities as well as a defiance of definition. Here, the border appeal resonates. Because the vampire defies a stagnant signifier and produces a multiplicity of identities that Hall discusses in his examination of the production of identity, "the vampire's pain also symbolises another dilemma which faces us all—the desire to signify, to have meaning, to matter in the light of day and not just in the shadows" (Williamson 2). The vampire represents those of us who defy definition or exist within multiple categories, such as those who identify as mixed race or bisexual.

This is further underscored through Hutchings when he asserts that Dracula's survival as a classic monstrous figure comes from our need to explore something of our own human nature that we recognize in the vampire (40). It is this search for meaning and signification in a cultural archetype like the vampire that appeals to a Freudian analysis, one that states "occurrences in fiction can reactivate repressed or surmounted mental elements in a manner that for the individual involved combines a feeling of strangeness with a weird sense of the familiar" (Hutchings 69). Therefore, our fascination with the vampire is bound up in our own need to explore what we perceive as a necessary feature of our own humanity. It is this exploration of identity that allows for the acknowledgement that we live in a frightening world that seeks to terrify us and reinforce our fears. We look to the vampire as a representation of this dual sense of strangeness and familiarity, of difference and otherness, as something that, through its presence in our cultural narrative, we can approach and fight. This is where the vampire exists within the borders of cultural identity (Magistrale 5). The vampire illustrates and "challenges any essentialized notion of subjectivity while simultaneously demonstrating that the self as a historical and cultural formation is shaped in complex, related, and multiple ways through its interaction with numerous and diverse communities" (Giroux 38). This is signifi-

cant within the context of horror films, since they have always explored areas that are difficult that “lurk just beneath the collective and personal consciousness” (Magistrale 17). At the very least, horror films, and the vampire in particular, can offer us insights and a philosophical exploration into what it truly means to be human.

Further, to explore humanity within the representation of the vampire, Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection as well as Barbara Creed’s monstrous-feminine offer a solid theoretical framework.

For Kristeva, in her text *Powers of Horror*, the term abjection means something that does not “‘respect borders, positions, rules’ that which ‘disturbs identity, system, order.’ In general terms, Kristeva is attempting to explore the different ways in which abjection works within human societies, as a means of separating out the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject” (Creed 8). Arguably, the audience of horror and those fans of vampires are all partially formed subjects, searching for meaning, which is the appeal. It is the separation of human and non-human (abject) that defines our identities and societies, particularly for those individuals that Williamson states exist out of social norms, or in the margins/borders.

Thus, for Kristeva and Creed the ultimate abjection is the corpse: “‘the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. . . . It is no longer I who expel. ‘I’ is expelled” (Kristeva qtd. in Creed 9). This abjection of the corpse, defying the expulsion process, both fascinates and sickens; our collective fascination with the vampire lies in the familiarity we recognize within the vampire as an undead body, bordering between life and death. Kristeva’s discussion of the abject as a border also conjures up not just a border identity and existence within the body itself, but also sexuality within *Bon Temps*.

The South Rises Again

According to Louis Castenell, Jr., Southern culture “shapes the corpus of knowledge transmitted . . . thereby influencing race relations” (155). If we are to examine pop culture as a form of curriculum as Giroux argues (“It is precisely in the relationship between pedagogy and popular culture that the important understanding arises of making the pedagogical more

political and the political more pedagogical" [236]), then *True Blood* and its representations are educational tools to examine issues of race within the South. In the opening sequences of the show, there are a number of images that historically characterize or stereotype the South. The website *The Art of the Title Sequence* writes of the *True Blood* opening sequence:

What it is to be reborn. A closed-mouthed catfish and cheery gator serve as an aquatic admission into a place that suffers the rot of intolerance and blackish baptisms. Stick shacks sulk under Spanish moss. Jace Everett's song "Bad Things" plucks and coos over the risqué and the religious imagery of Alan Ball's title sequence for "True Blood" contextualizing the slutty and the sweet swamp-goth vampiric *mise-en-scène*.

It is good southern surrealism. ("True Blood")

Placing the story of revealed vampires and other supernatural beings within the South does not seem without intent. Rich with a cultural and political history of repression, racism, and a steep rejection of outsiders, it is meaningful then that the vampires we engage in the show are situated within this context. As Jansson states, "'The South' in U.S. discourse constitutes an emotionally loaded geographic idea . . . [and] continues to be seen by many as different, radically deviant from national norms, and this difference is often located in a foundation of racism" (203). This context, southern Louisiana, becomes significant as a background for vampires and other supernatural beings. As Kristeva describes the abject as something that disrupts identity and order, it is interesting to point out that, in terms of place, the South certainly fits this description since the South seceded and literally disrupted these United States. Additionally, to describe a film as Southern, Langman and Ebner state that it has to pass the "Confederate test." "The action either takes place at any time in one of the states that composed the Confederacy or else it takes place during the Civil War in some other state but Southern troops are involved" (ix). The Confederacy imagery exists most in Bill Compton, who dates back to the Civil War and was a Confederate soldier on his way home after the war ended when he was turned or "infected" and became a vampire. He was forced to leave his family since he was turned against his will, and only returns to Bon Temps, his residence during the mid-1800s, after his last surviving kin dies: Bill reclaims the house in which he once lived. Bill's body is, through its very existence, abject; placed within the context of the South, also abject, Bill's body is controver-

sial since the image of the South represents race and racism as well as traditional gender roles. As Jansson argues,

“Race” is “central to the maintenance of this North/South binary opposition.” In the case of African Americans in “the South,” what is absent is their agency ... with black residents of the southeastern states playing a background role in the morality play between white “Americans” and “Southerners.” (207)

When the South appears in conversation or representation, it is contextualized within the history of the United States and the racial divide between North and South and issues of slavery. However, even as Jansson states that representations of the South are often “racist, xenophobic, poor, violent, and the like,” he acknowledges in addition that there is a parallel history of portraying the South as focused on “friendliness, hospitality, devotion to place, and devotion to family” (206). The South embodies this “Southern charm” both as an historical place and within the series, and these traits are often times presented as redeeming qualities despite the racism, violence, and poverty. Further, the South is often represented “through images of a region that is often perceived as backward, even grotesque. A range of media, from films like James Dickey’s *Deliverance* to high cultural forms such as the novels of William Faulkner, represent the South as an inbred territory of misfits and freaks” (Adams 164). This representation leads to a perception of isolation and otherness, but this otherness is usurped by its own participation in racist behaviors and racism to help sustain a Southern economy of slavery and production. Despite the otherness and isolation the South may have experienced and perpetuated, the series fails to align its racist history with either its positive portrayal of friendliness and charm or its representation as grotesque.

Thus, since the South does not exist either in cinematic or realistic terms without the representation and imagery of blackness, to place the vampiric other in an historically “othered” location filled with people of color posits a dissection or disruption of representations of racism. Perhaps, ultimately, the series is attempting to invoke a literal abjection on the part of the audience to expel the South’s racist ideology, and to do so, allowing us to recognize that this racist ideology still exists. In other words, through forcing the audience to confront racism through the series, the series itself is urging us to acknowledge it and then begin working to purge it from ourselves. This opens up a space of ambiguity to give room to identify “plural

identities which are never fixed and never settle into a fixed pattern” (Grossberg 15). To further complicate the politics of race,

ethnicity involves lines of intensity which construct and map structures of mobility and placement; it describes where and how people can stop and locate themselves . . . [S]uch locations are temporary points of identification and belonging and orientation. (Grossberg 15)

The places where people “can stop and locate themselves” as points of identification exist in *Bon Temps*, now that vampires have “come out of the coffin.” Like the “white” and “colored” demarcated areas during Jim Crow era, there are places where vampires can and can’t go. These places are not labeled spaces, but they are clearly marked. For example, as Bill enters into Merlotte’s and meets Sookie for the first time, he orders wine (since Sam [Sam Trammell] has no *True Blood*), in order to fit in. He understands that to be accepted within the restaurant, he must obey the behavioral rules a bar dictates. As a vampire and other in a Southern bar, he is the recipient of a “racist” ideology, one that is prejudiced against the vampire race. This is also evident in season one when Sookie’s grandmother (Lois Smith) dies at the hands of a vampire-hater after she has invited Bill Compton to speak at her meeting of the Glorious Descendants of the Dead, who include members that had family who fought in the Civil War. It is evidenced again when a group of stereotypical Southern “rednecks” collectively decide to set fire to a house on the outskirts of town that is said to house a vampire clan. They do so, and destroy the vampires inside. Though there is still some legal ambiguity surrounding what rights vampires have, it is not legally acceptable to engage in vigilante justice against them. Socially, however, the Southern citizens in *Bon Temps* don’t necessarily have difficulty in looking the other way. As Duvall indicates in his discussion of race within Southern texts, often Southern white writers, like William Faulkner, create white characters that embody blackness and who are, in fact, black to create inverted white characters. Duvall states,

Faulkner’s blackness, however, is not the result of his embodying stereotypes of blackness. It emerges instead from his imagining a queer realm of white masculine performance that ultimately serves to detach blackness from the southern concept of Negro.

(xi)

Furthermore, Duvall highlights the recognition that white writers like William Faulkner and Dorothy Allison are aware of racial problems within the South, and argues that in each of these texts, white characters are

Delineated in relation to blackness . . . [and] the ways in which racial otherness constantly returns in southern fiction, even in the very moments when African Americans are barely visible or completely absent. Through figurative blackness, southern fiction explores a series of imbricated relationships between racial and other forms of otherness, particularly that of gender/sexuality and class. In white southern fiction, a whole range of issues surrounding otherness emerge. (2)

In other words, in Southern texts by many southern writers, white characters tend to experience ways of becoming black, which is a recognition of a racist region, as well as a moderately progressive way to comment on racial relations within the South. While Duvall recognizes these characters can never be “truly” black, he explores how, historically, classic southern writers incorporate racial issues because of the racist background of the South in order to comment on it.

Situating this imagery within what Grossberg coins as “the kaleidoscopic conditions of blackness,” he states, “difference itself, as much as identity, is an effect of power, of other social and cultural practices and processes” and “identities can, therefore, be contradictory and are always situational [S]ince black signifies a range of experiences, the act of representation becomes not just about decentering the subject but actually exploring the kaleidoscopic conditions of blackness” (14). The conditions of blackness are made explicit, then, since the series operates within a backdrop of the South. If identities are situational, and the situation in *True Blood* is that of a representation of Southernness as not only romantic and dark, but also of a racist history, then how does this imagery correlate with the invocation of the vampire as other as well? Perhaps the answer lies in what Hall, as quoted in Grossberg states,

Contrary to the superficial evidence, there is nothing simple about the structure and dynamics of racism. . . it is racism’s very rigidity that is due to its complexity. Its capacity to punctuate the universe into two great opposites masks something else; it masks the complexes of feelings and attitudes, beliefs and conceptions, that are always refusing to be so neatly stabilized and fixed. . . all that symbolic and narrative energy and work is directed to se-

cure us 'over here' and them 'over there,' to fix each in its appointed species place. It is a way of masking how deeply our histories actually intertwine and interpenetrate; how necessary 'the Other' is to our own sense of identity; how even the dominant, colonizing, imperializing power only knows who and what it is and can only experience the pleasure of its own power of domination in and through the construction of the Other. (14-15)

Interestingly, like vampires, racism punctures the universe of the South that creates an us-versus-them dichotomy. Situating a vampiric tale within the South attempts, then, to actually fragment and create a border (space) to deconstruct the notion of what the "other" is, and to perhaps engage with this recognition and realize that the other is ourselves, that which we are most fearful of, that which we have created. It is the vampire who has the power precisely because of existing on the outside far from the collective margin of what is considered "normal"; it is because of the existence of the vampire that we do not know what we are. It is this ambiguity the series tries to promote through its analogous relationship of race and vampirism. Despite this attempt, the result is not unproblematic, as I will demonstrate in the last section. But first we will look at the main othered characters.

Loving You Is Like Loving the Dead

As Barbara Creed describes the abject in relation to her proposal of the monstrous as always acutely feminine, she states

The place of the abject is "the place where meaning collapses," the place where "I" am not. The abject threatens life; it must be "radically excluded" from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self. Although the subject must exclude the abject, the abject must, nevertheless, be tolerated for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life. Further, the activity of exclusion is necessary to guarantee that the subject take up his/her proper place in relation to the symbolic. (9)

For Bill and Sookie, who quickly establish an intense romantic and physical relationship, their identities within the series are complicated because they are both abject. If the abject is the place where meaning col-

lapses, then Sookie is that fragmentation within Bon Temps; the locals have guessed that there is something unique or at least different about Sookie, though they are not willing or able to understand/admit what the difference is. Since she can read minds and disrupts what the people of Bon Temps consider “normal” or even “of God,” then Sookie is a blasphemous representation—particularly since she is a woman—of what humans should not be. Sookie does not fulfill the expectations her gender might indicate, particularly within a Southern small town context. A barmaid, Sookie, at least on the surface, fulfills these gender expectations. She is pretty, blonde, petite; she is in a service-oriented career. The symbolic order Kristeva discusses is in this case the town of Bon Temps, or what the inhabitants think is their town of Bon Temps: a small working-class farming community full of god-fearing folk. Yet Sookie, by her powers and presence, disrupts that order, rendering her an outsider, since she speaks her mind, associates with vampires, and is able literally to read minds. To them, she is something other than what they are familiar with, and in fact, she is strange. In terms of Kristeva’s analysis of the abject coupled with Creed’s discussion of the monstrous, Sookie occupies both of these spaces, as women often do in horror films:

The concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses or threatens to cross the ‘border’ is abject. Although the specific nature of the border changes from film to film, the function of the monstrous remains the same—to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability. In some horror films the monstrous is produced at the border between human and inhuman ... in others the border is between the normal and supernatural, good and evil; or the monstrous is produced at the border which separates those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not; or the border is between normal and abnormal sexual desire. (Creed 11)

Sookie is situated within the monstrous framework in the series; she threatens to cross the border between normal and abnormal by her sheer existence. The town folk are fearful of her and known to think (if not verbally admit) that she is a freak; Sookie has resigned herself at the beginning of the series to a life of loneliness because of her “ability.” It is further confirmation that she is the monstrous as she, through her immediate desire

for and curiosity about Bill Compton in the first episode, will be the one to bring about a confrontation between the town (the symbolic order) and Bill Compton (that which threatens its stability) both literally, as he could kill them all, and metaphorically, as the town will be forever changed and othered by the presence of vampires. Sookie and Bill represent a border between human and inhuman, between normal and supernatural, and between good and evil; Sookie, even more so, does not accept nor perform her proper gender roles, as we see almost immediately in the pilot episode when she saves Bill Compton, on her own, against a drug-dealing couple who attempt to drain Bill. Further, the desire Sookie feels for Bill is considered abnormal; quite literally, she could be labeled necrophilic, though in the show vampires are described as having a "disease" yet are undead.

Even though for Kristeva women are abject because of their polluting bodies (menstruation and excretion), Sookie is abject because of her attempt to disrupt the symbolic order of *Bon Temps* coupled with her "material female body" which is "central to the construction of the border in the horror film" (Creed 11). This border works to emphasize that "abjection is always ambiguous," and so is identity; there is both pleasure and horror in the undifferentiated, which makes the recognition and treatment of difference perhaps transcend the self and other people. This could have potential in fighting against hegemonic forces within areas similar to the representative South in the series, though this assertion is problematic, considering that the vampires representing both racial and sexual otherness include Southern white men or, quite literally, Vikings.

To further complicate Sookie's character, she also functions as a type of vampire, not just in her ability to hear other's thoughts without their permission. At first we come to see her as somewhat of a possessed mother, one of the major images of the feminine as monstrous. She, at least in the very beginning of the series, fits this description, as she cares for Gran, her grandmother, and saves Bill from the Rattrays. Vampires are often described traditionally as extensions of the devil or part of the devil: "in films depicting invasion by the devil, the victim is almost always a young girl, the invader the male devil. One of the major boundaries traversed is that between innocence and corruption, purity and impurity" (Creed 32). This is illustrated in Sookie's telepathic power as well as in her relationship with Bill. Immediately her friends at the bar and her boss Sam are worried for

her safety and arguably, really, for her potential “corruption.” From a traditional feminist reading, this can be interpreted as a fear of feminine power in a historically patriarchal place. Second to the series’ exploration of vampiric representation as otherness concerning race and sexuality is the exploration of “female monstrousness and the inability of the male order to control the woman whose perversity is expressed through her rebellious body” (Creed 34). Sookie is immediately seen as perverse, both in her attraction for Bill and vampires and in her expression of sexuality to Bill.

But what truly links her to the label of monstrous and abject is her drinking of Bill’s blood in order to heal from deadly injuries after being attacked by the same couple that tried to steal Bill’s blood. Repeatedly in the series thereafter, Sookie drinks Bill’s blood to heal from otherwise terminal injuries. This action calls forth imagery in horror films when the feminine vampire myth is tied “to myths associated with menarche, [and] can also be related to another important threshold in a woman’s life, an event which also involves a sudden blood flow—defloration” (Creed 66). Soon after, Sookie (who is, in fact, a virgin) sleeps with Bill. In the construction of these moments, Sookie is both Bill’s lover and his daughter; he has given her life through his blood (to save her from death) as well as bitten her repeatedly during their sexual encounters. Their abject nature, in Creed’s framework, is defined by their oral exchange of blood, though not at the same time. One of the major taboos, incest and the female body, is present in the relationship between Bill and Sookie, and their love becomes even more taboo since it is already associated with the border between human and inhuman as well as the notion of decay.

Through these representations in this narrative, this world comes to represent difference, other, and the abject. However, audience members are not repulsed by these abjections but rather, in the intersections of these categories in the borders in *True Blood*, come to embrace this difference, to recognize repulsion and perhaps question where that repulsion originates.

Problematizing the Otherness of Race and Sexuality

In the horror genre, critic Robin Wood uses the phrase “return of the repressed” in describing the monster’s intimate relationship with the social mainstream. The monster is always a social outcast or other, never ac-

cepted by mainstream society since it is something the mainstream cannot recognize; therefore, the monster must either be assimilated or annihilated (Magistrale 3). As Magistrale sums up Wood's main points, he states, "we want to know more about [monsters] and the design of their plans, and not only because we need this information to help facilitate their capture" (3). I contend that *True Blood* attempts to use this classic understanding of the horror film monster, and in this case vampire, as an allegorical representation of people of color and queerness situated within old world Southern culture. This sentiment is dug up through imagery within the series, and situates the audience within this Southern culture immediately with the opening montage of the show. Other imagery includes religious and conservative organizations like Gran's "Descendants of the Glorious Dead," celebrating the Civil War actions of Bon Temps' family members and Bill's place within that same history; we also see these characters as devoutly religious and honoring their racist past. The audience realizes that these characters in this place represent historical, social, cultural and political conservative-ness; we have come to apply "othering" to some instances of conservative-ness as well as people of color and those who engage in same-sex sexual expression. The character that represents this otherness in both race and sexuality is Lafayette (Nelsan Ellis). Not only is he racially and sexually the other, but he also deals in vampire blood as a narcotic, trading sex for vampire blood, and also runs an internet sex site (as it is implied when he makes Sookie's brother Jason [Ryan Kwanten], a white male, dance for more vamp blood). Further, he is blood-related to the only other people of color in the show, Tara (Rutina Wesley) and her mother. Lafayette, while not an actual vampire, occupies the border between a human and a "monster" who deals in the world of vampires as a job, and a sexual and racial "monster" that has historically and currently been a social outcast, often "captured" and "annihilated."

Using traditional psychoanalysis of the horror genre and vampires especially, Wood focuses more on the horror film's significance as offering "the possibility of radical change" (Magistrale 3-4). In other words, Wood recognizes that the horror film attempts to threaten the cultural and political status quo, and as Magistrale describes, "the monster, in his role as outsider and challenger of social rules and mores, is a violent protest against ideological repression: 'One might say that the true subject of the horror genre

is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses” (4). If this is so, then the series takes that to heart in exploring the representation of the vampire, using its cultural popularity and historical roots to align it with the historical struggle of racism and slavery. This alignment is seen in the passing discussion of the rights of vampires, but more importantly, it is seen in the marketing campaign of the series. On the HBO channel, it was common to see commercials for the American Vampire League, a fictional group dedicated to the equality of vampires. Further, HBO’s American Vampire League has broadcast fake “news reports” created and televised by HBO that discuss current news and events surrounding vampire phenomena in the world. And, like any equality-seeking organization, it also has its anti-vampire rights supporters: Fellowship of the Sun members who also purportedly televised commercials encouraging humans to join in the fight against vampires, much like the fight against immigrants or (from a different angle) terrorism. In the series, the Fellowship soldiers, mostly white (it is difficult to recall a person of color shown on screen among them) are reminiscent of Ku Klux Klan imagery and tactics.

What is problematic about this imagery is that vampires can hide their status as vampires; unless they are touched or aroused in some sort of way, they can typically pass as human. However, people of color cannot always pass as white. While, in the show, we often see humans passing and moving within multiple categories, like Lafayette’s politician lover who passes as straight, or the coroner who is discovered as a fangbanger, nonetheless the allegory ultimately fails; the series, while it attempts to counter the hegemonic forces surrounding racism in our culture, doesn’t critically engage with the fact that people of color, because of their skin or when in the act of passing they are discovered, are immediately otherized. Unlike sexuality or alternative sexual practices as *actions* that tend to happen behind closed doors, skin is part of the body, that which is always under scrutiny and public viewing. This textual presentation is akin to what Magistrale argues: “thus, while the horror film typically ends in the subjugation of the monster and reaffirmation of the status quo, a subversive energy has nonetheless been unleashed; the audience has witnessed the punitive consequences that accompany nonconformity as well as the potential—albeit ephemeral—range of alternative political possibilities” (4). This is true for the series, especially when we see the Fellowship of the Sun, as they engage in suicide

bombings and warrior tactics, ultimately fail in their hatred against vampires. Their leader is uncloaked as a fraud, and ironically, the vampires show more humanity in not killing these members of the church than the members did in their plans to kill the vampires. There is hope for nonconformity in these acts.

However, the traditional vampire narrative has been about “desire and consuming out of an effort to quench that desire ... [and] like most of the monsters . . . , the vampire presents a problem in gender identification. Because the mouth represents the site of pleasurable (and hence, erotic) experience for most vampires, within that orifice we find both masculine and feminine traits” (Magistrales 38). Because of this understanding of the mouth as the representative site of erotic and sexual practice of the vampire, then it is more plausible to see the vampire within the *True Blood* series as more of an othered sexual and gendered representation; particularly in light of the “god hates fangs” rhetoric seen in the opening montage. This directly corresponds with the popular signage of “god hates fags” protest rhetoric seen, particularly at Prop 8 activist gatherings, or notably as used by the Westboro Baptist Church. Further, the commercials the series has televised as “real” to advertise the series are acutely representative of pro-marriage/anti-gay ideology we’ve seen on the airwaves as well as the equality debates surrounding marriage and queerness.

While this representation seems more likely given the imagery of the series, it is also problematic when we look again at Lafayette. Since he is a queer man of color who is the cook at Merlotte’s Bar, he works with Sookie and works for Sam, a Southern white shapeshifter. While he keeps his shapeshifter status a secret, Lafayette’s working for Sam as a cook in a small Southern bar is difficult to detach from a slave/master relationship, especially since Lafayette and his cousin Tara, named after a plantation, are the predominant people of color in the town of Bon Temps. To keep this imagery from slipping into a spectacle or into reductionist representations of queerness or blackness, the show would need to include more diversity and critical consciousness surrounding these identity markers.

What is even more interesting is to analyze Lafayette’s character in terms of sexuality as abject; he is a queer man of color in a white “redneck town.” He is flamboyant and often has to defend himself against stereotypes concerning gay men. One instance in the series has Lafayette jump-

ing over his stove to argue with a group of white men who sent their burgers back because they “don’t want no AIDS burger.” Lafayette threatens the borders, positions and rules of being masculine, of being black, and of being southern. His cousin Tara also threatens tropes by her loud mouth and aggressive nature. However, instead of being liberatory and counter-hegemonic, these attempts at carving out and problematizing notions of difference and otherness are lost within a sea of reductionist representation that falls flat for many audience members and likely reinforces and reinscribes stereotypes surrounding race and sexuality instead of troubling them. Lafayette’s race and sexuality are reminiscent of the Jungian shadow, which “is the most powerful and dangerous of them all because it contains those avatars of a primitive and bestial nature that defy rational boundaries and restraints” (Magistrale 12). This reduces Lafayette to another historical black stereotype: primitive and bestial in nature. However, Magistrale also argues that, citing Iaccino, “ ‘Within the medium of the horror film, one message is continually expressed: The dark shadow cannot and perhaps should not be repressed’ ” (12). Yet this realization is perhaps lost on the viewer since these shadows fall on a backdrop of Southern oppression and racism.

Conclusion

Despite the thoughtful use of the vampire archetype to explore notions of difference and otherness surrounding race and sexuality, the *True Blood* series ultimately fails to redefine, disrupt and upset the historical racist, sexist and homophobic ideologies of the South. Castenell, Jr. writes, “the factors that shaped a distinctive South are: (a) the relative absence of non-Anglo-Saxon white ethnics, (b) fundamentalist Protestantism, and (c) a propensity for violence manifested in the peculiar racial and economic institution of the slave plantation” (156). This is the image of the South and the factors that help shape its meaning; these images are further underscored as the show uses the vampire mythos to explore notions of passing, whiteness, racism, sexuality, otherness, difference, and abjection. Yet despite its representation of women who wield power and break taboos, of vampires who fight for their own equality; despite its exploration into individual vs.

collective responsibility and into difference surrounding vampires as a form of hopeful change, the disruption only goes so far.

In terms of sexuality, the gay/vampire analogy is powerful; as Curtis writes of *True Blood*, "after all, even before gays started coming out and gaining public visibility, it is safe to say that most people at least knew of their existence (even homophobes, who wished they didn't exist). Before the Great Revelation, however, most people believed that vampires were purely mythical monsters" (68). Vampires in the series are meant to be a repressed minority that society must recognize to live up to its ideals of justice and equality (Curtis 68). Creator Alan Ball stated on *trueblood.net* in season one commentary that the police raid on Fangtasia in season one was meant to resemble raids on gay bars (Curtis 76). However, elsewhere, Ball remarks, "Ultimately, if you latch onto that metaphor and become really serious about it, it would make the show . . . extremely homophobic. . . . Because vampires *are* dangerous, they kill, they're amoral, a lot of them. I don't think that's what it is. I think that's just a nice little detail in what is hopefully a big popcorn thrill ride" (Jace). While the series clearly draws connections between issues of otherness and vampirism, it fails to engage in a critically conscious understanding of the complexities that the history and context of sexuality demands.

To highlight this complexity even further, we must never fail to recognize that as vampires are "mainstreaming" on the show (a term that describes fitting in and participation in normal human life), "they are at play, playing at being human . . . [that ultimately vampire] success depends on their ability to play human" (Culver 20). Much like the vampires it represents, *True Blood* is playing at these complex notions of humanity. While noteworthy and ambitious, the show ultimately fails to engage the intricacies of otherness and difference in ways that create consciousness-raising in its viewers to truly delve deep into the bayous of ambiguous spaces and borderlands, despite the vampire as a representation of the human self. It is not a human self. And though it is a tool for us to engage in self-reflection, what is at stake here is much more than an abject corpse. But it is at least a step in the direction of using horror to tease out notions of abjection and difference.

Sabrina Boyer

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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Book Reviews

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Reviewers may suggest a book to be reviewed or request to be assigned one from among those sent to the editor. Reviews should be approximately 500-1,000 words long and should (like article submissions) be emailed as an attachment of a Microsoft Word document with the contributor's surname in the file name. Queries are welcome.

***Mad Men's* Color Schemes: A Changing Palette of Working Women**

In the third season of AMC's *Mad Men*, the episode "The Color Blue" finds an executive Don Draper (Jon Hamm) in bed with his daughter's art teacher. She muses aloud over a question posed by an eight-year-old in her art class earlier that day: "How do I know if what I see as blue is the same as it is to you?" While Miss Farrell (Abigail Spencer) is delighted by the wonder and nuance of such a question, Don dismisses the answer as fairly black and white: "The truth is that people may see things differently, but they don't really *want* to."

Over its first three seasons, *Mad Men* echoes this fundamental conversation between the sexes, repeatedly underscoring that the show's working women are attuned to color in ways that their male counterparts are not. Functioning as a kind of primer, a sequence of key episodes featuring the theme of color works together to reflect the complexity of women's experience in the work world, and what's more, begins to serve as a predictive tool to reveal their secrets before they are ultimately articulated in the fourth season finale.

Articulating Masculinity: Male Roles and Discursive Variety

In his February 2011 review of *Mad Men* in the *New York Review of Books*, critic Daniel Mendelsohn writes that fans of the series have falsely

equated the show's superior design and costuming with good writing and acting—elements Mendelsohn vigorously criticizes. Describing the show as more melodrama than drama,

the characters and their milieu were so unrelentingly repellent that I kept wondering whether the writers had been trying, unsuccessfully, for a kind of camp—for a tartly tongue-in-cheek send-up of Sixties attitudes. (I found myself wishing that the creators of *Glee* had gotten a stab at this material.) But the creators of *Mad Men* are in deadly earnest. (Mendelsohn 1)

For the sake of brevity, I will refrain from undertaking any lengthy summary of his arguments about the show's flaws, but I feel compelled to say that I largely do not share his convictions about bad acting and bad writing in the series. However, Mendelsohn's wry speculation that *Mad Men* had been crafting a kind of "tongue-in-cheek" vision of the Sixties seems oddly resonant with my own reading of the show. While I'm certainly not suggesting that *Mad Men* is any way meant to be interpreted as camp, I do find stylistic elements of its writing and narrative structure that are intentionally playful, a step away from the deadly earnestness that Mendelsohn sees at work, and must then be taken into consideration when interpreting the series as a whole.

Just as advertising itself is a persuasive fusion of the verbal and the visual, *Mad Men*'s advertising agency of Sterling Cooper is comprised of precisely those same elements, divided neatly along gender lines. The male characters stake out the terrain of the discursive, revealing much about their place in the work world through a superabundance of dialogue, banter, and even through what the viewer soon begins to recognize as a kind of word play: Roger Sterling (John Slattery) is the wealthy playboy, Freddy Rumsen is the alcoholic, and "Don Draper," the assumed name obscuring Dick Whitman's troubled past, tips off the viewer to the evasive Draper's proclivity for cloaking the truth. Further entwining the masculine with the discursive, Timothy Richardson's elegant Lacanian reading of masculinity in *Mad Men* points to the fact that the doubling of Don Draper complicates how that character functions as a signifier: "If Dick Whitman is what Draper was or could have been but isn't, Don Draper is made up. He's a fiction, a persona via which our protagonist has amassed a great deal" (Richardson 23). With Don Draper—a figure in a television show who has assumed a false identity—*Mad Men* blurs the line between the fictional and the fic-

tive, and sets a broader standard by which male characters in the series are often associated with fiction.

The trade-off for this explosion of male discourse, it would seem, is a dearth of color, and beginning with the stark black *Mad Men* logo, the men of the show are presented in bland, tri-chromatic uniforms of black, white, and gray. Commenting on the link between workplace competition and the early nineteenth-century “graying of male attire,” Simon During notes that

the dark suit began its career as a uniform for middle-class men.

This marked the effective end of the aristocratic display of power and prestige through male clothing, and the emergence of a de-individualized style of dress which signaled and performed an extended franchise of power: the power not of families and individuals but of a gendered collective, that is, of men. It also represented the ascetic ethics of saving, restraint and carefulness associated first with the Puritan tradition and then with professionalism, both being tied to a gender regime in which men increasingly were required to control their emotions. (During 180)

The era of the dark suit, argues During, also marked the moment in which colorlessness came to be equated with toughness and competence in an increasingly competitive marketplace. *Mad Men's* hoard of cutthroat Manhattan ad executives is no exception. With a comparatively short history of women in the workplace to consider, we may nonetheless make some implicit assumptions that the more colorful palette of mid-twentieth century women's attire was not read in a similar fashion.

A Spectrum of Femininity: Female Roles and the Use of Color in the Workplace

It should be no surprise that *Mad Men* features few central female characters in its 1960s office scenes. Women are often present, but as part of the massive background secretarial and support staff, and thus rarely have dialogue. In fact, in the third season's 147 scenes featuring dialogue in an office context, female characters have lines of three words or more in 67 of those scenes, participating in less than 46% of workplace dialogue. By contrast, male characters engage in a whopping 86% of the dialogue that unfolds at Sterling Cooper or other office settings, speaking in 127 of

the 147 workplace scenes. This discussion will therefore focus specifically on the two most prominent female characters at Sterling Cooper: office manager Joan Holloway (later Joan Harris) and secretary (soon-to-be copy writer) Peggy Olson (played by Christina Hendricks and Elisabeth Moss). The fact that both of those characters' descriptions require some modification from season one to season three is significant, as each undergoes a struggle to redefine her socioeconomic status: Joan marries a doctor in an attempt to leave office work behind her and ascend to a more refined world, while Peggy becomes increasingly competitive with the male account executives at Sterling Cooper and establishes herself as an independent career woman in the city. The show's female characters, both sociologically and cinematically positioned to be seen more often than heard, signal their own changing status in the workplace hierarchy through an elaborate language of wardrobe color. We may read these changes through the colors that Joan and Peggy adopt, their successes or failures in turn creating a prismatic semiotics of sexuality and success that will become the palette of *Mad Men's* working women.

Boudoir Red

Two pivotal scenes from seasons one and three serve to guide the viewer in understanding the operative language of color across the episodes. The first marks the debut of Joan Holloway's iconic red dress, repeated extensively in *Mad Men* publicity and reprised in slightly different iterations over the next three seasons. It is worth noting that the red dress does not in fact appear in the season one premier; rather, Joan is wearing green as she advises the new secretary Peggy about becoming indispensable to the male executives. As Joan gives the tour of Sterling Cooper, she notes to the wide-eyed Peggy, "if you really make the right moves, you'll be in the country and you won't be going to work at all" ("Smoke Gets In Your Eyes"), thus hinting at her own aspirations outside of the workplace. Even from the first episode, Joan is immediately identified as the office *femme fatale*: a beautiful redhead, voluptuous, professional, and unquestionably in control, both of the women in the secretarial pool and of the men whose calendars and libidos she expertly manages. In the sixth episode, "Babylon," Joan's red dress becomes narratively and symbolically

tied to all things of the body: in particular, her own physical self and notions of female sexuality. Art director Sal Romano (Bryan Batt) and ad executives Freddy Rumsen (Joel Murray) and Ken Cosgrove (Aaron Staton) struggle with the “Belle Jolie” cosmetics account, puzzling over how to sell the new line of lipsticks. As the scene opens, the men scoff at the names of the lipsticks—“Passion Flower Peach,” “Boudoir Red.” Lest we miss the fact that this specific band of the spectrum is being inextricably intertwined with sex, Ken cites research about how lipstick was invented to mimic the flush in a woman’s face after intercourse. But much like Don’s indifference to the mysteries of the color blue, Freddy and Ken are similarly stumped about how to differentiate one shade from another. “I don’t speak moron,” Freddy complains, “let’s throw it to the chickens.”

In the next scene, Joan takes charge of a focus group comprised of a number of the women in the office. Assembled in a room behind a one-way mirror, the women are presented all of Belle Jolie’s new lipsticks for their evaluation and comments. The men of Sterling Cooper begin to gather on the other side of the mirror. As the camera’s perspective shifts back and forth between either side of the glass, the viewer cannot help but make a powerful and lasting association: while the executives smugly critique their female coworkers from a darkened room, male expression is all at once equated with the verbal and entirely stripped of color.

It is worth noting that the only male character who occasionally transgresses the color line is Sal Romano, the impeccably dressed art director whose choice of tie colors wins him the admiration of a number of women in the secretarial pool. While the viewer is made to recognize his closeted homosexuality long before Sal himself does, his role in the Belle Jolie episode seems somehow telling. Even as his male colleagues in the darkened room make crude sexual remarks about the unsuspecting women who have approached the one-way mirror to apply their makeup, Sal abstains from the sexual banter and instead critiques different parts of each woman’s appearance by picking up the lipstick himself and drawing on the mirror. In a scene in which the men and women are otherwise so carefully separated both physically and by the use of color, Sal’s application of red lipstick onto the one-way glass complicates his position in the narrative, and hints that *Mad Men* may be using color as a marker of 1960s otherness in ways that include not just female subjectivity but gay subjectivity as well.

Divided from the boisterous, darkened room, the women are silenced behind the glass but awash in color, ablaze in every shade of lipstick. (In what seems to be a nod to the show's opening credits in which men and women are similarly divided into black and white versus color, a repeated shot captures the silhouette of one of the men lounging on a darkened couch, the camera lens shooting over his shoulder through the one-way mirror at the women in vivid color, applying lipstick.) At the center of the activity is Joan, the only woman aware that they're being observed. While the focus group around her parses out the nuances of each lipstick tint, Joan's fire-engine red dress has precisely one meaning—affirmed later as we learn not only that Joan is having an affair with her boss Roger Sterling, but also that his pet name for her is “Red.” Joan discreetly looks into the one-way mirror, and then creates a pretense to turn her back and bend over, offering a view of her backside in a bold red silhouette to the roomful of executives. It is a galvanizing moment in which color has expressive impact. “I want to stand up and salute that,” says the unabashed Ken, from the darkened room. Noticeably absent from the Belle Jolie campaign is Don Draper, at work on a different campaign for the Israeli Board of Tourism. In sharp contrast with the seeming banality of the lipstick focus group, Don is pictured reading the Leon Uris novel *Exodus* in preparation for his meeting. Once again, even as Joan presents herself in front of the one-way glass, Don is conflated with the textual while the female characters remain objects of visual inspection. Meanwhile, having remained wordless throughout her interaction with her male co-workers, separated literally behind the glass wall (and metaphorically below the glass ceiling), Joan at last makes red meaningful to the men.

If the Belle Jolie plotline sets up Joan's equation of sex, the corporeal, and the affirmative presence of color, then the opposite seems to be true for Peggy in this sequence. Peggy is part of the focus group, and quietly sits in front of her own make-up mirror without applying any lipstick. Instead, a slow-motion shot catches her dressed in neutral gray—the trademark color of her male coworkers—watching as other smiling women in vibrant shades of pink, purple, and red discard lipstick blots. On the other side of the glass, Freddy Rumsen takes notice, and after the focus group disbands, he stops Peggy to ask why she didn't take part in trying on the lipstick. She shrugs, explaining that her first choice had already been taken, and she's very par-

ticular: “I don’t think most women want to be one of a hundred colors in a box.” In this case, the fact that Peggy rejects color, the accepted mode of expression for women, transforms her career: Peggy’s insight offers Freddy a key to the new Belle Jolie campaign, and he in turn champions her promotion to junior copy writer.

While the “Babylon” episode marks defining moments for both of these working women, Peggy’s palette will be far subtler in its changes as her narrative trajectory takes her into the uncharted territory of her male counterparts. Instead of mapping out the shade-by-shade shifts in Peggy’s elaborate color schemes as she climbs the corporate ladder, I will simply make two brief observations here.

First, Peggy also has a signature dress that makes repeated appearances through season three. It’s a muted but stylish plaid sheath in green, blue, and beige that corresponds to points in the plot at which she takes significant risks in her career at Sterling Cooper: specifically, when she refers to equal pay legislation and boldly but unsuccessfully lobbies Don for a raise (“The Fog”), and then again after an argument with Don, when it becomes clear that her options at Sterling Cooper have stalled, and Peggy makes the decision to take active control of her career by contacting a former colleague and new competitor, Duck Phillips (Mark Moses; “Seven Twenty Three”). Just as red allows Joan to express her own considerable sexual charisma, the plaid functions as Peggy’s version of camouflage, mirroring her efforts to exercise a different kind of power—that of professional strategizing—in the workplace. The recurrence of Peggy’s green and beige plaid and its careful, orderly grid indicates to the viewer that she is a woman with a plan. The second point, however, underscores the fact that Peggy isn’t all corporate stealth. Even as Joan phases red out of her wardrobe in season three, Peggy begins to include red at moments that directly correspond to a secret affair with Duck Philips.

Green Dream

As if in conversation with season one’s “Babylon,” the much-discussed episode from season three, “Guy Walks into an Advertising Agency,” offers extraordinary insights into *Mad Men’s* palette for working women, using color as the means of articulating their transformations. In season three,

Sterling Cooper has undergone a number of changes: they have been purchased by a British firm, Joan has married a doctor who, unbeknownst to her friends at the office, turns out not to be the success she had imagined, and junior copy writer Peggy now has her own office and secretary.

Just as the Belle Jolie episode created multiple narrative levels around the color red, “Guy Walks into an Advertising Agency” does the same with green. While the office worries over the imminent arrival of the British executives, Ken Cosgrove celebrates landing a lucrative new account with that most American of companies, John Deere, by driving one of their riding lawnmowers victoriously into the middle of the office. It is not merely the incongruousness of the object but, as the camera’s soft focus suggests, the color that strikes the viewer. The sudden preponderance of green amid the neutral reception area establishes the preferred reading: the color will signal the promise of wealth, the good life, the American dream.

Reflecting all those ideals is Joan, also in the reception area during one of her final days at Sterling Cooper before leaving to begin her life as a doctor’s wife. While a previous scene has revealed that her husband has failed in his efforts to be a surgeon and that she will need to look for other work, Joan has carefully crafted the public image of a woman destined to leave the work world behind and ascend to high society. As she and Mr. Hooker (Ryan Cartwright), her British replacement, greet the arriving contingent from the U.K., Joan has come a long way from her days in *femme fatale* red; instead, she is elegantly dressed in emerald green, the color of prosperity that both she and the company hope to project.

Joan’s shift from red to green in the workplace—from the corporeal to the financial, from the sly wink to the very correct—comes with a name change, as well. While many in the office continue to refer to her by her first name, others have begun referring to Joan as “Mrs. Harris,” underscoring this push toward her new married identity. Mr. Hooker does precisely this as he introduces “Mrs. Harris” to the British executives. He notes that she had been an excellent office manager before him, “...but she’s off to greener pastures,” a metaphor that smoothly subsumes the John Deere mower, Joan’s dress, and the notion of social climbing.

Coincidentally, it is the day of Joan’s farewell party, and all her visual cues about leaving the office for a more refined life have not gone unnoticed by her coworkers as they toast her good fortune. Peggy pulls Joan

aside during the party to offer her congratulations and thanks, and as their conversation begins, the John Deere mower reappears in the frame as drunken office workers take turns riding it around the reception area. Referencing their very first scene together, Peggy invokes the premier episode of *Mad Men* in which Joan had spoken longingly of marrying up and out of the office (and, it is worth noting, had worn green).

Peggy: I'm really happy that you got what you wanted. I remember on my first day you said that could happen to me if I played my cards right.

Joan: Are you getting sentimental? Don't worry—I'm sure we'll see each other all the time.

Peggy: If we don't, I just want to say...

Peggy never gets to finish this thought about Joan's impending departure from Sterling Cooper (nor to answer the charge of "getting sentimental," when Peggy is at last on her way to joining the realm of emotionally controlled, gray-suited men), because in one of *Mad Men's* most famous scenes, this is the moment when a secretary accidentally runs over a British executive's foot with the John Deere riding mower. The stricken crowd is splattered with blood, and in the panic, it is Joan—she of the body, of the physical, of the corporeal—who takes over. She calls for a tourniquet and a first aid kit, and as the others watch in horror, Joan dresses the bleeding man's injury. For the viewer who has been attentive to the implication of color, it will come as no surprise to see that Joan's failed dreams of status and wealth are reflected back in her wrecked green dress, now returned to her signature red as if revealing her irrefutable nature. In the hospital waiting room later, Joan seems to acknowledge the connection as well when Don Draper greets her with a stunned, "Joan, my God!", ostensibly in reference to the day's events. Joan, however, replies as if he were commenting on her blood-spattered dress: "I know, it's ruined." Here, the significance of the imperfect, besmirched green and all it had once implied for Joan has never been more vivid.

If Joan's disappointment is rendered in the stark contrast between green and red, then financial officer Lane Price's own close call (the injury resulting from the lawn mower accident will mean he will be spared an unpleasant corporate transfer) is punctuated by nothing less than a literary reference. Lane (Jared Harris) quotes *Tom Sawyer* to Don in the waiting room: "I feel like I just went to my own funeral, and I didn't like the eu-

logy.” Where Joan is concerned, however, Lane returns to platitudes: he extends the company’s thanks for her quick thinking, and offers to reimburse her for her dress. Their conversation turns to her departure from the office, and Don comments on how much Joan will be missed. As if incapable of telling red from green—an actual affliction of perception that in fact affects a good percentage of men¹—Don and Lane seem unaware that Joan’s destroyed green dress paints a clear picture of a woman whose attempts to leave work behind her for a life of leisure will go unfulfilled, and indeed she returns to work with the then-reconstituted company of Sterling Cooper Draper Price by the end of season three.

Meaningful Speechlessness and Madonna Blue

In its depiction of the years 1964-1965, the fourth season stands apart for its more explicit and unflinching representation of women’s struggles in the workplace, and accordingly, the show’s storyline sees the addition of both a major and minor female character (market research consultant Dr. Faye Miller [Cara Buono] and new secretary Megan [Jessica Pare], their respective statuses in the workplace marked by the presence or absence of a last name) as well as a discernible increase in dialogue attributed to women in office settings. That is hardly to suggest that season four signals a moment of perfect gender equity, however; quite to the contrary, numerous plotlines revolve around escalating displays of sexism toward Joan and Peggy, and hostility among the female characters as they weigh individual versus collective goals.

Season four, then, might best be understood as the pivotal moment in which *Mad Men*’s working women are seen and *attempt* to be heard, with mixed and often frustrating results. In the midst of these struggles, the semiotics of color provide the viewer with ample clues to supplement the silences. Episode 9, “The Beautiful Girls,” signals a heightened sensitivity to the show’s history of color codes. Joan appears wearing her signature red dress for the first time in season four. Not surprisingly, the return of red in Joan’s wardrobe is in the context of on-and-off sexual tension with her boss and former lover, Roger Sterling; Roger has learned of Joan’s husband’s looming departure for Vietnam and in her distress, she and Roger have become closer. Like the infamous lawn mower accident, yet another bodily

crisis unfolds in the office, and there are evocative parallels between “The Beautiful Girls” and season three’s “Guy Walks into an Advertising Agency.” In fact, the color schemes already in place in seasons one and three provide sufficient information to predict many key points of *Mad Men's* season four finale.

In the glass-walled conference room of the newly formed Sterling Cooper Draper Price, Don and his team scramble to land the account of Filmore Auto Parts. In the reception area, and just behind the Filmore brothers’ backs, the office is horrified to realize that Don’s elderly secretary Miss Blankenship has collapsed and died at her desk. While the executives in the conference room work to keep the clients’ attention focused elsewhere, the remaining staff frantically gathers to discuss the disaster. Amid the panic, Joan in her red dress makes the decisions about how to handle the body. She covers Miss Blankenship with an afghan, and instructs the young secretary Megan to find a man help her wheel the body quickly out of view. From what we’ve come to know from past episodes and what we can extract from this single story line, Joan’s red is evoking multiple moments—past, present, and future—in this narrative: the injured man’s foot, the bloodied dress, the secretary’s mortality, Joan’s husband’s future in Vietnam, her passion with Roger—passion that will escalate at the end of that day from a reluctant dinner to furtive sex.

The careful viewer of “The Beautiful Girls” will also note another parallel with “Guy Walks into an Advertising Agency”: there is once again a lovely young woman in green during the crisis. This time, it is Megan smartly dressed in an expensive shade of emerald. Unlike Joan’s destroyed green dress in season three, however, Megan ends the episode with her green dress flawlessly preserved as she moves with uncanny ease from the emergency with Miss Blankenship to comforting Don’s daughter Sally (Kiernan Shipka), who has wandered into the day’s chaos uninvited. Taking our cue from the signifying systems of color in past seasons, it is far less surprising when Don proposes to Megan in the season four finale, making Megan, and not Joan, the high society wife-to-be.

While Mendelsohn bemoans much of the acting in *Mad Men*, one of the rare moments he highlights includes an early scene involving Joan, who at one point is asked to help vet television scripts for potential conflicts of interest with clients’ ads, and finds she’s both good at it and intellectually stimulated by it—only to be told, in

passing, that the firm has hired a man to do the job. The look on her face when she gets the news—first crushed, then resigned, because after all this is how it goes—is one of the moments of real poignancy in the show. (Mendelsohn 2)

As is so often the case, the scene showcases a moment in which Joan has only a modicum of dialogue among a roomful of chatting men, and must simultaneously suppress her interior life while looking radiant and professional in the workplace. By the time Joan is fully engaged in the plot twists of the fourth season, her character is increasingly comprehensible through the dynamic play between vibrant color and meaningful speechlessness.

The day after their indiscretion, Joan's tension with Roger is marked by his preponderance of talk and her relative silence. Conversely, her emotions—and her new pregnancy revealed in the next episode—are visible in her color choices. Having avoided Roger much of the day, Joan is summoned to Roger's office. She enters the comically stark black and white modern room wearing a lush floral print in vivid purples.

Roger: Is this what it took to get you in here?

Joan: (no reply)

Roger: Look, I'm sorry. It was in the heat of the moment. And there was a moment, you know that.

Joan: I'm not sorry. But I'm married, and so are you.

Roger: I feel something. I know *you* do.

Joan: (no reply, exiting.)

In "Hands and Knees," Joan reveals to Roger that she believes she's "late," and with her husband away in the army, it must certainly be the result of their tryst. A complicated conversation unfurls throughout the rest of the episode revealing Joan's feelings about both her relationship with Roger and the possibility of motherhood at this point in her life, all without ever using the words "pregnancy," "abortion," or "baby." Roger arranges a visit to a doctor who scolds them for their reckless behavior, but ultimately refers them to "a good man"—the procedure (an abortion, the viewer assumes) will cost \$400. Later, in a restaurant, Roger bemoans their bad luck. Again, their exchanges are marked by fairly little input from Joan, as Roger's side of the discussion increasingly reveals the limits of his emotional investment.

Roger: What if this is a sign? Maybe I'm in love with you.

Joan: (tentatively) So you want to keep it?

Roger: No, of course not. I mean, if there's going to be something

between us, I don't want it to start this way. Do you? With a scandal?

Joan: (withdrawing) I see.

Sensing Joan's disapproval, Roger desperately considers other options, including the possibility that her husband may never come home from the war. Joan cuts short his morbid ramblings: "I'm going to take care of it."

Later, in a modest royal blue dress (an unusual color choice for Joan), she sits in a doctor's waiting room across from a young mother who begins to cry quietly as her daughter is shepherded back into the clinic. Composed but empathetic, Joan initiates a conversation with the mother, who confesses through her tears that her daughter is only seventeen, and that she herself had been only fifteen when she had given birth to her. "How old is your daughter?" asks the woman, assuming that Joan too is waiting for her child. Joan pauses for a moment, and responds softly, "Fifteen."

Many viewers saw the first hints that Joan would secretly opt to keep the baby in her next-day assurances to guilt-ridden Roger ("It's ok—we avoided a tragedy," she tells him, as he worries for her and regrets not having gone with her to the clinic. Steering him out the door, she adds, "We have a partners' meeting. Life goes on."). In fact, the precursor to that clue is a telling sequence in which, immediately following a shot of Pete Campbell (Vincent Kartheiser) and his very pregnant wife Trudy (Alison Brie), Joan rides the train home from the clinic. Alone and pensive in the darkened car, she leans her head toward the window where her image is reflected in the glass. Joan instantly evokes the iconic Madonna figure in countless paintings, a figure that symbolizes maternity throughout the West in its depiction of a serene woman clad in royal blue bending in a subtle, feminine arc to accommodate a cradled child. While Joan does not confirm our suspicions until the final episode of season four when she discusses her pregnancy with her husband by phone (she has created the fiction that she's much further along, and that the baby is his), the thoughtful reader of color will have long before noticed this significant change in Joan's usual palette, and situated that color scheme both in the context of the "Hands and Knees" episode and in the context of powerful historical and cultural associations.

Color Commentary

None of this is to suggest that *Mad Men* has absolutely nothing to say about the interplay between men and color, but even as the palette from which women express themselves becomes more telling, men are repeatedly indifferent to those nuances. From Don Draper's conviction that everyone must undoubtedly want to perceive the same shade of blue to Roger Sterling's song-and-dance performance of blackface for his delighted guests at a garden party in "My Old Kentucky Home," the show's implicit commentary insinuates a wry kind of male color blindness toward power and privilege in early 1960s society. Nor would I contend that the dialogic content surrounding the female characters is insignificant—there is quite simply less of it. *Mad Men* has had the insight to replicate an office environment from that age in which men are not only vastly in the majority in the workplace, but develop an ease in communicating with each other because of it. On the other hand, the capacity for women to relate to and converse with their coworkers in the 1960s workplace becomes constrained by a variety of office inequities and sexual discrimination, all of which are increasingly the topic of season four. In sum, both the quality and the quantity of women's dialogue is reduced, and appropriately so for that historical moment. Shifts in the use of color, then, become an alternative language by which the viewer might gain insight into the complexities of office life for *Mad Men*'s working women. Both our cultural associations to color and the artful narrative links created by individual plotlines work together to give these central female characters a powerful semiotic tool to articulate a vibrant spectrum of personal and professional transformations.

Katherine Gantz

St. Mary's College of Maryland

Notes

¹Red-green color vision deficiency is a relatively common form of colorblindness in which red and green are perceived as identical. It is inherited in an X-linked recessive manner and affects 8% of Caucasian males, but only 0.5% of Caucasian females; these statistics go down to roughly 3% among males of African or Asian descent (Deeb and Motulsky 2005).

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The Revolution Will Be *Soooo* Cute: YouTube “Hauls” and the Voice of Young Female Consumers

In the last three years, more than 250,000 short videos known as “hauls” have been posted on YouTube. The ostensible purpose of a haul is to display recent clothing, accessories, and makeup purchases, sometimes simply showing the items and sometimes offering a quick demonstration of how they will be worn; a typical video is under ten minutes long and is filmed with a webcam in the video blogger’s, or *vlogger*’s, bedroom. The *San Francisco Chronicle* describes them as “the favorite medium of expression for attention-seeking shopaholics between the ages of tween and twentysomething” (Wells). Some hauls have more than a million hits, and the 500 or so videos posted by sisters Elle and Blair Fowler have surpassed 160 million combined views (Schwartz). The phenomenon has rated coverage by major outlets such as NPR, *The New York Times*, *Psychology Today*, and *Good Morning America*.

All of this time and attention on the part of teenage girls and young women is channeled into what the *Urban Dictionary* reminds us is simply “a video showing a shopping spree” (Raven L.). Of course there are many variations on the theme, but YouTube video genres develop so quickly that I think we can already speak in terms of the “classic hauls.” The original or core demographic producing hauls consists of mainly middle- and upper-middle class, and mainly white, teens and young women. The products displayed include fairly expensive makeup along with clothing from major brands and mall stores. About ten stores and brands seem to dominate, including

MAC, Forever 21, Sephora, Lush, Ulta, Victoria's Secret, Hollister, American Eagle, Charlotte Russe, and Wet Seal. The uncontested leaders are MAC, which is named in the title of at least 34,000 hauls, and Forever 21, appearing in at least 23,000 titles. A quick taxonomy includes videos with and without a tutorial element; follow-ups on previous hauls; videos responding to "tags" (requests for a haul on a particular topic); hauls from one brand or store; hauls made in response to someone else's haul ("video responses"); and recurring topics such as "Products I Regret Buying," "Back to School Haul," and the especially gratuitous "Bedroom Tour" and "What's In My Purse?" Rarer subsets include hauls displaying products from discount stores, plus-size stores, and wholesale catalogs.

Both in the videos themselves and in the lengthy viewer comment strings beneath, the language that accompanies haul vlogs is an ethnographic goldmine. This discussion explores the rhetorical positioning and conversation topics of the core demographic involved in this phenomenon. Ultimately, I suggest that hauls and their attendant comments provide important information about this segment of contemporary youth culture and its maintenance of longstanding gender tropes even while traversing the new language territory made possible by Web 2.0 forums such as YouTube. Before going further, readers unfamiliar with hauls may want to experience the self-titled "beauty community" for themselves. Clips from several of the hauls discussed in this article are available in a four-minute video on YouTube entitled "How Cute Is That Hauls Sampler?" (Jeffries). Spending just a few minutes in the haulosphere will provide a lasting impression of the rhetoric that constitutes a classic haul. In the transcripts and quotations used in this article, I have retained all the verbal idiosyncracies of speakers and commenters for reasons relevant to my analysis.

If we describe hauls objectively as videos that display and demonstrate new products, identify brands and retailers, and provide a forum for feedback, we might expect something equivalent to an adolescent's *Consumer Reports*. That really would be a nice idea, but it's not a particularly apt analogy since this is not statistically significant data regarding any one product, and the products have not been meaningfully tested. With the exception of the "Products I Regret Buying" tag, hauls are generally filmed immediately after purchase—before we know if this mini-dress will hold its shape or this eyeshadow will flake before second period.

Mail marketing and free samples raise questions about the source of so much expensive merchandise in the hands of teenagers, and recent Federal Trade Commission rulings are relevant to the haulers' activities. According to the 2009 revision of the "FTC Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising," a blogger must "clearly and conspicuously disclose" if a product has been received free of charge from the manufacturer (Federal Trade Commission 79). Indeed, it's quite common to see, in the description box beneath the video, something like jennydeer's note: "Everything was bought by me, I am not being paid, these are my honest opinions." RubyChopsticks confesses, "'This FTC thing confuses me, but i'll just state that i bought everything in this video with my own money and i'm not affiliated with the company. any comments I make are my honest opinion.'" Such disclaimers show awareness, however cloudy, of government oversight, and the girls are anxious to clarify that their haul is not an advertisement. But another motivation seems to be fear of personal accusations such as being mercenary—paid by the company to talk up the merchandise—or the much worse judgment of being spoiled—a rich girl whose parents simply bankrolled the haul.

Negative potential undercurrents are carefully defended against in the hauls. One high school student begins her "Back to School Haul" with this labored protestation:

Hi guys, it's me, Mak, also known as DazzleMak. So today I'm going to do a haul-ish type thing. I don't really want to call it a haul, just because so many people get upset about hauls and bragging. And trust me, I'm not trying to brag: I buy all my clothes by myself; I buy all my makeup by myself. The only time my mom buys my clothes is back-to-school shopping, um, jeans when I really really need them, Christmas, and my birthday. . . . So if you don't like hauls, then *you* don't have to watch this (*smiling*).

Over and again, we see how the vlogger's rhetoric protects her image of transparency and the positive social environment; these are deeply-entrenched social values of the hauling and vlogging community created by young female consumers. Of course negative responses—ranging from jealousy to legitimate judgment—do threaten at the boundaries of every haul, and the etiquette reminder broadcast by DazzleMak is important in this cultural space where what we overwhelmingly find, and what I will

analyze in more detail here, is the familiar smiling face of American “nice girl” culture. Critique is not welcome in this public forum: “So don’t be like, ‘Oh my gosh,’ you know” (DazzleMak).

Adding to the ever-present pressure to be positive within the hauls themselves, the viewer comments framing them develop revealing textual lives of their own that can go on for many months. Since the comment strings involve larger numbers of people, they may give us even more insight, and I would argue that it’s a truly discouraging insight regarding the use these young consumers make of the freedom given by websites like YouTube. These user-generated videos and this largely uncensored forum could be used to regain control of the personal image landscape which has been designed by corporations and imposed through popular media. But the comments deliver disappointingly little more than vapid confirmations of the thinness, big-eyed-ness, cuteness, or general corporate trendiness of the much-revered hauler. In the comment space, which looks most like a series of text messages and IM’s with the expected abbreviations and initialisms, there is very little thoughtful conversation. What I mean is that there is no productive questioning, no broaching of important issues—instead, there are pages and pages of compliments, thank-you’s, and genuinely empty catch-all positives and intensifiers such as the ubiquitous “soooo cute.”

The following example of a viewer comment string displays the frequent use of positive words without much meaning (*cute*, *sweet*, *awesome*, *beautiful*, and *great*) and the tendency to use relatively empty intensifiers (*really*, *very*, and *so*). This one is quite typical in being limited to an exchange of compliments, acknowledgments of those compliments, and occasional queries about where to get the same merchandise or achieve the same look. This is a short string, but many others go on in a similar vein for hundreds of exchanges without introducing any significantly different topics.

PlasmaSpeedo's "Forever 21 haul- VERY Cheap and cute jewelry!"

Fashionbug9880: do you like that knuckle ring because I think im getting the same one

PlasmaSpeedo: yeah I love it

ShaneeLovee: Aww I want it all! You really got some great stuff (p.s. -> your very beautiful)

PlasmaSpeedo: very sweet of you to say, thank you :)

mmorrellwi: Love your jewelry. . . . you have great style

PlasmaSpeedo: it's great because it's so cheap! And none of it has tarnished. . . . yet lol

ashleyluvsmoffins: ooohhhh I love that Gold knuckle ring<3 And the heart necklaces

TheBiggybiggy: u r cute

PlasmaSpeedo: u r sweet!

Paaperhearts: I like your owl necklace (:

PlasmaSpeedo: yay! I think it's the one I wear most often

Peachy4Cherry: nice!!

Sstupidssmile: . . . I love all the things you purchased :)

PlasmaSpeedo: I got everything at forever21. com on the website.

The closest forever21 to me is like 2 hours away

Rita273: You are Very Beautiful. Byew

HairloungeNmore: great haul!

PlasmaSpeedo: u r very kind to say so, thank you. :)

wholemilk89: how long did it take to grow your hair out?, Also I love the bow ring. I want it!!!

PlasmaSpeedo: ohh my, i've had hair like this my entire life. I just cut off 10 inches!!! I still can't put it in a braid because it is so short and a braid makes it seem shorter! It makes me freak out, lol YES I don't know which is my fav, the bow or the butterfly :)

Decades of linguistic research into women's language provide insights that correspond with what we find in these hauls. Janet Holmes's 1995 book *Women, Men, and Politeness* observes that compliments exchanged between women are often vehicles to deliver a social judgment or overt "encouragement to continue with the approved behavior" (Holmes 126). Based on the viewer compliments from the main group of hauls, we could conclude that the "approved behavior" includes detailed attention to makeup and hair; maintenance of a body size that can sport the latest fash-

ions; and regular participation in the process of buying new products and putting them (and oneself) on display for public approval.

Holmes offers this general explanation of the subject matter and interpretation of compliments among women:

To be heard as a compliment an utterance must refer to something which is positively valued by the participants and attributed to the addressee. This would seem to permit an infinite range of possible topics for compliments, but in fact the vast majority of compliments refer to just a few broad topics: appearance, ability or performance, possessions, and some aspect of personality or friendliness. (131)

Indeed, the participants in haul-girl culture fifteen years later exchange compliments in just these areas: their natural beauty; their ability to enhance or customize that beauty through cosmetics and trends; their possession of the desired products and clothes (this is a combination of financial ability and selection know-how); and those two ineffable personal qualities, *cuteness* and *sweetness*. Even in this asynchronous forum, the hauler herself often participates in the flow of compliments, conventionally a two-way exchange: when a viewer posts “u r cute,” the hauler promptly replies, “u r sweet!” (PlasmaSpeedo).

Comment strings such as the one displayed above reveal a limited set of values, and the often cruel codes of teen image are reified by this process in which big name merchandise is “hailed in” and commented upon by a few thousand consumers from around the country. The carefully-stated corporate message—look this way or be left out of an important cultural space—is faithfully translated and glossed by unpaid native speakers of the language of teen girls. The merchandise is now *even cuter* than when it left the store and began its journey to some girl’s bedroom, through her webcam, and into the echo-chamber of comments that remind us, quite often, of only this fact. Xxbeechbarbeexx gets right to the point: “This is a cute, cute, cute, cute shirt. Look at that: how cute is that? . . . isn’t that pretty? How awesome is that?”

Nonetheless, in the search for greater self-awareness, broader interests, or resistance to the nice-girl directive, we might look at some “Products I Regret Buying” hauls, a subset where critical or negative ideas would be appropriate. The pressure on young women to seem positive or friendly, no matter what business they are conducting, is humorously revealed by an

analysis of a few of these hauls, described by juicystar07 as “a tag that is going around the beauty community” (“Products I Regret Buying” :02). Most of the “Products I Regret” vlogs open with a statement similar to this one from juicystar07: “So I just want to go ahead and clear things up and just let you know that I’m not trying to talk down on any of the companies or products I mention” (:31). After a reassurance that it’s not about product quality, but about her own purchasing mistakes, the video (which has more than 600,000 views and almost 4,000 comments) goes in quite a different direction. We learn that a Sephora eyeshadow kit was returned because “the pigmentation was just awful” (1:11), and the expensive MAC eye pencils don’t give “good color payoff” compared to the \$3 off-brand options (4:24). E.l.f. brand liquid eyeliner fares much worse. The important information in this product review is that “I opened this, and it smelled so bad that I wanted to cry” (4:53). Though in the next moment, the hauler hedges and softens her dismissal of the product—“Um, I know some people actually really like this product. I don’t know if it’s just mine”—she immediately returns to the negative review with even more detail—“but it smells so bad I *cannot* take it. If I open this up, the stench will fill the room and it will make me want to gag. That’s how bad it smells” (5:12). Even an old standard, Paul Mitchell hair conditioner, gets panned because it “didn’t even make my hair feel soft” (6:09). This goes on for ten minutes and about ten products.

Moniquevanity08’s “Products I Regret” video only had about 375 views and eight comments after a few months online. But this less-popular haul follows all the conventions, including its formulaic opening: “I’m not bashing on these products; they just didn’t work for me” (0:31). Moments after she explains that “you can honestly find, like, a better, like, drugstore foundation” than the punishingly expensive MAC product, and that she “wasted a lot of money on that,” Monique assures us that this review is not about the companies or the products. This nervous vacillation between negative reviews (which must in some cases be legitimate consumer complaints) and assurances of her own positive attitude shows just how much the language of negativity is a feared or uncomfortable part of the young female public identity. These false positives, where the haulers take pains to maintain friendly relations with the corporations, and the FTC disclaimers discussed earlier, which consciously distance the haulers from the companies, are in

fact rhetorically consistent elements of the hauler's personal image. Put together, these pronouncements establish the haul as the genuine (unpaid) experience of a pleasant (unrude) young lady. This is the contorted smile of nice-girl culture through the years—unpaid, unrude—and the inconsistency is not to be a problem.

Linguists Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet explain, in their 2003 study *Language and Gender*, that when women's language implies they are "less than completely committed to the content of what they have said," this is commonly assumed to reduce their social power in that instance (183). But importantly, as the authors assert, contextual factors determine the correct interpretation of any utterance, and there can be varied motivations for using such speech-softening devices. The inconsistency between the introductory rhetoric and the content of so many "Products I Regret Buying" vlogs are not in fact social liabilities in the beauty community, but rather exercises in personality politics, maintaining the requisite sociability and positivity. Here the young women self-consciously distance themselves from what they know will be a brief negative streak, a necessary evil. This is the classic "No offense, but . . ." maneuver that clears a temporary space for a negative remark while carefully protecting the speaker's general sense of self as a nice girl.

Such observations about the hauls comment strings should come as no surprise, as these trends in women's communication have been demonstrated by linguistic analysis for decades. Tannen's well-known 1990 book *You Just Don't Understand* characterizes women's typical speech as an effort to be supportive and to confirm another person's position. This directive comes from social training that begins in childhood. In a 2008 interview, Tannen confirms "how true it still is" all these years later. "Many women," she notes, "are uncomfortable with outright conflict and opposition" and "can be quite competitive about who comes off as the most *cooperative*" (qtd. in Stepp). Years before Tannen, linguist Robin Lakoff's 1975 *Language and Woman's Place* described common features of women's speech such as a veneer of politeness, phrasing statements as questions, hedging, and a general reticence to appear forceful, negative, or even sure of one's own opinion.

Knowing what the rules are, let's see what happens in the far less common case that a hauler approaches the "Products I Regret Buying"

genre with an openly caustic attitude, a little sneer, and no palpable effort to make nice. “Siderasuperstar” forgoes the pretense of being pleasant and happy about wasting money on inferior products or products she can’t use. Her vlog begins, “Hey guys, I’m back again, and I’m doing a video on products I do regret buying and just do not like at all—like, at all. I don’t like them—they are just . . . *uullgh*.” There is no rhetorical softener, and the video doesn’t contain any positive reassurances. The comments generated by more than 54,000 views in a twenty-month period reveal plenty of “haters” and only a few defenders (people we can call the *hater haters*). The 400 comments include many insults about Sidera’s speech and mental ability; there is much less tolerance for poor speech by an openly grouchy girl than for similar habits displayed by ostensibly friendly girls. Comments range from “omg your stupid” to some especially crushing notes like “wow you sound stupid like” and “u shouldn’t make vids com ons u don’t even talk well.” The irony of this comment aside, it may still be the final cut in the web 2.0 world of the teenage girl. This hauler does not follow the known rhetorical and social directives very carefully, and we can tune in to see her virtually ripped to shreds by the pack for these infractions. We’re reminded of the rules when a more sympathetic onlooker takes issue not with the *content* of all the insults but with the way they are *delivered*: “don’t be so mean and calling her dumb . . . cant you just say it nicely?”

Viewer comment strings in response to all types of hauls starkly illuminate the value placed on positivity. After ten months, juicystar07’s “Forever 21 Haul” had accumulated 2,242 comments. A scan of some common words quickly shows the divide between positive and negative language. The most common important word in the string is *love*, as in the comment “i luv all of your hauls.” This word, in its traditional and *texteze* spellings, occurs over 1150 times. The word “cute” is used over 400 times in reference to the hauler, her clothes, and her little dog Teddy, who also appears in the video. The positive adjectives *pretty*, *adorable*, *gorgeous*, *amazing*, *beautiful*, *hot*, and *sexy* combine for a total of 289 uses. By contrast, none of the words *ugly*, *gross*, *hideous*, *nasty*, *yuck*, *yick*, or *disgusting* ever appear in this space. One complex exception to the positive/negative divide in this string is the word *hate*. *Hate* is used only 10% as often as *love*, all in some variant of the phrase “ignore the haters.” These “haters” don’t seem present in the comments themselves, but they are

mentioned by juicystar in various videos as people who've said negative things about her hauls. Juicystar's oblique references to these unseen criticisms allow her to mention the fact that she is not bragging or conceited. After the spectre of the haters has been invoked by the hauler and sent packing by her fans, we are back to the business of piling on positivity.

When we occasionally find a sniper in the comments beneath a popular girl's haul—mentioning the speaker's limited vocabulary, nasal voice, or even her lack of experience with an important make-up brush—those negative remarks are sometimes ignored but usually counter-attacked. A viewer might support her favorite hauler by pointing out that Negative Nelly doesn't have to watch if she doesn't like it. The idea that critique and criticism are legitimate forms of written response doesn't seem to get much support in these comment strings. As noted, the most common block against negativity comes in that patriotic mantra of Haulworld, "never mind the haters." But this is not often necessary, since it's pretty uncommon that a hauler's value is openly criticized. One of the few defenders of the controversial Sidera gets to the bottom of the issue: "rude shut your mouth almost all of you are just jealous of her cause she is prettier than you haters!" Jealousy: it's the only proffered explanation for not loving these beautiful girls with their brand new things.

Positive thinking and seeing the good is part of the American girl's cultural mandate. Barbara Ehrenreich's recent book *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* traces the history of forced American cheeriness and quotes advice for women from a typical dating website:

You should remain positive at all times. You should avoid complaining too much, seeing the negative in things, and allowing this negativity to show. While it is important that you are yourself . . . being negative is never a way to go. (46)

The message is that, for women in particular, too much critical thinking or too much direct engagement with problems will result in rejection and loneliness. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet flatly conclude that high-schoolers' "value as human beings and their relations to others are based on their adherence to gender norms" (26). As we have seen, the haulers (women in training) periodically fail to avoid the dreaded negativity, and social consequences exist for going to that dark side.

Young women know from experience that language choices are social determinants. Years ago Robin Lakoff called attention to some “discourse particles” common in women’s speech including *you know*, *of course*, and *like*. Such insertions “do not contribute much to the content that is conveyed but in various ways solicit sympathetic interpretation and perhaps ultimate support from the listener” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 183). In my transcriptions of the hauls, I convey these weakening particles, though I am aware that many vlog transcriptions would (politely) omit these verbal features and thereby avoid the social implications of leaving them in. The question, indeed, is whether we are “picking on” a female speaker by including her full range of utterances in this way, given what we know about our culture’s common judgment of those very speech patterns. The haulers frequently use *like* and *you know* and even *um* to brace against a potentially impolite or unflattering statement. These habits expose their fear of the consequences of a more straightforward delivery used to describe themselves, their behaviors, and the most of all the things they don’t like. If the hauls culture is ostensibly about talking, sharing, modeling, and even counseling, anything that could create alienation must be introduced and handled gingerly. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet note that “[w]omen’s construction of themselves often gives sociability a central role, whereas appearing self-centered is particularly problematic” (175). As young women, the haulers are already expert at agreeing, supporting, smiling, and beating around the bush. A complex strategy is enacted when one talks about oneself and one’s clothes on camera for ten or more minutes while simultaneously trying to diminish the sense of being self-centered or self-absorbed.

While I am interested in the implications of such discourse particles, hedges, and other speech softeners, I want to distance this analysis from those that assume there is a problem wherever young people employ abbreviated written forms such as “chatspeak.” A few large-scale studies of the linguistic features of adolescent and young adult instant messages and other computer-mediated communications (CMCs) have been published recently. Analyzing one of the largest data sets collected so far, Canadian researchers Sali Tagliamonte and Derek Denis dismiss the common academic handwringing that texting and IM-ing signal the end of literacy. Their 2008 article in the journal *American Speech* argues that IM conversations exhibit a flexible “linguistic fusion” because users are free to “pick and

choose from all the available variants that their linguistic system has to offer.” They go on to argue that young people’s IM language can give us some reason to be hopeful since it “reveals fluid mastery of the sociolinguistic resources in their speech community” (Tagliamonte 27). A more recent study of collected text messages (published in the July 2010 issue of the journal *Reading & Writing*) concludes that teens’ spelling skills are not compromised by their fluency with texting abbreviations and other “new language” forms (Varnhagen *et al*). We should probably accept the idea that young people do still have some control over the language, and maybe adults are too concerned that their communication choices indicate an inability to differentiate among the written registers.

But this academic’s foray into the world of YouTube hauls suggests that, when teen girls are given free reign in an adult-less language environment, it’s not the spelling and vocabulary that should worry us, but rather the number of ideas, topics, and social possibilities that get any air time. The comment strings reveal not the free speech community we hope would result from our American girls’ new vistas, but a limited speech community hemmed in and delimited by the same old gender-based social fears. In video after video, haulers fail to deliver substantial ideas, show little awareness of global issues and corporate behavior, and glibly extricate themselves from tricky questions about endorsement. On the other hand, nothing is too trivial for extensive coverage by the voices of “the beauty community.” Pinkcupcake211’s “Mac To The Beach Haul” goes on and on:

And, this is what the box looks like. It’s like a really nice glossy, olive green. And the eyeshadow itself is also like a really nice olive green. And I really like the fact that they made it really shiny—um, the normal MAC packaging is just kind of bland and . . . not glossy, so that was really cute. And how cute is that? It has a little seashell on the front: that looks so cute and summery. . . . so I thought this would be really cute to wear with like light pinks and um maybe peaches, so it’s really cute.

These vlogs provide so many hours of virtually unreflective talk about subjects like how to straighten hair (never wondering why straight hair has such value); how to predict which jeans pockets will make the butt look smaller (demonstrated by a person who weighs about 100 pounds); and how to color in the perfect “smoky eye” (for a day in the ninth grade). PlasmaSpeedo begins one of her thirty-three similar videos about her clothes,

her nail polish, and her cheap-but-cute jewelry with this terribly ironic announcement: “I’m just going to jump right into it because I hate when people babble” (0:07).

But still hoping and searching in good faith, I clicked on one more haul, this one about the charitable company TOMS Shoes, thinking I had found a “haul for a good cause.” In addition to admiring the free gift that comes with the shoes—“it looks really cute”—and the shoes themselves—“they’re so cute”—this hauler tells us that the company donates shoes to children “like in Africa or somewhere over there” (1:29). The shoes, she proclaims, have “a really cute message” (1:45). Of course we can accept all this verbal cutenanny in the service of a good cause like TOMS, but we’re abruptly brought back to Haulworld reality when she admits it’s “kind of a bummer” that TOMS are now available at Macy’s, since she wanted to be one of the only people in her area to have the shoes. The screen name for this vlogger is “moniquevanity08.” So much for helping the cause and changing the world one pair of shoes at a time.

Other Groups and Conclusions

With more than a quarter of a million hauls posted so far, the samples and trends I have explored here cannot be entirely representative. The social group that is the focus of this discussion forms the core of a trend which exists on a smaller scale in other populations. These other groups, doubtless, reflect and maintain their own values through this medium, and further analysis should consider the differences among hauls posted by varied social and ethnic groups. I’ll briefly take a look at three subsets here to give an idea of the range of issues and priorities they present.

Bargain or discount store hauls provide one example of the distinctions among hauls posted by different groups of consumers. A search for hauls with the terms *bargain*, *cheap*, or *dollar* (Dollar Tree, Family Dollar, Dollar Store) in the title reveals about 10,000 videos, or less than 5% of the hauls to date. These generally shorter videos feature products from stores such as Ross, Dollar Tree, and Kmart and seem to make up the majority of the hauls posted by African-Americans. In a general comparison to the classic hauler profile discussed here, the bargain store hauler is less chatty and solicitous of the audience’s feedback, less practiced at speaking and

presenting, and also less concerned with dress and makeup at the time of filming. Sometimes the products aren't shown clearly or the hauler is sitting so close that part of her head is cut off by the webcam. She often still wears the sweats in which she made the Dollar Store run, not concerned with putting on all the new goods before filming the haul. These casual vlogs receive far fewer views and comments, if any comments at all, and the rhetorical issues observed throughout this discussion are not a noticeable feature (with the exception of the overuse of the word "cute," which seems to impact all groups). A second interesting subset features Asian-American teens and young women; undeniably, these videos compete with the classic hauls in their focus on new clothes and major brands. They feature some of the most prepared, carefully manicured, and well-spoken contributors. Two features set them apart most clearly: the choice to identify a cultural group in the title (the word Asian occurs in the title of about 1% or 3,000 of the hauls currently online); and the presence of conversations about important cultural issues many Asians and Asian-American girls face, such as skin tone and skin lightening. Comment strings frequently include compliments about the whiteness of a girl's skin and the exchange of information about lightening products. Occasionally there is a disagreement about the origins of and rationale for continuing this practice. In this sense, these self-titled "Asian" hauls start some potentially productive work; unfortunately, my observations of the debate thus far only find exchanges of opinions and myths that don't go anywhere. The hauls viewer comments—and perhaps this is true of almost all YouTube comment strings—just don't lend themselves to the type of responsive and responsible dialogue that advances a community's understanding. Instead, voices fire at random and rarely come back to explain themselves. We must also remember that, while skin-lightening is an enormously important identity matter which reaches into the impact of colonialism and class divisions over hundreds of years, these young haulers are primarily interested in the topic as it pertains to makeup purchases and application tips.

Finally, the smallest subset of haulers I will mention here consists of girls and young women over size twelve. Fewer than 2,500 haul titles, or less than 1%, contain the words *plus size* or the name of a plus-size retailer (stores such as Lane Bryant, Torrid, and Avenue). In 2009, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the average American woman was a size fourteen and also observed that "plus-size clothing is largely relegated to the Internet,

where customers who already have a complicated relationship with clothes are unable to see, touch or try on merchandise” (Vesilind). Given this reality, hauls could be a meaningful corrective to the lack of available information, but this population of women doesn’t participate in the hauls phenomenon at a rate anywhere near their actual numbers. The language strategies and conversations of the very few who do choose to speak in this forum would be worth examining.

Such disparities between the true diversity of young American women and the limited array represented through hauls is a painful reminder of what we already knew about the values sustained by popular media and its consumer champions: expensive, light-skinned, and thin. Even when the mechanism is in the control of the population itself—after all, YouTube’s slogan is “Broadcast Yourself”—old cultural pressures, paradigms of beauty and importance, and class divisions continue to direct and limit our conversation. Instead of using technology and the new speech forums to resist the corporate culture machine, the powerful consumer group constituted by young American women exhibits a lamentable lack of activism.

Douglass Rushkoff’s 2001 documentary *The Merchants of Cool* describes a “giant feedback loop” in which corporations manipulate young consumers into selling an image to themselves. These “hauls” are the latest manifestation of that automated marketing process in which consumers spread the corporation’s message but feel they’re somehow steering the market themselves. Numerous haul gurus like meganheartsmakeup and dulceandcandy87 have their own YouTube channels with hundreds of thousands of subscribers, all engaged in this conversation about clothes and makeup. Going beyond YouTube’s consumer incubator, there is recent news that Blair Fowler, the 17-year-old hauler we’ve known as juicystar07, and her older sister Elle, have signed a contract for a reality show on the corporate mothership of contemporary American teen culture, MTV (Schwartz). How cute is that?

Laura Jeffries

Florida State College, Jacksonville

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Outsider Nostalgia in *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City*

During the 1990s, American popular media evidenced a wave of nostalgia for the decade of the 1970s. While this nostalgia was not as conspicuous as the 1950's craze of *American Graffiti* (1973), *Happy Days* (1974-1984), and *Grease* (1978) twenty years before, *Billboard* magazine noted that "Over the last eight years, that glorious yet harshly criticized... period has been the basis for more compilations, song covers, books, movies, and television shows than any other musical movement" (Flick). The 1990s interest in the 1970s produced films including *Boogie Nights* (1997), *A Night at the Roxbury* (1998), *54* (1998), and *The Last Days of Disco* (1998).

In his groundbreaking work *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, Fred Davis asserts, "A sociology of nostalgia...is concerned with tracking down the sources of nostalgic experience in group life..."(vii). David M. Shumway further states, "Commodified nostalgia involves the revival by the culture industry of certain fashions and styles of a particular past era" (39). As the titles indicate, each of the previously mentioned Seventies-nostalgic movies is disco-themed. We might therefore theorize that a primary source of group nostalgia from the 1970s is the musical movement of disco.

While such a theory would account for many of the 1970s nostalgia films, it would not account for all. *Dazed and Confused* (1993) and *Detroit Rock City* (1999) are the exceptions to the rule, a small rebellion against the institutionalized nostalgia of the disco-themed films. *Dazed and*

Confused examines the day and night of the last day of school in 1976, as experienced by a group of Texas teenagers. *Detroit Rock City* chronicles the adventures of a group of Cleveland youth as they journey to a concert in the eponymous metropolis. These films not only do not use disco as a source of nostalgia, they actively reject it. In so doing, these two films are further set apart from the pack by being nostalgic from the outsider's perspective. This essay illustrates the outsider nature of these films, and examines how each fits into Davis's "sociology of nostalgia." It will thus aid scholars in understanding the multiplicity of perspectives that can be brought to bear in nostalgic cinema.

The outsider nature of the two films may be quickly established. Each is a "rock movie," and both take their titles from rock songs. If it stopped there, this might be more evidence of insider status than outsider status. However, it is the kind of rock employed in each film that makes each outsider films, since the genre, in both cases, is heavy metal. "Dazed and Confused" is the title of a 1969 song by Led Zeppelin, perhaps the premiere British heavy metal band of the 1970s and, some say, of any era. "Detroit Rock City" is the title of a 1976 song by KISS, perhaps the most controversial of American heavy metal bands.

Heavy metal is unique even among rock's sub-genres. It has thrived for more than thirty years, while producing almost no "number one" singles. The soundtracks of *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* include fifty songs that are heavy metal or its guitar-centered musical relative, Southern rock. Examples of musicians of the former genre on these soundtracks include AC/DC, Ted Nugent, Black Sabbath, and of course KISS; of the latter, ZZ Top, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Black Oak Arkansas. Their fifty songs make up the overwhelming majority of tunes in the films – no other genre comes close. Furthermore, of the fifty, none reached the number one position on Billboard's top 40 from 1976 through 1978, the years covered by the two films (Bronson xiv-xvi). Genre enthusiasts might counter that metal is primarily an album-oriented genre, and so should not be expected to produce hit singles. Even so, the fact that fifty songs from more than twenty different groups could not produce one chart-topper in three years is telling. Perhaps as telling, the best-selling album of the period was the soundtrack to *Saturday Night Fever*. Clearly, heavy metal was not the popular favorite of 1970s youth.

Unlike punk, another 1970s-spawned genre, heavy metal has also never been a favorite of the rock press. Most critics simply ignored it. The few critics who defended the genre praised it in ambiguous terms, at best. Noted rock writer Lester Bangs admitted, "As its detractors have always claimed, heavy metal is nothing more than a bunch of noise.... It's a fast train to nowhere...." (335). This bluntness came in an article not for an obscure underground magazine but for *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll*. Fellow critic Robert Duncan, in his biography of KISS, said of his subjects, "When I first saw KISS I thought they were the most ludicrous rip-off to come down the pike in many a moon...." (166). Again, these admissions come from supporters of the heavy metal genre.

If, then, heavy metal is neither the music of the masses, nor of the cognoscenti, who is it for? In his companion book to the PBS documentary of the same name, *Rock and Roll: An Unruly History*, Robert Palmer notes, "Above all, metal was the cult of the white male adolescent, providing a rite of passage for each new generation" (286). In each movie, most of the characters are white adolescents. The majority of the teens, and the main players, are also male. *Detroit Rock City* focuses on four white male adolescents (WMAs). *Dazed and Confused* has a larger ensemble, but still primarily focuses on Mitch, a rising freshman WMA, and Randall "Pink" Floyd, a rising senior WMA. There is only one significant role for a person of color in *Dazed and Confused*: Melvin, an African-American football player. There are no significant roles for people of color in *Detroit Rock City*. In *Yearning for Yesterday*, Davis notes that males are apt to be more nostalgic than women (55), and that adolescence is the predominant focus of their nostalgic fantasies (56-57). As Davis observes, "It is almost as if the depth and drama of the transition were such as to institutionalize adolescence in the personality as a more or less permanent and infinitely recoverable subject for nostalgic exercise" (59). Therefore, as objects of exercises in nostalgia, the adolescent characters are perfect.

In addition, these WMAs are not part of the hip culture of New York, Los Angeles, or any "in" spot. *Dazed and Confused*, filmed on location in Austin, Texas, never names the small city in which it is set. *Detroit Rock City*'s protagonists are natives of Cleveland, Ohio. The choice of settings reinforces the outsider status established by the heavy metal music. It should be emphasized that these WMAs choose heavy metal as a means of

expressing to others their romanticized outsider status; but the same music becomes an effective means of evoking nostalgia. As Davis states, “[G]enres, styles and concepts that in one epoch strike one as leagues removed from nostalgic sentiment can, at a later time, capture it to a turn” (88).

We have seen that the subjects—male adolescents—are perfectly suited to nostalgia, and that the heavy metal genre marks these adolescents as outsiders. What of the films themselves? As “rock” movies, the temptation might be to class them, with so many of their predecessors, in the exploitation genre described by Pam Cook. Exploitation films offer “alternatives to the dominant representational systems” (56). As we have established, this can certainly be said of both films’ soundtracks. On the other hand, Cook also maintains that the archetypical exploitation film rejects “critical notions of ‘quality’” (85) in favor of, among other things, “substantial degrees of sex and violence” (63). Neither film emphasizes sex or violence. There are two fistfights in *Detroit Rock City* and one in *Dazed and Confused*, but the violence never escalates. There are no real gunfights (though a few shots are fired in each film, no one is hit) and no serious injury or death occurs. Sex is implied in both movies, but never shown on-screen. Neither film thus fully embraces the exploitation genre. Nor, in genre consideration, is it enough simply to slot both films into the “coming of age” category so strongly established by *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *The Graduate* (1967), despite the fact that *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* center on periods of major transition for their young protagonists. Both Nicholas Ray’s and Mike Nichols’ films were specifically designed to be pictures of then-contemporary late adolescence or early adulthood, not as looks back into the past.

Even if the two films could be classified as exploitative coming-of-age, Cook provides a basis for still considering them as films of nostalgia. According to Cook, “Film texts do not necessarily simply use memory in a functional manner, they also embody memories—those of the filmmakers themselves, for example” (99). This strongly echoes Davis’s contention that “[N]ostalgia must in some fashion be a personally experienced past...” (8).

It is clear that these movies are expressions of personal pasts for their directors. Richard Linklater, director of *Dazed and Confused*, stated, “For

me, *Dazed* was like a good night.... Take Mitch, who was really me.... That was kind of like every interesting thing that happened to me in my freshman year..."(*Mr. Showbiz*). Adam Rifkin, director of *Detroit Rock City*, declared, "The whole thing was my Midwestern youth as a rock 'n' roller perfectly captured" (*Yahoo*).

The two directors also began their directorial careers at about the same time. Linklater directed his first feature in 1991. Rifkin made his feature debut in 1988. Chronologically, this places them as part of a new generation of nostalgia directors. Vera Dika defined a first wave of modernist nostalgic filmmakers, foremost of whom were Peckinpah and Altman, who, according to Dika, "dismantle[d] Hollywood films" (15) with such movies as the revisionist Westerns *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971), respectively. Dika states that this wave was followed by the post-modernists, including Carpenter, Coppola, Scorsese and Spielberg, who responded to "already dismantled classical American cinema" (16) by re-inventing and remaking traditional American film genres. While it may be too soon to class Linklater and Rifkin together as part of a "Third Wave," it can be argued that *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* are the beginnings of what Paul Grainge calls "... a new kind of engagement with the past, a relationship based fundamentally on its cultural mediation and textual reconfiguration in the present" (7). Unlike previous waves, the primary new engagement is in what they leave out. Lesley Speed states, "My examination of the nostalgic teen film reveals that devices such as the narrative coda, voice-over narration, and the figure of the writer contribute to a privileging of the adult perspective in narrative and in terms of spectatorship" (8). Neither *Dazed and Confused* nor *Detroit Rock City* uses these devices. Each film's perspective remains personal, but is the personal perspective of remembered adolescence, as far as that can be achieved. This was the stated intention of the directors. In fact, Linklater said, "When I was making the movie, I regressed completely.... My whole mind was like a 15, 16, 17 year old. Anyone over their early 20s seemed just slightly cartoonish" (*Dazed and Confused* DVD). Rifkin was even more direct: "I got to recreate my youth with this movie" (*Detroit Rock City* DVD).

Of course, neither director claimed to be making a documentary of his own past. In Davis's view, this is as it should be, since the nostalgic expe-

rience is a result of a certain tension between two opposite poles of the past. While the natural focus of nostalgia is the “positive affects of being,” these recollections are often bittersweet. “The hurts, the annoyances, disappointments, and irritations... are filtered forgivingly through an ‘it-was-all-for-the-best’ attitude or, at the very least, one patronized under some ‘great human comedy’ metaphor” (14). What keeps the evocation of times past from straying from nostalgia into a purely idealized Never-Never land is that “[I]n the end the memory of them is constrained by, at minimum, some nagging unspoken sense of the way things actually were then” (9). Davis later refers to this as “the constraint of a lived past on nostalgia and nostalgia’s inability knowingly and recklessly to obliterate it (or to fabricate another past in its place)...” (48). We may then ask whether *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* fulfill their nostalgic function by providing, first, a sense of how things really were in the past; second, a focus on positive affects of being; and, third, a corresponding filter of hurts.

The Way Things Really Were

The sense of how things really were is possibly the easiest to answer. Davis was writing at a time when nostalgia was quite prevalent on the nation’s theater screens. He cites two films of the period, *American Graffiti* and *The Sting*, as examples of a cinematic nostalgic style “... which eschews the visually vaporous and existentially distanced and opts instead for a heightened, almost obsessive realism that strains to capture *exactly*, in minute and exquisite detail, how objects looked then, how people spoke and dressed then...” (88-89). Cook states that this attention to detail establishes a special connection between the filmmaker and the audience by engaging the audience in a game of recognition, in which the audience gets “points” for good memories and bittersweet feelings for positive aspects of the past that are lost (99). This style is apparent from the opening shot of *Dazed*: a custom GTO “muscle car” cruising through a high school parking lot full of other period cars, as Aerosmith’s “Sweet Emotion” plays. Certainly, both car and music are details of the period. The music may be diegetic, since the car certainly has a radio, or it may not. There are no direct visual or aural cues to tell us. Regardless, Oldies music is, according to Shumway, “the most important ingredient in the production of the affect of nostal-

gia.... the tea-soaked madeline of the masses...” and notes that movies use them “to evoke the fiction of a common past” (40). But the visual and aural subjects and the way in which they are presented render the shot even more nostalgic. As Jon Savage notes, the classic car and the “cruising motion” of the camera echo the opening shot of *American Graffiti* (20). As Shumway further notes, *American Graffiti* deliberately blurred the line between diegetic and non-diegetic music: “Music doesn’t come from particular places in the film’s space; it pervades that space” (41). Thus, *Dazed and Confused* connects directly to what Dika and Jameson agree is the inaugural youth nostalgia film (89) and, by invoking the earlier cinematic scene, draws the viewers further back into their pop culture memories. (Lesley Speed, in noting the centrality of the car in *Dazed and Confused*, suggests a connection to 1960’s counterculture [4].) However, the *American Graffiti* connection is far more obvious. Furthermore, the car has been central to American adolescent dreams in every era since the 1950s as a means of freedom, an expression of rebelliousness, and a symbol of teen status.)

The attention to detail does not stop with *Dazed and Confused*’s opening sequence. Accessories inside those period cars include CB radios and 8-track stereos. The cars pull into service stations which sell gas for \$.60 per gallon (exemplifying Cook’s bittersweet recollection of good things lost). Furthermore, Bicentennial murals and decorations are found throughout the school. The kids have bean bag chairs in their rooms, where they put on paisley shirts and jeans so tight they have to lie down to zip them up. Of course, every youth, male and female, has hair past the collar, if not past the shoulders.

Yet one of the most intriguing details in *Dazed and Confused* is found in the superimposed words that end the credit sequence. The words read, “Last day of school, May 28, 1976, 1:05 P.M.” In her discussion of the film, Speed disparages *Dazed and Confused*’s lack of attention to the collective, with the exception of the large ensemble (7). The use of the utterly specific time detail, while leaving the location completely blank, suggests that the collective is intended to be the entire audience, regardless of their location. It also subtly continues the outsider theme; the superimposed words literally set the film in the middle of nowhere. Further, the prominence of the “Last day of school” line serves to expand the audience be-

yond those who can remember May 28, 1976, to anyone who can relate to a last day of school. This connects the specific nostalgia for the 1970s to a general nostalgia for any last day of school, even if it happened only yesterday.

Detroit Rock City is no less attentive to detail. As with the Linklater film, cars still have 8-track stereos – though not, in a neat bit of geographical and time detail, CBs. The closet of one protagonist holds *Planet of the Apes* and *The Partridge Family* board games. A downtown theater is showing a Kung Fu movie festival. Convenience stores have racks full of 1970s comic books, and 1970s *Hustler* magazines behind the counter. Qiana and polyester disco styles are worn by all the pretty and popular kids in school – which does not include our outsider heroes in their KISS tribute garage band. In their only nod to insider icons, the basement where the band practices has a poster of Farrah Fawcett-Majors on the wall. More important, the basement contains a mind-boggling array of KISS merchandise. As Cook notes, collecting can be a form of fetishism: “These objects both bring the adored star or celebrity closer, and possess a magical quality that has the potential to transform lives” (115). Our heroes clearly hope for both effects; the outsider teens fetishize an outsider band.

Like *Dazed and Confused*, *Detroit Rock City* also uses words superimposed onscreen to place itself in time. In the latter’s case, the words “Cleveland, OH, 1978” locate the movie geographically as well. This spatial specificity, on the one hand, has a certain limiting effect. On the other hand, the geographic grounding helps to counterbalance the title sequence that follows the opening scenes of the movie. In a pop-art explosion, KISS posters, newspaper clippings, magazine covers, concert footage, broadcast news reports, and television commercials are intercut with at least 35 other icons of the 1970s. These range from the Patty Hearst Symbionese Liberation Army photo to the *Charlie’s Angels* (1976-1981) episode-opening silhouette. Cook notes the association between nostalgia and fantasy (3), and this sequence could act as a textbook example of that symbiosis. Since the sequence ends with a ringing telephone and Jam, one of the protagonists, awakening with a start, the implication is that it is a fantasy; literally, Jam’s dream. Still, even the outright fantasy is dominated both by the media period detail and, of course, Jam’s personal obsession, the rock group KISS.

Positive Affects of Being

The second major point, according to Davis, is a focus on the positive affects of being. Here much depends on how one defines “positive.” In *Detroit*, our heroes enjoy practicing in their garage-band, Mystery. The whole focus of the film is a road trip to see their idols in concert. Along the way, the protagonists indulge in some high-speed driving and pick up a pretty, teenaged hitchhiker. Certainly road-tripping to a much-anticipated concert is a common experience for most teens. The idolization of KISS, again, renders it an expression of the protagonists’ outsider identification. In *Dazed*, the teenagers cruise around town, with occasional fast-food breaks. When they stop at a local game room – in the last pre-video-game years – they play foosball and pinball. They converge at the “moon tower” (an outdoor lighting structure left over from a construction project) for a huge, though clandestine, outdoor party. While not positive as adults might define it, certainly all these activities fall into an adolescent category of fun that was common during this time period.

Interestingly, while romance or, more bluntly, sex is the primary focus of innumerable teen movies, including such controversial examples as *Porky’s* (1982) and its sequels and *American Pie* (1999) and its sequels, young love is almost an afterthought in the subject films. Two of the four heroes in *Detroit* do lose their virginity, but the other two must subsist on a single kiss apiece. No one in *Dazed* is explicitly shown or stated to have had sex, although it is hinted at having occurred twice, and there’s a respectable amount of kissing (and, of course, recurring discussion of sex). What is a constant and overwhelming emphasis in both movies is the consumption of alcohol and marijuana. Every teenage protagonist in *Dazed*, and all but one in *Detroit*, drinks beer, smokes marijuana, or does both. This mild substance abuse is a form of rebellion, of self-proclaimed outsider status, for the teens. At the same time, the avoidance of sex emphasizes the adolescent nature of the protagonists. Not quite ready for adult relationships, they are holding onto the behaviors of youth.

These small rebellions may, however, be seen merely as the pastimes of the protagonists, more-or-less thoughtless responses to the boredom in their lives. A far more important positive aspect of both *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* is the conscious moral choices that reflect

who the protagonists *are*. Again, Davis: “The rhetorical formula seems simple enough: if, as my nostalgic evocation of the past tells me, I was lovable and worthy then despite adverse or dangerous conditions, I am likely to prove lovable and worthy now despite the anxieties and uncertainties of the present” (36). *Detroit*, being more an adventure (if not fantasy) movie than *Dazed*, gives its four heroes ample opportunity to demonstrate their worthiness in dangerous conditions. Hawk, the leader of the group, overcomes his stage fright at an amateur-night strip contest. Jam, the hen-pecked drummer, stands up to his domineering mother in front of her anti-KISS protest group. Lex, the bassist who always follows and never leads the action, on his own invades a chop shop and outwits two hoodlums to recover their stolen car and their newfound hitchhiking friend. And guitarist and admitted physical coward Trip faces down a shotgun-toting robber in a convenience store. As Cook admitted, “I don’t like [violence], but the illusion of ‘being there,’ the risk involved, is a real turn-on” (175). Just as the audience vicariously embraces outsider status by identifying with the protagonists, so the audience is vindicated when the boys face their own worst weaknesses.

Few of our protagonists in *Dazed* have such dramatic occasions to prove that they are worthy. Yet virtually all have an opportunity, however brief, to show a lovable side. With twenty-four significant roles in the movie, space prevents listing them all, but a few should suffice. The perpetually stoned Slater shows a thoughtful side with a long and oddly logical monologue about the relationship between George Washington, marijuana, and the dollar bill. Melvin, a senior football player, demonstrates generosity when he lets a freshman keep the change from an errand. Wooderson, a twenty-something high-school graduate with a dead-end job and a thing for high school women, comes to the rescue when a kid he does not even know is being viciously beaten. And Simone, a perky blonde with no apparent ambition beyond being the girlfriend of Randall “Pink” Floyd, shows a clear eye and a refreshing honesty when she deflates Pink’s pretensions of persecution, pointing out “You guys are kings of the school!”

Simone’s momentary deflation of Pink in no way diminishes him as a person. In fact, he is probably the most “heroic” of all the characters in the film, along with Mitch, who can be seen as a Pink in training. Pink demonstrates compassion in taking the freshman Mitch under his wing; courage in

breaking up a fight; consistency in refusing to sign a no-alcohol pledge, when all his friends are signing it and imbibing anyway. Davis sums up this aspect of nostalgia neatly: “In short, people want to think well of themselves” (36). As a representative of our own adolescent struggles, Pink allows us to think well of ourselves.

Furthermore, Pink is a reflection of another intriguing aspect of Davis’s thesis: “We are all familiar with the scenario... that ‘beneath it all’ we are something more intriguing, more sensitive, more complex, more daring. In short, that we are not like ‘all the others’... nostalgic recall evinces a strong partiality for this genre” (40). As the star quarterback, Pink spends most of his time with, and seems closest to, his friends on the team. Yet he is also intelligent enough to trade witticisms with the class intellectuals. He is laid-back enough to be accepted by the class “dopers.” He is practical enough to relate to the class “greasers.” And, as mentioned, he is compassionate enough to form a bond with the incoming freshmen. While all the teens connect briefly with others outside their clique, Pink is the one character who bonds with all. He is a “renaissance teen.” In fact, Pink thus seems to contradict the outsider status that we have ascribed to the characters in both films. Even Randall “Pink” Floyd, though, is still stuck in the same anonymous small town. Though he can relate across his peer group, he cannot rise above it.

In contrast, the concept of relationships across the social strata of high school is not explored at all in *Detroit Rock City*. With the exceptions of Beth, a classmate of Jam’s who finally reveals her crush on him, and Christine, the aforementioned hitchhiker from another school (“Beth” and “Christine Sixteen” being titles of two KISS hits), the four boys are not shown to have any significant relationships with any other teen. The closest thing that the foursome has to an interaction with any peers is this mocking line from a pretty and popular (but, in the film, nameless) classmate: “Don’t stare too long, boys, or you’ll go blind.” In the film, the members of Mystery are suffering through perhaps the cruelest outsider status of adolescence. Not even recognized enough by their peers to be persecuted by them, the four boys are simply and completely ignored.

Their idols, KISS, are vilified by adults and ridiculed by popular teens. The name of the activist group M.A.T.M.O.K., Mothers Against The Music Of KISS, sums up the adult perspective. Though this group is a creation

of the film, similar protests dogged the band throughout its heyday. The insider teen perspective is expressed by one of *Detroit Rock City*'s disco fans: "A bunch of guys who make bad music, dress like freaks, and wear more makeup than all my sisters combined." It is interesting to note that both the "reactionary" adults and the "cool" teens react in the same way to KISS: they destroy their recordings. Jam's mother throws his LP copy of *Love Gun* in the trash; the disco fans toss an 8-track copy of the same album under the wheels of a truck. It is probably over-analytic to look for Freudian meanings here. Still, these reactions are visual cues to the peculiar conflicts faced by the outsider.

Emphasizing the peculiarity of these boys and their obsession, though it may not suggest hidden depths, does neatly point up the "sweet strangeness" part of nostalgia. Davis says, "It is as if by harking back to those (probably recast) times of sweet strangeness, we assure ourselves that, just as we then felt odd, different, alone, and estranged, and yet managed somehow to emerge from it all intact and possibly even enhanced, so shall we again" (41). Most of us have felt that strangeness at some time during adolescence, even if we were in fact insiders of the highest degree. The emergence from that awkward stage is an important part of other teen nostalgia films. Shumway points out that *American Graffiti* and *Dirty Dancing* (1987) both focus on the transition point between high school and college (41). But neither *Dazed and Confused* nor *Detroit Rock City* even allude to this transition. Though set on the last day of school, all of the primary characters are still in high school in *Dazed and Confused*. *Detroit Rock City* is set in the middle of the school year. The characters have yet to emerge from the "sweet strangeness," and they seem in no hurry to do so. Pink at one point does ask his friends to shoot him if he ever refers to his teen years as the best of his life. Still, Pink and the rest of the teens in both films seem intent on staying in the moment, strange as it may be.

Filtering of Past Hurts

The emphasis on strangeness in *Dazed and Confused* and in *Detroit Rock City* brings us to the third of the three major elements of nostalgia: the filtering of past hurts. Filtering, in the sense of straining out the coarsest elements, never occurs in the two films. In *Dazed*, incoming freshmen are

subjected to brutal hazing. The girls are rounded up by female seniors, who force the youngsters to suck on pacifiers while playing “Air Raid” on a hot asphalt parking lot. This game has the participants stand up until the person in charge screams “Air Raid.” At that instant, the girls have to throw themselves on the lot as quickly as they can. Then, the senior leader screams “Get up!” On command, the younger girls have to scramble back to their feet. After a few rounds of this, the girls are forced to lie on the asphalt, where the seniors cover them with ketchup, mustard, flour, and whipped cream. One particularly brutal senior verbally berates the new girls, calling them “bitches,” “sluts,” and other even less savory terms, throughout this whole process. Next, the seniors put dog collars on the younger students and make them “propose” to senior boys. Finally, the seniors “clean up” the new high school students by putting them in the back of open pick-up trucks and driving through a car wash.

The initiation of boys is less complex, but more painful. Every rising senior boy who cares to makes himself a wooden paddle (much attention is paid to the time and care the seniors put into the customization of their paddles). The new seniors then use their custom weapons to beat every incoming freshman at least once during the summer, for as many “licks” as the older boy decides to give.

Things are better for rising sophomores, juniors and seniors in the world of *Dazed and Confused*, but they too have their trials. They are stopped by police, have parents disrupt parties, lose fist fights — even have adults pull guns on them. Still, the implication is that the worst is over for them.

The pains endured by the heroes of *Detroit* are more varied in nature. Each of the four members of Mystery has his own trials to endure.

For Jam, the primary source of pain is his mother. She drags him out of his friends’ basement rehearsal, screaming all the while. She forces him to wear polyester clothes of the period that reflect her tastes, not his — because she has purchased them for him. She shows up at his school and screams at him, by full name, over the PA system, thus humiliating him in front of the entire school. She destroys his KISS records and his KISS concert tickets. In her worst act, she tries to destroy his friendships and his dreams of being a rock drummer by dragging him off to boarding school.

For Trip, the primary source of pain is his own lack of thought. It is his carelessness that is in part responsible for the loss of the first set of tickets. Though he wins another set for the group in a radio contest, in his euphoria he hangs up without giving all the necessary information – and they lose the second set. An ill considered plan to get yet a third set results only in Trip receiving a physical beating.

For Hawk, the primary source of pain is his dreams of the spotlight. As the leader of the group, he is driving when Trip tosses a piece of pizza out the car window. The ejected pizza splatters on the windshield of a car full of disco fans. The enraged disco teens force our heroes' car off the road. Hawk is then manhandled by two older and much bigger boys, simply because he was driving the car. Later, Hawk attempts to earn the money for more KISS tickets in an amateur night strip contest. Unfortunately, he humiliates himself by vomiting onstage of a nightclub full of older women. Still later, and against all odds, Hawk is given a chance at what most boys his age would consider a dream date. A much older, yet still lovely, woman (played by former *Playboy* centerfold Shannon Tweed) takes him back to her car for a sexual encounter – and Hawk prematurely ejaculates.

Finally, Lex's problem is just the opposite – it is his position outside the spotlight, as the “fourth man” of the group, which causes his pain. He allows the band to practice in his basement bedroom, and Trip spills bong water in his bed. He lets the others talk him into taking his mother's car to Detroit, and the car is stolen. He tries to sneak into the concert through the backstage area, and he is thrown out literally onto a pile of garbage.

In neither nostalgic depiction are these various agonies smoothed out. However, the painful initiation is situated as a rite of passage by which Mitch and his female counterpart Sabrina enter the world of high school. The mishaps of the older teens are resolved, or at least put on hold, by dawn. And it is through facing their pains that the four garage-band teens grow as young people and, finally, reach their Shangri-La – the KISS concert. Thus the pain is indeed subsumed by “It was all for the best.”

Furthermore, these plot points illustrate a primary difference between the two films. Cook notes that in many nostalgic fictions, “The past is presented as a site for a complex imaginative encounter, combining fantasy, emotion, and critical judgment, to which the knowledge that it can never be

fully retrieved is essential” (11). This could have been written specifically for *Detroit Rock City*. The trials and triumphs of the film become increasingly fantastic. Few teens will foil armed robberies, sleep with Shannon Tweed, turn junkyard guard dogs against chop-shop hoodlums, or lose their virginity in a church confessional. The fantastic nature of the plot is mirrored by Rifkin’s flamboyant style of both montage and mise-en-scène. The director uses no less than twenty point-of-view shots in the film, including one from the POV of Gene Simmons’s tongue, and employs Dutch tilts with abandon. He also creates a thought visualization scene: Trip imagines his friends explaining the downside of armed robbery. In the editing room, Rifkin uses numerous splits, wipes and dissolves, but also employs frequent jump cuts.

On the other hand, the trials of *Dazed and Confused* are highly realistic, as are the “immediate pleasures” noted by Speed (6). Linklater’s filmmaking style is correspondingly straightforward. The cinematography, with the exception of one shot, is solidly in the third-person observer mode. There are neither jump cuts nor transition effects in the editing. In short, Linklater used what audiences have come to accept as the Hollywood classical narrative style to reinforce the naturalness of his story.

Had either of these art works come into existence as simply the reminiscences of an individual, they could be dismissed as what Davis terms First Order or Simple Nostalgia: “...that subjective state which harbors the largely unexamined belief that things were better (more beautiful) (healthier) (happier) (more civilized) (more exciting) *then* than *now*” (17-18). As motion pictures, though, they move into the public realm. Obviously, in order to make money, the film must arouse feeling – preferably nostalgic — in as many people as possible. Thus, though the feeling may be the same, the film must tap into collective nostalgia: “that condition in which the symbolic objects are of a highly public, widely shared, and familiar character” (122). And, as Davis also notes,

... What is most striking and interesting about contemporary nostalgia... [is] that not only is it propagated on a cast scale by the mass media, but the very objects of collective nostalgia are in themselves media creations from the recent past... Or, as a cynic might put it, nostalgia exists of the media, by the media, and for the media. (122)

The whole of *Detroit Rock City* is permeated with the second part of this concept. It is the obsession with KISS that drives the entire movie. Of course, more people have experienced, or at least heard of, KISS, than have experienced high school in a small Texas city. It should follow that *Detroit Rock City* is a better example of collective (simple) nostalgia than *Dazed and Confused*. On the other hand, the numbers argue against this view: according to the Internet Movie Database, *Dazed and Confused* grossed nearly twice as much during its first run as *Detroit Rock City* did during its initial release.

We might say that *Dazed and Confused* was successful through its evocation of a more “realistic” nostalgia. *Detroit Rock City*, on the other hand, was less successful because of its more fantastic nature. We might also note that, even in nostalgia, KISS is still a very polarizing, love-it-or-hate-it band. But an even more important clue to the difference in success between the two films may be found in the last shot of each. *Detroit Rock City* ends on a freeze frame of Jam, who has just caught a drumstick thrown by KISS drummer Peter Criss. *Dazed and Confused* ends with the only POV shot of the film: a view through the windshield of a car, which is not immediately obvious as a period auto, speeding down an open road. In her discussion of female modernists and postmodernists and nostalgia, Ellen G. Friedman notes, “They... remain outlaws outside the canon because there is little in the backward, Oedipal glance for them. Instead, they aim their gaze unabashedly and audaciously forward” (177). The films are both devoted to nostalgia of the outsiders of their era. Rifkin freezes the outsider in a “backward glance.” Linklater emphasizes Friedman’s forward-looking, outlaw gaze. The romantic idea that our protagonists and, through them, we the audience are still rebels, not rebels of yesterday, is a strong part of *Dazed and Confused*’s greater appeal.

Carey L. Martin
Liberty University

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The Beatles and the Art of the Tambourine

Despite having been used on dozens of tracks, including ten of the twenty-seven number one singles gathered on *The Beatles I* compact disc, the tambourine has received scant attention in discussions of the Fab Four's music. In Walter Everett's two-volume *The Beatles as Musicians*, tambourine parts are often mentioned but rarely analyzed for musical purpose or value. His two appendices detailing the band's instruments list no percussion other than drums, cymbals, and cowbell. Likewise, Andy Babiuk, author of *Beatles Gear*, in an inventory of the instruments the Beatles used "from stage to studio," passes over the tambourine. Although the tambourine lacks the visual appeal, musical importance, and brand recognition of the band's Gibson, Gretsch, Höfner, Rickenbacker, Fender, Vox, and Ludwig gear, the critical silence regarding it is the more surprising when one considers that each Beatle played it at least once on released material—a whopping sixty-one of the 186 tracks comprising the thirteen studio albums (twelve British plus the American LP *Magical Mystery Tour*). Several singles and B-sides compiled on *Past Masters* increase the total.

Early on, the player (Ringo Starr or John Lennon) would play it straight, on the beat, with little variation in tempo or volume. But in 1965 the band began to explore unconventional uses of the tambourine, which had seen infrequent service on their first three LP's (four out of forty-one tracks). More often than not after 1965, the tambourine generated a residue of restlessness while the player toyed with the quarter-note. After toeing the line for a minute or two, he would reconsider his part, even if this meant

suspending it, then move on to a new part. Apparently the other Beatles and producer George Martin approved the tambourinist's autonomy in altering a pattern. Having mastered the art of straight tambourine delivery, the Beatles may have felt compelled to indulge in quirks that would prevent the rhythm track from becoming too predictable.

Paradoxically, the tambourine's syncopations, broken patterns, and irregular dynamics can be hard to hear, its jingles becoming like the noise of traffic in the ears of people living in houses near a highway: the home-dwellers (like fans and critics over-exposed to the tambourine) stop registering it and so say nothing about it. But the Beatles' anti-metronomic method of playing is the index of a highly innovative rock aesthetic. The tambourine parts represent a microcosmic sound-mirror of the group's more celebrated innovations: ADT, surprise endings, fade-in starts, backward vocals, tape-looping, feedback, exotic instrumentation, doing an impromptu concert on the roof of a city building, and the like. To inspect the tambourine's function in one-third of all Beatles music is to understand it as both a key rhythmic embellishment and an easily overlooked embodiment of the band's creativity.

The Instrument

The frequent sight of the tambourine in the hands of rock singers tends to obscure its remarkable history, longevity, and global reach. No other instrument has been adopted in every corner of the world; none has been "heard" both in the Old Testament and on rock classics like "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction"; none is more popular with both amateurs looking to bang out a simple TWO/FOUR backbeat and virtuosos looking to coax distinctive sounds and complex figures out of something made from just a few materials.

The tambourine is a percussion device in the "frame drum" family made of a wood, plastic, metal, or fiberglass hoop into which slots have been cut. Inside these slots, a single- or double-tiered row of paired brass, nickel, or bronze jingles (technically, "zils") are held in place by pins or nails. A calfskin or plastic head is tacked to the hoop. According to percussion historian James Holland, most tambourines range from six to twelve inches in diameter and have a depth of about 2.5 inches. Small tambourines hold six

or seven pairs of jingles while larger ones often contain two rows of them totaling sixteen to twenty pairs (Holland 48). Drum expert James Blades notes that “The diameter of the orchestral tambourine should not exceed 10 in. as a larger instrument tends to prove cumbersome” (*Orchestral* 27)—an important point insofar as a photograph on the DVD track on the remastered *Beatles for Sale* compact disc shows John holding a huge tambourine, perhaps twelve inches across, encircled by a double-row of zils, eleven pairs per row; and during a sequence in *Help!* Ringo plays another large one.

When appraising the tambourine, historians invoke its ancient origins, its worldwide presence, its numerous varieties and names (Robinson 365-66), and its timeless appeal. With its roots in the Middle East reaching back thousands of years, Holland calls it “one of the oldest known percussion instruments” (48). Many sources support this claim. For instance, Blades’s history of percussion places the tambourine in ancient Persia, China, and India, where, “typical of the Asiatic tambourine with deep shell,” the *kanjari* had “fewer jingles than its western counterpart” (*Percussion* 140). A tambourine, notes Blades, is pictured on the walls of Egyptian tombs as early as the fourth millennium BCE, while depicted on another Egyptian relic “we find a large tambourine over two feet in diameter being used at the time of Osorkon II (c. 800 BC)” (*Percussion* 154, 158). The tambourine’s existence in second century CE Rome is confirmed by a bas relief called *The Triumph of Bacchus* (an unintentional but direct link to the bacchanalian rock ‘n’ roll sound, not to mention lifestyle, that the tambourine helped to define in the 1960s); while two platters dating from the fourth century CE on display in the British Museum commemorate Pan (another avatar of rock music) equipped with a tambourine (*Percussion* 181). Such signs of tambourine use in ancient Greece and Rome prompt Blades to declare, “The constant representation in detail of the instruments of percussion on many of the world’s greatest art treasures leaves little doubt as to their widespread popularity” (*Percussion* 181)—this time a link to the Beatles specifically, whose recordings, the more unique because of the tambourine, can be counted among the musical treasures of the world.

Throughout all epochs and nations—Turkey, Spain, Russia, Ukraine, Italy, Great Britain, the Balkans, the African continent, the Caribbean islands, all regions of Latin America—of recorded history, the tambourine’s

contribution to music, both sacred and profane, has been preserved in paint, sculpture, text, and musical score. It can be seen in Matteo di Giovanni's *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1474)—presumably because, as Jeremy Montagu writes, “In the more public scenes [of later medieval iconography], there is a frequent use of tambourine and jingle ring” (52)—and four hundred years later in American artist John Sprague Pearce's mural *Recreation* (1896), in which an epicene adolescent, eyes wide, mouth pursed, holds a big tambourine aloft, knuckling it during a duet with a female recordist. The textualized sound of the tambourine is even “audible” in the scriptural origins of Judeo-Christian culture. The Old Testament's Book of Exodus includes a verse about Aaron's sister Miriam, who “took a timbrel [biblical term for tambourine] in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances” (King James, 15.20). Similar singing and dancing happen in Psalm 68.25: “The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the damsels playing with timbrels.” Genesis, too, refers to what some scholars consider a variation of tambourine, the tabret. Labran chides Jacob for deserting him and his family, when he, Laban, “might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp” (31.27).

Although numberless generations and mutations in national boundaries separate the days of Jacob and the rock 'n' roll era, the sonic and visual allure of the tambourine has remained unchanged. For this handy little instrument, it is a short leap between Canaan c. 5,000 BCE and Liverpool, London, and Los Angeles c. 1965-2010. The damsels in Psalms would surely find much to relish in the jingles embellishing the arrangements of one Motown single after another, or a one-off *Billboard* number one like “Green Tambourine” (the Lemon Pipers, 1967), or country singer Tift Merritt's cut “I Am Your Tambourine” on her 2004 homage to the instrument, *Tambourine*. To the sound of much jingling, she rejoices, “I am your tambourine / Rattle me darling / Shake me with your love tonight.”

In addition to the common practice of holding the tambourine in one's stronger hand and then whipping its head into the palm of the other hand, techniques include thwacking it on the knee or outer thigh or shaking it, Tift Merritt-style, to produce, in Blades's words, “the sustained note, notated tremolo, trill, or roll” (*Percussion* 385). (A roll can be heard as a sequence of either eighth or sixteenth notes.) According to the tambourinist “Tabourot,”

it “is capable of a mind-boggling array of effects, and it can be played in as many ways as ten fingers, two hands, two arms—and occasionally thighs and knees—can make sounds” (32). Tambourinists wave, shake, smack, strike, knuckle, roll, stick, rub, and, for sudden fortissimo effect, drop it on the floor from a height of twelve inches; James Holland points out that this occurs in 1911 at the end of Igor Stravinsky’s ballet *Petrushka* (49). Blades claims that Christoph von Gluck inaugurated the tambourine score in *Echo and Narcissus* (1779) and that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart inserted tambourine parts into *German Dances* (1787) (*Percussion* 261, 265). European and Latin-American romantic and modern composers followed suit, deploying the tambourine for exotic or tonal effects outside mainstream orchestral values. More down-to-earth musicians liked it too. On his visit to New York City in 1842, Charles Dickens went “slumming” in a club called Almack’s, where he was delighted by a “corpulent black fiddler, and his friend who plays the tambourine.” Wild dancing and laughter erupt, thanks partly to “the man’s fingers on the tambourine” (91): a foretaste of what is to come in the jazz lounges of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance and after. To cite one example from the jazz canon, one can listen to and view (on YouTube) Rashaan Roland Kirk’s percussionist Joe Texidor put down his sticks (at 5:34) behind the drumset and pick up a tambourine (shaken until 7:22) on 1973’s “Volunteered Slavery” (Robinson 365). Too late for the Beatles themselves to enjoy but testimony to the tambourine’s continued popularity is one master after another demonstrating his or her prowess on YouTube videos, chief among them Glen Velez’s solo pieces, or clips of Ken Anoff and Layne Redmond creating bravura polyrhythms, made and posted in the 2000s.

All of the major strands of American popular music that preceded and, through a long process of assimilation, shaped rock ’n’ roll—folk, country, rhythm and blues, gospel, jazz—are permeated with the sound of the tambourine. In the pop, rock, and folk-rock music of the Beatles and other bands of the 1960s, where there was vocal and instrumental virtuosity to spare, tambourine technique tends to be simple. Musicians and producers understood that the kind of complexity one sees in a recital by Glen Velez or the contemporary Italian tambourinist Carlo Rizzo would have detracted from the instrument’s role in “Respect” (Aretha Franklin), “California Dreaming” (the Mamas and Papas), “Good Vibrations” (the Beach Boys), “Mr.

Tambourine Man” (the Byrds), “You Keep Me Hangin’ On” (the Supremes), and a hundred other standards where it reinforces a backbeat or rolls through a refrain. The tambourine helps to make these songs chime and shine, usually without calling much attention to itself.

Seven Functions of Rock Tambourine Technique

Tambourine figures into the Beatles’ first A-side, “Love Me Do,” recorded at Abbey Road on 4 September 1962. Ringo, hired on 18 August, was, like the other Beatles, a novice in the studio. True, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and George Harrison had a modicum of recording experience, but in these sessions for a major label there was far more at stake. Paul—assigned the lead vocal by George Martin, who wanted John to play harmonica (thus preventing him from singing a song he had always sung live)—has said the change in roles unnerved him (Miles 91). Jittery nerves may also have contributed to Ringo’s inability to keep a beat steady enough for Martin. Martin had the boys re-record the song a week later with session drummer Andy White behind the kit while, in the words of the late Beatles critic Ian MacDonald, “a disenchanted Starr tapped a superfluous reinforcement to the snare on tambourine” (41). (The probable tambourine, a small one, is pictured on page 75 of *The Beatles Anthology*.) That is, Ringo echoed White’s quarter-note shuffle backbeat: TWO/FOUR, with TWO-AND/FOUR on alternating bars.¹ (In this example as below, all played quarter-notes are in UPPER-CASE; played eighth-notes are UPPER-CASE **BOLD-FACED**; bracketed numbers are silent beats, provided only to give the reader the place in the measure.) The first version was released as the single; the second version appeared on the group’s first EMI LP, *Please Please Me*.

From this simple beginning, the Beatles would proceed to rely on the tambourine to produce various percussive effects. What they did with their tambourines is to some degree echoed in the work of other sixties bands who wanted to enliven or enrich their recordings with the tambourine’s “jingle-jangle” sound. Six key functions—seven if we include hybrid applications—characterize the pop and rock style.

1. The tambourine “wettens” and “sweetens” the backbeat, in effect stretching the quarter-note, making it splash and shimmer rather than crack or pop. It transforms the backbeat from a single snare crack into a jingling splash, adding decay and putting bright metallic sound around the backbeat. Drummers often describe the sound of a drum, hi-hat, or ride cymbal in terms of dryness or wetness. Dryness can be sweetened and “hydrated,” as it were, by a tambourine. When one is privileged to hear the same song, “Love Me Do” for instance, without and with tambourine, the difference between them is instantly detectable. The latter version of “Love Me Do” has a sweeter, wetter, and some would say more musical backbeat. For further comparison, the tambourineless 10 July 1963 *Live at the BBC* version of this tune, “near-letter-perfect” (62) in archivist Richie Unterberger’s view, is much jazzier than the Andy White take; Ringo’s lightly shuffled ride cymbal pushes the song into swing territory. The cut also sounds dry. Revealing too is the 6 June 1962 EMI audition recording where Pete Best’s snare drum clacks like a hoof on wood, begging for a tambourine to soften the edges of a product inferior in other ways as well.

2. If swung toward a contact-point rather than being hit by a hand or stick, tambourines can create an audible “whip-space” before impact. The defining element of whip-space is the pre-jingle whiff that precedes the strike. Two outstanding non-Beatles examples of whip-space are “Time Is on My Side” and “Heart of Stone” by the Rolling Stones. At 0:26-0:34, 1:08-1:09; and 0:00-0:08, 0:58-1:02, 1:47-1:50, respectively, Mick Jagger’s TWO/FOUR strike falls either before or behind Charlie Watts’s backbeat. In addition to adding an element of suspense, the whip-space breathes spirit into these tracks by “ventilating” the line while stressing the rough time, which in turn underlines the Stones’ indifference, perhaps hostility, toward a clinical equivalence between snare drum and tambourine. The best Beatles example (discussed below) of whip-space is “You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away.”

3. A rolled or shaken tambourine can mask a “tick-tick” ride pattern on closed hi-hat, making the rhythm more intuitive, less exact. A good non-Beatles example of this function is heard on the Byrds’ “All I Really Want to Do”; a good Beatles example is “Tell Me What You See.”

4. The tambourine's inherent exoticism blurs ethnic and historical lines, especially when it collaborates with shakers (maracas). A good Beatles example is "Wait."
5. Deployed after the song's rhythm has been set, the rolled or shaken tambourine adds a sixteenth-note feel and seems to accelerate the song without, however, increasing its tempo. Contrapuntal pulses tug the listener in two directions. Buffalo Springfield's "Everybody's Wrong" (1966) captures the excitement this technique can generate. Thirty years later, Wilco did the same on "Monday." The Beatles' affection for the tactic is a highlight of "Mean Mr. Mustard."
6. Through accents, off-beats, delayed entrance, and cross patterns, the Beatles used the tambourine to create rhythmic contrasts that even after forty years continue to disorient the listener and skew the metronome. *Revolver* and *The Beatles* burst with tracks that illustrate this function. The players inject syncopations and counter-rhythms that augment the more conspicuous innovations regaling masterworks such as "Tomorrow Never Knows" and "Happiness Is a Warm Gun."

The Beatles' Tambourine Tally

Tambourine next crops up on the second album's "Don't Bother Me." Two tambourine parts grace *A Hard Day's Night*. The five mostly conventional performances on *Beatles for Sale* do not prepare fans for the jingle-jangle sound-flood on *Help!* (6 of 14 tracks), *Rubber Soul* (9/14), and *Revolver* (8/14). Perhaps the baroque production of *Sgt. Pepper* made the tambourine seem old-hat to the boys; it appears without much consequence on just four of this LP's thirteen cuts. On the American release *Magical Mystery Tour*, the group applies it to eight tracks (of eleven). One-third of the thirty cuts on *The Beatles* have tambourine, one-half (3/6) of *Yellow Submarine*, and one-quarter (4/17) of *Abbey Road*. *Let It Be* is jingle-free. Singles made the wetter and/or sweeter by tambourine are "Day Tripper," "We Can Work It Out," "Paperback Writer," "Rain" (all from the watershed years 1965-66), and "Hey Jude."

Sources for this tally are not consistent. Ian MacDonald, Walter Everett, and Mark Lewisohn, the three leading close-readers of Beatles

music, regularly list different tambourinists and on occasion even disagree on its presence in a given song. At times, online source Dmitry Murashev departs significantly from the other three (for him, one tambourine use on *Sgt. Pepper*; for MacDonald, four), but because he is sometimes correct, he too must be consulted. Case in point: Murashev specifies tambourine on “Baby’s in Black” whereas MacDonald does not. But the tambourine is clearly there.²

Notable Tambourine Tracks

In keeping with the uniqueness that makes so many dozens of Beatles songs distinctive within the band’s oeuvre, the tambourine was played so idiosyncratically that a majority of its uses calls for comment. But since space does not allow for analysis of thirty to forty songs, this section, broken down by studio album with a few singles included, will for the most part cover only tracks where the tambourine reveals the Beatles at their most intriguing.

After “Love Me Do” the first notable use of tambourine occurs in 1964 on *A Hard Day’s Night*’s “I’ll Cry Instead.” Of this tune MacDonald asserts, “Some sources ascribe the tambourine to Lennon, but this is unlikely in view of his notoriously poor sense of rhythm and the arcane subtleties of decent tambourine playing” (92). Everett believes it is John, saying he plays “an unusual ostinato, stressing only the second beat of every 4/4 measure” (241). No matter who the player, for every second of this 1’47” throwaway the tambourine plows along competently in a quick eighth-note shake. In “I’ll Cry Instead,” arcane subtlety is not needed anyway. Rock and roll, claimed John in 1970, “is primitive enough and has no bullshit. . . . If it’s real, it’s simple usually, and if it’s simple it’s true” (Wenner 100-01). Further evidence on the same album of this perspective lies in “Things We Said Today,” which benefits in the bridge from a backbeat tambourine exploding behind Ringo’s half-open (i.e., very wet) hi-hats that complement the tension being released in Paul’s voice, which the tambourine helps to keep in check. Also noteworthy is the emotional thwack—the lover punctuating the urgency of the passing moment—on the TWO-count backbeat in the tune’s last eight seconds. Note the far less stirring live BBC recording of this tune, which lacks tambourine.

The tambourine held by John on the video portion of the 2009 remastered *Beatles for Sale* (1964) compact disc is a large and beautiful instrument whose sound is best captured on the choruses of “I’m a Loser.” It also brightens the bridge of “I Don’t Want to Spoil the Party” and most of “Honey Don’t” and “Everybody’s Trying to Be My Baby.” But these applications pale beside the Beatles’ first off-the-wall use of the instrument. “Baby’s in Black” has been cruising along in 8/12 time for one minute and thirty seconds when, at the end of the second chorus, with just thirty-four seconds left, a jingle comes creeping out of the right channel in a tentative off-rhythm that within seconds resolves itself into an eighth-note roll with accents on bass drum and snare. A slight shake prolongs the song’s last chord. This performance is the earliest significant example of Beatles’ mischievousness, calling to mind John’s revelation in his 1970 *Rolling Stone* interview that “we used to have a laugh putting this, that, or the other in, in a light-hearted way. . . . there would be things like a beat missing or something like that to see if anyone noticed” (Wenner 97). A humorous indulgence, to be sure—but also a choice that by altering a given song’s sound and rhythm would invariably affect its emotional content.

The boys desist from slipping anything this complex into the title song of their next album and movie, *Help!* (1965). The conventional eighth- and sixteenth-note rolls during the chorus or middle-8 (bridge) on “Help!”, “It’s Only Love,” and “You Like Me Too Much” require no comment. On “Ticket to Ride,” however, on which Everett attributes the tambourine to John (MacDonald credits Ringo), the huge jingling backbeat (with discernible whip-spacing) anchors Ringo’s off-beat snare/tom pattern. The driving sixteenth-note shake in the middle-8 provides rhythmic contrast to the stuttering pattern, creating the illusion, as this technique always does, of acceleration (the tempo, in fact, does not waver) while also joining Ringo in regularizing verse syncopations that, had they continued unchanged, would have become tedious. Another hard shake fuels the “My baby don’t care” fade-out. Abetted by the tambourine’s energy, the singer departs the song gripped not by the jealousy heard in the lyrics and agitated drum patterns but in a surge of acceptance.

But because of its visual component, “You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away” is the tambourine centerpiece of *Help!* At 27:46 of the *Help!* DVD, the lip-synched track starts. The camera cuts to Ringo—seated, back up-

right, expressionless—playing tambourine at 28:04/29:06/29:12/29:38. His left palm strikes the middle of one held vertically in his right hand. This video shows that the massive whip-space audible on the recording could not have been produced as filmed because the tambourine does not move. This physical fact exposes a critical mismatch between sound and vision since the loud whip-space, by emphasizing a lagging backbeat consistent with the theme of resignation, is one of the song’s pivotal features. Yet on camera Ringo does not make the slightest effort to maintain the illusion of live performance (the song’s maracas, played on the refrain, are absent too). The final blow to audio/cinema *vérité* is Ringo’s failure to replicate the last strike on the tambourine, which is heard on the soundtrack. This laxness reflects the band’s disengagement, signaled elsewhere in the movie and well documented by the group in ensuing years, from the project. But on record, engagement is total, and the tambourine’s whip-spacing, without peer in their catalogue, is a crowning part of its appeal.

Also without peer in the Beatles’ output is the display of conventional techniques for tambourine on “Day Tripper” (late 1965). A loud one fills the right channel, balancing Ringo’s drums and cymbals in the left. The tambourine’s driving rolls, huge slapping quarter-note backbeats, and eighth-note trills (played, it seems, by John) match the crack of Ringo’s snare drum and his salvos on tom-tom. Two-measure crescendo shakes leading into the verses wash over the groove, while during the solo the backbeat tambourine steadies the ensemble, cymbals erupting around the hot guitars. John’s missed backbeat at 1:51 of the last verse again rewards the listener who keeps close tabs (as in “Baby’s in Black”) on the tambourine part.

Regarding “We Can Work It Out” MacDonald voices two opinions. First, “While some sources say Harrison played it, it is here credited to Starr on the grounds of probability” (137). (Lewisohn and Everett give no attribution; Murashev names George.) Then he adds, “The tambourine on ‘We Can Work It Out’ was the most effective and influential use The Beatles ever made of the instrument (which, as a result, turned up on every other ‘folk-rock’ record made around this time)” (137). Putting MacDonald’s claim aside for the moment, what does Ringo (or George) do on this song, with its odd verse counts and mixture of four- and three-beat measures? He shakes sixteenth-notes throughout the verses, avoiding monotony by stressing the off-beat during the seventh and eighth bars of the verse. On

the four-count section of the middle-8, he continues shaking; upon reaching the three-count section, he accents the second and third quarter-notes, driving home the urgency of Paul's plea for cooperation. Song structure coheres around the tambourine, and as such the tune's message depends on it as surely as it depends on Paul's plaintive singing.

But back to MacDonald's claim. Release dates of some tambourine classics from the same era not by the Beatles (the UK-US release of "We Can Work It Out" was December 1965) indicate that several other artists had a good handle on "folk-rock." Although none of these bands would ever explore the tambourine terrain soon to be explored by the Beatles, they deserve mention for distinctive uses of the instrument.

In the earliest example, "Not Fade Away" (May 1964), the Rolling Stones show how one recurring jingle strike can propel a tune. Here, the player whacks it on each bar's sixth eighth-note: the [THREE]-**AND**. The tambourine plays off the steady maracas and handclaps, making each measure skip forward, thus hyper-animating the already jumpy Bo Diddley beat and helping the song to leap out of the teenager's transistor radio.

Then there were the three American B's: Byrds, Beach Boys, and Bob Dylan. In Timothy White's estimation, "Brian Wilson was taking cues from the Beatles. The Beatles were taking cues from the Byrds, who were taking cues from the Beach Boys, the Beatles, and Bob Dylan" (250). Walter Everett says Jim "McGuinn's solo vocalizing on all the Dylan covers and his stunning use of the Rickenbacker twelve-string brought the Byrds to the Beatles' attention, particularly to that of Lennon and Harrison" (277). On *Mr. Tambourine Man* (June 1965), the Byrds' debut LP, tambourine was used on nine of twelve tunes, including "I'll Feel a Whole Lot Better," a rocker with a mixed attack of backbeat strikes, quarter-note accents, and eighth-note shake-rolls, and "Don't Doubt Yourself, Babe," leaping and lurching with tambourine rolls and accents placed around the Bo Diddley sections of the refrain.

In June 1965's "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," the Stones devised a relentless tambourine/snare tattoo. By buttressing, in a THREE-**AND**-FOUR slap, the four-count snare backbeat, the tambourine may be said to be integral to the tune's "message." The lack of satisfaction compels the "narrator" to smack something repeatedly—the tambourine, a medium for rage and frustration. In December the Beatles replicated the part in "Think for

Yourself,” with a considerable reduction in intensity. Ian MacDonald acknowledges the Beatles’ indebtedness on this tune to Keith Richards’s fuzz-box riff on “Satisfaction” but is silent about the tambourine pinch, which, to be fair to the Beatles, sticks only to the verses (elsewhere it does backbeats) and which is veiled by maracas throughout.

Dylan’s *Highway 61 Revisited* (August 1965), comprised of nine songs, has five songs with tambourine, led by the slaps that help to animate “Like a Rolling Stone.” The tambourine also splatters Bobby Gregg’s backbeat over the hopped-up shuffles “From a Buick Six” and “Highway 61 Revisited.” The Beatles knew this music, just as they knew Brian Wilson’s Beach Boys. On “Good Vibrations” (October 1966), Frank Capp’s crescendos and backbeats resemble aural scaffolding upon which Wilson’s session men and his fellow Beach Boys can hang their complex instrumental and vocal arrangements. On this classic single, Capp’s tambourine may be more important than Hal Blaine’s drum kit. The Beatles could not have been deaf to the tambourine’s assets on Brian Wilson’s consummate single.

Rubber Soul (1965) bloomed in this jingling environment. With “Drive My Car” the Beatles kick-start two albums full of remarkable tambourine tracks, in effect declaring that percussion, especially tambourine, would no longer be just a conventional add-on (“Love Me Do,” “I’m a Loser,” etc.) but a carefully considered part of a given song’s structure and texture. (“Day Tripper” and “We Can Work It Out,” taped during the *Rubber Soul* sessions, exemplify this new approach.) Whoever is playing it on “Drive My Car”—MacDonald cites Ringo; Murashev, John; Lewisohn, no one—does a fine job layering polyrhythms around the four-count cowbell. The **AND-TWO-THREE-FOUR** pattern, sustained when the tambourine is shaken on the chorus, climaxes in the first BEEP-BEEP/BEEP-BEEP YEAH! shout-out, then morphs slightly on George’s stinging solo: ONE-TWO-THREE-**AND**-FOUR. Muting the tambourine on the second *a cappella* shout-out both reverses one’s expectations and highlights the clarity of the singers’ erotic triumph.

There are no other surprises of this sort on *Rubber Soul*. Light TWO-THREE taps on “Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)”; double-taps at the turnarounds on “You Won’t See Me”; lively tapping and rolling on “Wait”; and chorus shaking and one coy mid-bridge trill in “I’m Looking Through You” define the tambourine’s role on the album—an album, it should be

stressed, whose folk-rock sensibility is attained largely through the prevalent jingle-jangling. But “If I Needed Someone” requires a word if only because its inconsistent tambourine previews the radical inconsistency that will combine to make an Artistic Statement on many future Beatles tracks. (The inconsistency cannot be detected in mono and in fact will elude casual listeners of the stereo re-master.) The tune starts predictably enough, backbeats on the verse (the first backbeat is missed) and a sixteenth-note shake on the chorus—all of this favoring the left channel, with minimal right-side bleed. But during the solo, a clumsy eighth-note roll takes hold in the right channel. The third verse shifts tambourine back left, where tentative backbeats repeat until the tambourine moves right again for the tune’s final seventeen seconds (four bars) of coda. The disjunction between unpolished, vacillating tambourine and polished vocal harmonies seems to reflect the speaker’s ambivalence towards the loved one: back and forth he goes, missing beats as if his feelings are not reliable.

Usually seen as the group’s genius reaching full-flood, *Revolver* (1966) contains tambourine parts that echo the album’s extraordinary strides in composition, performance, and production. So complex is the tambourine on the opener “Taxman” that reference to several time-sequences is needed to analyze it. In a word, extremely irregular playing fractures the pulse. The tambourine starts at the top of the second verse (0:32) with a TWO/AND-FOUR backbeat riff, repeated once, then lapsing immediately, refusing to stick to the expected supporting role, but only for one bar, when once again the TWO/AND-FOUR resumes, lapsing again after two bars and resuming at 0:45, where it plays along until 1:08. An eighth-note run on the tambourine breaks into a sixteenth-note shake-roll during Paul’s guitar solo, runs through the ensuing chorus, continues until 1:32, then after defaulting to the backbeat for seven seconds goes silent at 1:39. Another shake commences before the last verse and chorus at 1:50—yet another arbitrary place to resume—to end (2:39). This complicated, asymmetrical performance may be intended to connote the speaker’s frustrations with punitive tax codes. Tim Riley, in *Tell Me Why*, dances around this conclusion as he talks about the cut’s “edge,” “acridity,” “fevered stress,” “vengeance,” and “sour smell[s]” (183). He observes that “Taxman” starts in “two tempos [that] not only trip up expectations as to where the beat will land; they gives [sic] a sense of space to the recording: the tension between what’s heard in

the foreground and how it's actually produced behind the scenes" (182). But his insights are limited to voice, guitar, bass; the tambourine, he notes, "is added to this basic texture [the guitar/bass riff] on the first part of the second verse" (183). This understatement suggests the tambourine was applied without variation for the duration, when in fact it bends itself to complement "Taxman" 's *mélange* of smashes, lashings, and wails.

On "Got to Get You into My Life," the tambourine conspires with the opening sixteen quarter-notes to throw fans off balance. (Everett wonders if George handles tambourine; MacDonald says Ringo; Murashev goes with John; Lewisohn is mum.) The heavy four-beat pulse is rendered deceptive by a tambourine that starts with a fortissimo thwack on the ninth quarter-note (0:04)—technically, the first beat of the tune's third measure. The player's ONE-TWO-THREE-FOUR strikes anchor a groove that, for all its deepness, has one puzzling how Paul makes it to the first verse, which lands on the fifth measure. At 0:22 the tambourine switches to TWO/FOUR and by doing this assumes responsibility over all other vocal and instrumental elements for momentarily cooling off the blasting horns and halting the rush of the singer's obsession with, according to the song's composer Paul, marijuana (Miles 190). The tambourine pauses during the two-measure verse turnarounds, thus deferring to Ringo's snare/tom triplet fill, then more or less repeats the first sequence. Sloppy hits and misses in this second TWO/FOUR section would have never made it past a modern producer's computer-corrected rhythm tracks, nor would the tambourine's sudden cessation well before the brass line abandons the chorus at 1:45. From the outset, the tambourine's little explosions tend to muddy Ringo's hi-hat and snare, in effect making the subsequent slippages and stoppages the more dramatic. At 1:45, a twenty-five second lapse begins. Why, one might ask, does the tambourinist retire to the margins of a masterpiece? We soon know. At 2:10, the tambourine's silence is shattered in the middle of the coda/fade-out with a return to four-count strikes in step with the horn section's last licks. The first tambourine smash in this set may be the most startling single quarter-note in the Beatles songbook.

Although not quite as disruptive, "I Want to Tell You" accumulates its fair share of irregular tambourine tics. Complementing crescendo shakes on maracas that sound like an attacking rattlesnake, the tambourine nails the TWO backbeat in verses one, two, and three (on the mono re-master);

and on the first bridge an unusual ONE strike alternates with ONE-TWO strikes. On the second bridge, the tambourine drops out except for some stray ONE accents; and during the last verse, new handclaps (1:49) replace the tambourine except for one final shake at end of the verse and random off-beat strikes. Walter Everett's belief that the tune "convey[s] stammering and searching for ideas" (58) finds support in the tambourinist's fluctuations.

Of *Revolver's* mighty finale, "Tomorrow Never Knows," Mark Lewisohn observes, "Ringo's drums carried a hypnotic and mournful thud. Paul's bass, high up on the fretboard, matched Ringo note for mesmerizing note. There was another eerily live Lennon vocal, a tambourine, one note of an organ playing continuously, two guitar solos, one fuzzed and played backwards the other put through a Leslie organ speaker [sic] . . . and a jolly honky-tonk piano" (70)—another understatement. Unchanging throughout the song are the bass drum (ONE/**AND**-THREE), the snare drum (TWO), and the tom-tom (a double sixteenth-note after the THREE, clipped before the FOUR). The main percussion discrepancy lies between the snare/tom-tom tattoo and the tambourine, which misfires in its echoing of the second part of the tom-tom part. That is, the tambourine is played in a straight **AND**-FOUR pattern behind the snare drum's second sixteenth-note, thereby creating a tiny lurch in tempo—just the kind of thing that would disorient audiences but be hard to pin down. (The tambourinist is probably playing a big tambourine, which he is unable to whip in synch with Ringo's stuck tom-tom.) More disorientation occurs at 0:31 when there are three strikes—almost certainly a mistake—to break the pattern, which never recovers. In fact, the tambourinist departs from the established part and opts for a rough shake-roll at 0:42, killing it eleven seconds later (0:53) just before the end of the vocal line. During the tape-loop interlude, the tambourine withdraws altogether for fifty-seven seconds (0:53 to 1:50), as astounding in its way as the last triple-piano chord in "A Day in the Life" or the opening chord of "A Hard Day's Night." But paralleling the tune's tape-loops and other weirdnesses, the tambourine re-enters the fray. A short shake-roll with accents on TWO/**AND**-FOUR (1:50-1:57) gives way from 2:02 to 2:29 to syncopated eighth-note strikes that destabilize Ringo's linearity with, of all things, a tentative Latin touch that eventually self-destructs. A poorly executed shake-roll commences at 2:32 and stops at 2:49 with eight seconds

of this “psychedelic tapestry” (Womack 146) remaining. In sum, the tambourine part, reflecting its use(s) elsewhere on *Revolver*, begins conventionally in straight time before dissipating into a series of slaps and shakes. Since at times there seems to be no method at all in the Beatles’ tambourine madness, one may wonder if along with genius some amount of luck, incompetence, indifference, obliviousness (tracks were made, then erased, then made again with different Beatles picking up different instruments, with tape bleed-through or incomplete erasure), or a combination of these was incorporated into the final mixes and masters of “Tomorrow Never Knows.” Or perhaps what we are hearing is a tambourinist who sees so many possibilities in the three minutes at his disposal that he satisfies his craving for variety by concocting several patterns in the whirring, chanting soundscape.

Even the clean tambourine part on “Penny Lane” (early 1967) keeps us guessing. Noteworthy for being the only known instance on record of Paul playing it, the tambourine stays well under the radar until 0:52. Never doing more than TWO/FOUR service, it drops out for stretches but then creeps back in. At 2:16 Paul fills the open FOUR with a light jingle-tap. Easy to have elided, he instead kept it: a pretty jingle gracing a gorgeous song.

In contrast to “Penny Lane” is “It’s All Too Much” (mid-1967). Derided by major critics for its lack of good taste—Tim Riley calls it a “relentless barrage of the irrational” (242)—“It’s All Too Much” is the sign and seal of the Beatles’ decadent phase. Having taken a journey through pure rock ’n’ roll, girl-group, Tin Pan Alley, rhythm and blues, Merseybeat, power-pop, Music Hall, chamber pop (today’s “twee”), folk-rock, hard rock, baroque and psychedelic, electronica, symphonic, singer-songwriter, and back-to-basics rock, the Beatles were ready to indulge in the farrago of gimmickry and perverseness called “It’s All Too Much.” At 1:17 the tambourine breaks into the song like a gate-crasher unable to wait any longer for an invitation to a revel already well underway. Jumbled up with cowbells and ricocheting drums, the tambourine defies one’s attempt to chart its permutations, detours, and whims. Like the rest of the song, whose creators are for once in their career indifferent to all sense of proportion, the tambourine’s arbitrariness *is* the point, *is* part and parcel of the “theme.” Ringo tries backbeat, rattles and rolls, conforms and contradicts, then suddenly plays

dead, all of these choices representing a decadence so extreme that this major byproduct of this short-lived era seems doomed to perennial rebuke.

Ringo's tambourine also excites interest on two lesser-known tracks from *Magical Mystery Tour* (American LP, 1967), "Blue Jay Way" and "Baby You're a Rich Man."³ In the latter tune, jingles dip and dive in and around thick backbeats, hi-hat whooshes, and busy Ludwigs, creating a dialogue between two percussive sensibilities that relinquish time-keeping duty to TWO/FOUR handclaps. "Blue Jay Way," far more subdued, sneaks some jingling into the SoCal fog. Light four-count taps in the middle of the second chorus (1:41) change to TWO/FOUR backbeats in the third verse. The tambourine vanishes in the third chorus, reappears out of the fog at 2:31 like a bird searching for home in a miasma of heavily phased drums, strings, keyboards, and voices. During the last forty seconds the bird flutters aimlessly.

"Dear Prudence" (1968) is decorated with the Beatles' most sensitive tambourine playing on record, attributed variously to Paul, John, or "a chorus with tambourines and handclaps consisting of the Beatles, Mal Evans, cousin John McCartney, and Harrison protégé Jackie Lomax" (Everett 168). The delicate, isolated taps—in the first forty-four seconds, it is touched twice, both times on the THREE—are like kisses of encouragement on the brow of the reclusive Farrow girl (Mia's sister), who had withdrawn from the other meditators at the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Himalayan ashram. The tambourine is folded into the chorus on the [TWO]-AND/[FOUR]-AND; the last TING in this sequence is delayed to the FOUR: "The sun is up (TING), the sky is blue (TING), it's beautiful (TING), and so are you (TING), Dear Prudence . . . (TING), won't you come out to play?" The tambourine gently nudges the four-count groove as John coaxes Prudence from her seclusion. A perfect part, repeated almost verbatim in the next chorus. Reaching the climax, the tambourine maintains the upbeats, underpinning the band as the volume soars and resolves itself in George's spectacular lead guitar and Paul's stupendous drumming, punctuated by massive cymbal washes, over ten bars.

Two other songs on side one of *The Beatles* (a.k.a. "The White Album") deserve mention. "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" perpetuates a Beatles tradition of introducing the tambourine late in a song—here, an extraordinary two minutes and sixteen seconds, near the halfway mark. It torques the intensity of the second middle-8, goes dead (3:02, another Beatles

trademark), and reawakens (3:23) mid-verse and mid-measure. Neurotic jingle on and off as Eric Clapton rips his solo.

Finally, on “Happiness Is a Warm Gun,” tambourine powers the manic syncopation of the “Mother Superior jump the gun” passage. Dissonant shakes on “Glass Onion”; sardonic rolls on “The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill”; sweet backbeats and sixteenth-note rolls on “Piggies”; a joyful shake-roll on “Birthday”’s pre-bridge drum break; a false-start and a late escort to the last labored bars of “Sexy Sadie”: the tambourinists leave their marks on these and other tracks from *The Beatles*.

The last memorable use of tambourine by the Beatles is heard on 1969’s *Abbey Road*. The loping gait of “Mean Mr. Mustard” is transformed at 0:09 (first beat, fourth measure) with a sixteenth-note shake sustained in the accented sections of the tune (“Take him out to look at the queen / Only place that he’s ever been”). The roll fades at 0:36, nearly becoming inaudible in passages, but increasing in volume on the last three beats.

The Legacy

Forty years after *Abbey Road*, great tambourine performances by any number of contemporary bands bring the Beatles to mind. Part of their vast legacy seems to be their influence on tambourine tactics in digital-epoch pop and rock. Thus, when Yo La Tengo jumps into the deep groove of “Moby Octopad” with a shake-roll from 1:21 to 1:44, resuming from 2:00 to 2:32 and from 4:20 to end (5:29); or when in the exact middle of “Little Eyes,” they apply backbeat tambourine for twenty-six seconds, then smack it on all fours from 3:59 to 4:09, we know where we have heard this before. Much of Oasis’s Britpop sound is a bow to the Beatles, never more so than in four songs on (*What’s the Story*) *Morning Glory?* “Wonderwall”’s yearning is enhanced by the delayed entrance of backbeat tambourine, and “Hey Now!”’s anthemic sound is modulated by a mixed arrangement of steady jingles. Sweet, wet tambourine is mixed high in the heart-breaking “Cast No Shadow,” and at 1:58, rolling on the eighth-notes, jingles attach to the first chorus of Britpop’s supreme homage to the psychedelic sixties, “Champagne Supernova.” Judging by two tracks on their compact disc *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*, American band Spoon seems to have picked up some clues from the Beatles. From the start of “You Got Yr. Cherry Bomb,” two big-

sounding tambourines layered in echo start/stop, backbeat/roll, and travel left/right in a pattern whose rationale, if any, demands close listening; and one reason “Don’t You Evah” stands out is that with just forty-one seconds left in a song clocking in at 3:37, a shaking tambourine jumps into a deep groove already gouged out by bass drum and snare. A final example, Coldplay’s upbeat in “Violet Hill” and backbeats on the choruses of “In My Place” embody the tambourine’s appeal to bands of all eras and all stripes—all the more reason to study the Beatles’ handling of this ubiquitous but underestimated instrument. How the Fab Four played tambourine reveals much about one wise choice they made in their determination to sound so different, so good.

Steven Hamelman
Coastal Carolina University

Notes

¹ All Beatles music cited in this essay refers to the monaural or re-mastered stereo compact disc versions released in 2009 and to these official releases: *Live at the BBC* (Apple 1994) and *Anthology 1-3* (Apple 1995-1996).

² The Beatles themselves would not be able to help much in the tally. During the production of the *Anthology* video in the 1990s, the three survivors sit with George Martin reviewing old tapes (“Back at Abbey Road” on the Special Features disc). None of the four can remember who is playing bass guitar on “Golden Slumbers” or the piano coda on “Tomorrow Never Knows.”

³ More inconsistent attribution. MacDonald says Ringo plays on both tracks; Murashev gives “Blue Jay Way” to John and “Baby You’re a Rich Man” to George; and Everett gives “Blue Jay Way” to John, “Baby You’re a Rich Man” to Ringo.

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Outsourced: Crime Stories, New World Horrors, and Genre

There's been a break in the continuum—the United States used to be lots of fun.
—"Jackie," *The New Pornographers*

Hyperbolic blood offerings and other hallmarks of nihilistic gore drawn from the ultraviolent horror film are making substantial inroads into genres traditionally distinct from horror cinema. Among other media platforms, signal elements from the cinematic splatterfest are infiltrating the prime-time serial drama, the musical, and high-profile television advertising campaigns.¹ Gory images from lurid horror films notorious for their obscene disregard for human flesh are making particularly disruptive incursions into the enduring genre of crime fiction.² These advances by the modern horror film into foreign territory are reworking the textual and affective rubrics that allow popular authors to compose intelligible crime stories and knowledgeable readers of crime fiction to make sense of their preferred genre. The intrusion of the horror film is also reshaping the critical nexus between crime stories and extra-generic references to the material world that confederate readers share outside textual realms.

Depicting convincing assaults in crime fiction now requires some leading writers in the genre to draw upon grotesque shows of violence that outrun the more temperate level of mayhem and bodily harm once common to the depiction of unlawful violence in crime stories. Furthermore, the articulation of criminal carnage as a hideous pastiche envisioned through reference to American productions allows international writers of recently published

crime stories to link displays of horrific depravity with American-led invasions of distant lands. In this new admixture, characters treat the wild work of horrific killers and inventive psychopaths as equivalent to the recent overseas adventures of the United States. In a genre not noted for pointed commentary regarding the direction of foreign policy, this striking correspondence between serial mayhem and American initiatives abroad occasions sharp critiques of U.S. engagements with irregular combatants on other shores.

Mapping new organizational alliances in crime fiction requires critics to begin with the recognition that most works in the genre are predicated on marshalling an appropriate response to the violent trespasses of social outlaws and not the bad acts of supernatural malefactors. Given this well-established bias, it should be a relatively simple matter to register the presence of alien offenders in the genre. Notwithstanding the prime directive of calling the guilty to account for their misdeeds, the genre of crime fiction is more amorphous and less rigidly exclusive than common wisdom might immediately suggest, as evidenced by the staggering variety of distinct sub-genres collected under the umbrella term of crime fiction. Nevertheless, most criminal fictions obey a sturdy series of common standards allowing the genre to maintain a coherent structure handily recognized by legions of readers.³ So, even as individual crime fictions may belong to a near countless series of proliferating micro-genres, including, as tallied by John G. Cawelti, “gender-oriented detection” (288), “a new regionalism, a new internationalism, and a new historicism, with mystery series set in every conceivable area of the world” alongside whodunits featuring varied investigators drawn from a rainbow palette of diverse ethnicities and sexual orientations, they continue to exhibit strong family traits that cement the latest derivation with the collective ur-genre (289). No matter how rapidly a rhizomatic genre generates new, slightly mutated revisions, the mutual threads that unite familiar stories sharing a common heart remain palpable.

In writing works that honor the established rules regulating the genre, authors documenting bad deeds in crime fiction uniformly provide a rational explanation for the chaos and injury occasioned by wayward men and bad women. The transgressions of the law that occur in crime fiction are not generally carried out by a monster or other strange agent. There are some hybrid crime-horror blends that do not tender a natural account for acts of

illegitimate violence, but these stories have departed the main channel of crime fiction proper for the hinterlands that lie beyond the ordinary purview of the genre. Even when making room for polysemic jumbles that span multiple narrative bodies, most readers will first think of crime stories as fictions anchored in the hard concrete reality of the naked city or other pedestrian arena. Characteristic crime fictions are not chimerical compounds that promiscuously mingle the uncanny with “just the facts” required to satisfy an orderly police investigation or indefatigable private eye.⁴

Furthering the historic divide between crime fiction and horror tales, the scourge of violence that signals the presence of the horrific is usually depicted in more salacious and heated terms than those factual signifiers employed to designate instances of law-breaking in police procedurals and similar stories. In typical tales of horror, the central focus of reader fascination is the terrible appearance of misshapen freaks in conjunction with their black trespasses and diabolical handiwork. This fascination with the monstrous can be traced back to gothic tales of supernatural intrigue that depict bizarre violence as part of an inextricable fusion lacing mysterious torts with spooky portents of supernatural menace. Crime fictions generally render violence, even extreme acts of mayhem, as offensive deeds executed by suspect men and women without reference to the mesmerizing powers of the supernatural. These distinct orientations to the depiction of violence lead crime fiction to concentrate on violence as a puzzle to be solved, while horror stories represent the violent commissions of monsters as strangely alluring violations instigated by inexplicable forces from the beyond. As pathologist Garret Quirke observes at the beginning of an investigation occasioned by an altered death certificate in *Christine Falls*, “[i]t was not the dead that seemed . . . uncanny but the living” (Black 8). In a horror tale, the dead who violate the natural order are of consuming interest, as they offer sublime confirmation of a queer world just the other side of the border marking the sensible limits of our mortal coil. Regrettably, in crime fiction the dead are a necessary write-off required to set into motion the identification and apprehension of the culprit or gang with the means, motive, and opportunity to commit unwarranted trespasses.⁵

Crime fictions aim to account for the twisted, yet entirely natural, objectives that drive men and women to commit contemptible deeds and not to offer chilling entrée to the astral plane. What this means for contempo-

rary crime stories reanimated with reference to horrific set-pieces is that while violence may now be most artfully and robustly expressed by emulating modes of display that replicate alien modes of representation, such appropriations do not entail a full-on adoption of all the expressive devices and narrative strictures at play in another genre. Instead, new permutations in crime fiction remain focused on evil as a natural phenomenon even when violence is depicted in a foreign register. Recall, for example, the ambitious craftsmanship of Hannibal Lecter and other predators in the influential series by Thomas Harris documenting the nefarious deeds of serial killers and those charged with running them to ground. In these novels and film spin-offs, Harris scores elaborate scenes of memorable mayhem, aptly expressed in Lecter's snappy patter "I'm having an old friend for dinner," that owe a tremendous debt to films like *Psycho*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and countless slasher films, gore fests and zombie pictures. Such productions, both the horror films themselves and crime fictions that borrow from a distant genre, feature "densely corporeal violence," as a vehicle for manufacturing either thrills and suspense or a horrific chill (Seltzer 166). While the grotesque displays of the broken body are homologous, each genre prefers radically different accounts for the authors of such brutal acts. Inspired killers in the horror film are not of this earth. Howsoever dreadful their appetites, the rapacious killers in crime fiction are mortals and not unloosed minions from Hell.⁶

Crime stories remain intricate enigmas charging readers and their investigative partners to puzzle out how justice is to be done.⁷ No matter how captivating the work of an inventive serial killer or other felons, crime fiction maintains a primary focus on the gathering of clues and fingering the guilty. In this regard, an egregious act of violence is almost always an anticlimactic incident which sets into motion the investigation of the crime leading to the eventual apprehension of the guilty; consequently, it is the investigation that takes place after violence is done that serves as the crux of the crime-centered narrative.⁸ As David Lehman noted, "the detective's story's 'narrative line flows backward, from effect to cause, causing the reader to become a participant or co-conspirator'"(qtd. in Simpson 74). On occasion, bad actors do commit a series of spectacular crimes over the course of a crime story. In this case, a crime spree ups the ante and intensifies

reader desire for the final showdown between those charged with enforcing the law and those fated to break it.⁹

When an alien mode for representing violence is imported from the ultraviolent horror film, the effect is not to uproot all the conventions of crime stories. The central inquiry whereby malefactors are run down remains paramount, but the interknit cognitive and sensual apprehension of the terrible sweep of criminal cruelty is radically altered. With the assistance of a foreign register for the depiction of violent mayhem, readers of crime fiction are confronted with criminal deeds that induce the intense revulsion common to the experience of viewing assaultive horror films. This response is not typical of older crime fictions that require readers to take their place alongside dutiful chief inspectors and private eyes in the deliberate, clinical process of ratiocination. If Hercule Poirot were presently on the case, in tandem with exercising his superior little gray cells, he would have to dance around gray matter speckled across the crime scene as he sifts through weeping viscera.

New amalgams of the horrible and the criminal also call for unexpected answers to the question of cultural verisimilitude. Readers looking for confirmation that their chosen fictions belong to the genre of crime stories generally need to be satisfied that the text plays by the rules of the genre *and* that crime fictions honor conventional wisdom regarding the time and place of the investigation.¹⁰ For this latter query, does the big city presented in the radio and television serial *Dragnet* or the novel and film adaptation of Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* sync appropriately with our experience of Los Angeles, or more likely, of what we think was or may now be true of Los Angeles? Even the very well-travelled typically know the Tenderloin, Hell's Kitchen, Cabbagetown and other locales common to crime fiction through mediated accounts that take the place of personal site visits and actual empirical experience. To offer a convincing answer to the question of cultural verisimilitude, realistic genre fictions must mesh precisely with other mediated accounts accepted as representative of the tangible world beyond the text. In so doing, like jigsaw puzzle pieces that fit neatly with their interlocked neighbors, reading a body of texts drawn from a common genre that takes place in the known world allows reader to synthesize a mosaic index or register for gauging the comparative authenticity of select fictions. Comprising all we know with relative certainty about

the sensible world, this pragmatic index allows savvy readers to assess entries in the crime genre for due attention to the immutable natural laws, social conventions, and historical givens that organize everyday experience.

The need for simulated authenticity is especially critical in crime fiction. In addition to establishing guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, the legitimate work of crime detection must also feel as if it gives readers a genuine “insider’s” perspective into the cultural setting where heinous crimes are staged and justice served. In this fashion, typical crime fictions make readers feel at home on the beat. Rather than referencing a set of shared signs that betoken the ineffable presence of the supernatural, plausible depictions of the scene of the crime and the workings of law enforcement must reference common signs that are taken as accurate tokens of the mundane world.

In light of how satisfactory responses to the questions of generic and cultural verisimilitude allow readers to identify a generic work as crime fiction, note how Arnaldur Indriðason initiates the central investigation in *The Draining Lake*. As detectives question the First Secretary of the Russian embassy in Reykjavik, Iceland, about local skirmishes during the long-concluded Cold War, the envoy reflects on U.S. and U.S.S.R. brinksmanship following the discovery of an old skeleton freighted with Soviet radio gear.

If we did have spies in this embassy then there were certainly twice as many CIA agents at the US embassy. Have you asked them? The description of the skeleton you found suggests to me – how should one put it— a mafia killing. Had that occurred to you? Concrete boots and deep water. It’s almost like an American gangster movie. (84)

The diplomat’s description of the foul deed and acknowledgment of spying are notable precisely because everything the attaché says works to satisfy competent reader expectations in reference to a professional hit executed during a well-documented era of high tension between world powers. This exchange confirms for readers that this is a story framed with appropriate and consonant reference to actual historical events. Furthermore, the “mafia killing,” a work of efficient and practiced termination, is a form of sanitized murder that readers recognize as the hallmark of well-trained professionals and not an unhinged assault perpetrated by satanic agents.

Finally, the cross-reference to the American gangster film provides a ready illustration of the crime-scene from a companion channel that must

also play by a rigid series of generic constraints dictating how gangsters go about their dirty business. Cable serials, time-worn syndicated television runs, celebrated movies and other texts documenting criminal behavior all demonstrate that it is not a desire to curry favor with Satan, but Napoleonic ambition in the land of King Dollar that drives the brethren of “Little” Caesar Bandello, Al Capone, Meyer Lansky, Vito Corleone, Tony Soprano, Frank Lucas, and Joey Gallo. Notable as well throughout this exchange is the dispassionate language used to describe the hit. In accord with the measured tone of the First Secretary (“how should one put it”), discussions of the crime scene, motive, means, and opportunity are expertly disinterested and bloodless.

The need to reference convincing signs representing the things of this world is also made plain in the front matter and opening pages of *Faceless Killers* by the best-selling Scandinavian author Henning Mankell. This work is the first entry in an extensive, popular series of crime stories set in contemporary Sweden. Mankell is not solely a national or provincial publishing sensation. He is an internationally celebrated writer whose works have been published in thirty-three countries, translated into thirty-five languages, and adapted for numerous feature films and television dramas (Mankell, *Henning*). In reaching a global audience, it is clear that Mankell’s popularity, his all-inclusive readability, is due, at least in part, to employing a set of narrative strategies and generic tropes that are transparent to heterogeneous readers who do not share a common vernacular outside the conventions that order a genre in flux.

Prior to entering the story proper, readers of *Faceless Killers* are presented with a detailed map of the southern shore of Sweden and that chunk of eastern Denmark lying just across the strait separating Copenhagen from Malmo. Unlike the fantastic maps that accompany tales of other worlds (as in editions of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy), the prefatory map in Mankell’s book is provided first and foremost as a testament to the veracity of the author’s fictional but not fantastic account. Mankell’s characters are imaginary constructions, but they are drawn from and walk upon a concrete phenomenal plane that anchors the fictional realm. Driven readers could employ Mankell’s map to motor around Sweden and Denmark. Meticulously detailed maps of Middle Earth chart the text only and not a place we could physically traverse on an eventful quest to Mordor.

Once past the evidentiary front matter that situates readers in the overlapping terrain of Mankell's fictive realm *and* this world, *Faceless Killers* commences with the depiction of a crime scene in a remote farmhouse. When the police arrive they are confronted by a repellent display that calls for them and Mankell's readers to find some way to comprehend what ought to remain inconceivable:

The couple's bedroom was covered in blood. It had even splashed onto the porcelain lamp hanging from the ceiling. Prostrate across the bed lay an old man with no shirt on and his long underwear pulled down. His face was crushed beyond recognition. It looked as though someone had tried to cut off his nose. His hands were tied behind his back and his left thigh was shattered. The white bone shone against all the red. (*Faceless* 10-11)

Barely breathing, there is also an old woman in the death chamber with a taut noose cinched round her throat.

As all observe during the rigorous examination of the bedroom, the crime scene is: "a slaughterhouse" (*Faceless* 11). It is also, as one of the primary investigators notes in response to a query from a deskbound assistant, "worse than you could imagine" (*Faceless* 21). Another officer coming up with the only apt comparison on par with the shocking desecration states that it was "[l]ike an American movie. It even smelt like blood. That usually doesn't happen" (*Faceless* 21). It is important to note that the officer's fit assessment is not a half-right simile. In our collective reality, a compound quarter which includes the shared stage of the "truthful" text and our sensate surroundings, these things, the "American movie" and the horror show in the farmhouse, are just too alike.

There are several additional observations to be drawn from Mankell's presentation and a reader's likely reception of the crime scene. Despite their common experience of reading a violent procedural, their collective serial engagement, the assembled readers for this work are a varied lot, hailing from vastly different locales. These disparate venues will surely harbor idiosyncratic sets of reading practices that are not wholly identical to the interpretive practices of any other cultural locus. As the Swedish police go about their investigation, an American or Mexican reader will not pick up some of the subtleties or even a gross textual thrust that will be obvious to a marginally literate Dane or thick Finn. Yet, despite these signal differences, it is also likely that Mankell's great community of variform readers will

share some of the same reading practices. On crucial points of textual import nearly all readers can be trusted to reach similar conclusions. They do so by employing a common pool of clues drawn from the narrative in mutual patterns of induction. When the author and his chorus of cops describe the assault in cinematic detail, a clear vision of the corpse's ragged state and the perilous condition of his throttled mate is shared by a plurality of readers. Furthermore, the collective readership knows just what the inspector means when he refers to the crime scene as an abhorrent display pinched from an American film. For those not convinced by an argument predicated on how a hypothetical reader might respond to the mayhem, then bear in mind the response of the sickened officers who despite being uniformly inured to most ordinary scenes of violence — “that usually doesn't happen” — are all nearly incapacitated with disgust and nausea in the face of an horrific affront.

A deep semantic reservoir for the production of violent imagery, the filmed American dreadful is a lingua franca for detailing bodily ruin world-round. Here, when referring to staging appropriated from another genre, cops and author employ a short offhand descriptor that directly cites the work of Americans. *Faceless Killers* was first published for Swedish readers in 1991, with the North American edition appearing in print six years later; but by the early nineties, writers and readers world-wide had suffered long exposure to the American shocker, and even those who disdain the contemporary horror film are minimally conversant with the conventions of gruesome cinematic slaughter. In light of this facility, diverse readers readily grasp exactly how the guilty party has dressed the scene when an American production is indicted. The wet work of a profane killer is horrifically over the top when performed in keeping with a new world shoot. And unlike Indriðason's impassive reference to the American gangster film which had to be explicitly stated, Mankell's cops don't even need to name the exact type of film they are talking about for readers to connect the dots. American, horror film, and stomach-churning violence are all part of the same connotative skein in this transparent textual patchwork constructed between readers and author. In accounting for this recalibration of violence in crime fiction, it is worth stressing that the addition of horrific violence to the crime scene asks more of the reader than mere recognition of an escalating level of violence in the genre; this shift represents a change in the

tenor of criminal violence, the affective organization of violent imagery, and is thus a change that is registered as a phenomenological break when a queasy shudder, the frisson of horror, supplants the quickening charge of suspense.¹¹

In this communal assembly, few readers will fail to register the telling condition of the near-severed nose which appears almost “cut off” or the alabaster thigh bone which noses through the ground flesh of the thigh with an unwelcome glint. The fact that the old man’s face is “crushed beyond recognition” speaks clearly of the absolute fury fueling the farmhouse attack. In addition, the advanced age of the elderly couple, leaving them incapable of offering even faltering resistance, gives us direct insight into the warped psyche of the manic killer or killers. Heaping insult upon injury, these mad blows are inflicted while one of the ancient victims is rendered wholly impotent with feeble hands bound behind his bowed back. Quite literally, binding the hands of an already defenseless victim is overkill. Finally, there is the distasteful reference to the fallen state of the male victim’s night dress as his long underwear is “pulled down.” With that mean detail we can safely presume that the murderer or group of killers nurses a nasty paraphilia. Who but a homicidal fetishist will go so far as to strip a trussed ancient while beating him to an unresponsive pulp?

This is malefic work best understood with a direct nod to American horror films. Readers recognize the ominous hallmarks of a depraved, ultraviolent slasher even when these signs appear in an alien genre. This is not to say that somehow crime fiction has become newly violent. The genteel “golden-age” locked parlor whodunit with just a tiny spot of crimson to render the proper tone is long, long gone.¹² Crime fiction writers can now frame their depictions of the worst affronts with direct reference to the American horror film in order to provide a quick, dirty description of the crime scene that is instantly intelligible by genre enthusiasts about the planet. This is a notable shift as depictions of the worst assaults in crime fiction were once almost entirely delineated with reference to the cold hard facts as detailed by a world-weary ’tec, jaded tough, or omniscient super-sleuth. Now the nastiest acts of men and women may be aptly framed with explicit reference to a foreign genre where spectacular violence was once the exclusive preserve of impossible monsters and not human actors. In so doing, the empathetic response evoked when an author frames the case in cool

terms that refer the reader to a professional gangland elimination is radically unlike the response elicited by the unsparing depiction of a feral rampage shot through with gore. Depicting a grotesque crime through the lens of the American horror film is clear evidence of a successful generic border invasion as two separate forms intersect. In this dark episode of provisional genre entente, distinct fictional realms blend with the presentation of a generic portrayal of violence that calls for readers to recoil in horror from the conjunction of law enforcement and loathsome bloodshed. This is a *revolting* crime. Even more troubling, at least for those who call the U.S. home, the alarming act that makes it necessary to call for the intercession of the law has been outsourced not just to the horror film, but to the *American* horror film.

What makes these and other connotative unions possible is the construction and ready availability of elaborate, world-wide distribution networks. These robust systems, analog and digital, make it feasible to quickly channel images and texts to international audiences while also working to option locally manufactured texts, say Swedish crime fictions and American horrors, and channel them, as well, back into these same systems of transnational distribution. Thanks to these extraordinarily wide-spread and efficient distribution relays, all sorts of text and images are available to world-wide audiences. Think of the phenomenal success of Stieg Larsson's *Dragon Tattoo* trilogy. The adventures of goth avenger Lisbeth Salander and her familiar Mikael Blomkvist, while ostensibly "Swedish" tales of detection, are genre recombinations, popular, in great measure, because they so cleverly recast an exhilarating brew of pop conventions and striking iconography not yet passé across the West. With a maelstrom of written, photographic, and film imagery, it should not be surprising for new unprecedented combinations of searing images and texts to have a marked effect on the constitution and interpretation of popular fictions with an international reach.

In league with Mankell's depiction of crime through the lens of the American horror film, consider how John Burdett kicks off *Bangkok Haunts* by offering readers a barbaric murder framed with explicit reference to both the American film industry and American foreign policy. Written with the same inescapable exposure to the stock American horror film as evidenced in Mankell's work, Burdett extends the critique of all things U.S.A.

to include a highly negative assessment of American-authored expeditions in the Mid-East. This terrible fusion allows Burdett's fictional law officers and readers to make sense of injuries that would beggar the imagination absent the pinpoint orientation provided by specific reference to the production regimes of the American industrial complex.

Few crimes make us fear for the evolution of our species. I am watching one right now. . . . The video I'm sharing with the FBI uses two industrial-quality cameras that between them seamlessly provide all the tricks of zoom, angle, pan, et cetera, and I am told that at least two technicians must have been involved in its production. The color is excellent, thanks to however many millions of pixels that contribute to their subtle shading; we are looking at a product of high civilization unknown to our forefathers. (3)

As the top dollar snuff video concludes, FBI agent Kimberly Jones and Thai police detective Sonchai Jitpleecheep decide both productions, the digital video recording and the snuff spectacle, must be authored by Americans.

"We're gonna get them, Sonchai. Tell me what you need, and I'll find a way of getting it to you."

"Don't make promises, " I say. "This isn't Iraq."

She frowns. I guess a lot of Americans are tired of hearing those kinds of jibes. "No, but that movie had a certain style, a certain professionalism about it, and if that alpha male isn't North American, I'll turn in my badge."

"A Hollywood production?"

"For something like that, frankly the U.S. is the first place I would start looking. Specifically California." (4-5)

Here again, as in the excerpt from *Faceless Killers*, the terrible extent of the violence opening Burdett's novel is made plain with reference to the American horror film. Few other images of violence can rival the base splendor of the contemporary American horror film. It takes an American production team to depict harm to the flesh in such an arresting manner. Heaping aspersions on the Stars and Stripes, this is a not a subtle critique of American foreign policy and the American character. In this venomous reflection, national pride galvanized by the ethos of American Exceptionalism is a deadly catalyst when partnered with advanced technology.

As this is a genre-read, the slur against all things American is an unambiguous diatribe that will elude few readers. Even those who feel such

bile is misdirected will have no trouble grasping the fierce tenor and origin of the complaint. Identifying who bears full responsibility for this noxious crime is not a mystery at all. When readers encounter the reference to the North American alpha male responsible for the bravura Sadean performance, no one is likely to imagine a likely suspect hails from Prince Edward Island, Calgary, or Cabo San Lucas.¹³

One last example from a paperback original is worth entertaining prior to concluding this brief appraisal of an unlikely merger between genres that most taxonomies of the popular would treat as distinct entities. Horrific imagery is not merely a lethal export manufactured solely on American soil. Indeed, infectious goods from home encourage imported knock-offs when an eager serial killer inspired by American horrors comes to the United States to win fame and good fortune. In the land that made serial killing a growth industry, the last word on death comes as an immigrant's homage to the pure products of America.

Bringing it all back home, *Slide* is the eponymous tale of an Irish émigré consumed with besting America's most notorious killers on their native ground. If Slide is to author his own grand destiny in good faith, then the dedicated acolyte must take passage to the homeland. Slide's:

passion was all things American. . . . Dahmer, Bundy, Ridgway, Berkowitz, Gacy and Slide. . . . To master the art of kidnapping he studied American films. . . . He knew the mechanics of abduction, but had trouble on the follow-through. He knew how to do ransom notes and torture hostages, but having a man or woman bound in his basement was way too tempting, and sometimes instead of collecting ransom, he'd kill them. . . . His backyard was like downtown Baghdad—start digging, you were likely to hit bone somewhere. No one amused him like his own self and once, when his shovel clanked against an old victim, he muttered, *Boner*. (Bruen and Starr 19-21)

As a dogged apprentice aiming to become an artisan of the first degree, Slide masters killing with practice and careful media consumption. He learns he can be a star viewing serial media encounters that place ambitious slayers in competition with more anodyne celebrities. Through attentive reading of film and the news, genre productions all, Slide learns how things work. For this edgy autodidact, snaps of celebrated killers and decorated torturers, stories of dread, Hollywood creations, and images of bloody streets

in Iraqi outposts and American cities, as seen on large screens and small, commingle in a bloody inspirational mess as part of the mediated fabric of everyday life.

Long before the age of Slide, John Milton argued that attending to images of wrong-doing was an effective means of strengthening one's defenses against evil. As all illustrations are deracinated and diluted versions of the puissant Original, shadow texts allow curious readers to explore iniquity at a safe remove. Not as strong in effect as the real thing, a distanced representation could be counted on to give readers practice knowing evil prior to unmediated exposure to a real demonic spirit or some secular incarnation of Old Nick. Slide might give Milton pause, as might all the many contemporary readers who share similar appetites. We too have come to experience killing and what it means to be a killer through formulaic images drawn from the American horror film and from accounts and images of American deeds on foreign soil. When Lehman argues that crime fiction makes "co-conspirators" of all readers, he assumes that readers align with the good men and women fighting crime, but criminals also have co-conspirators, and it is entirely possible that some readers may opt for more deviant engagements.

By paying explicit homage to the spectacular possibilities of dismemberment and bodily harm achieved by the American horror film, crime fictions may also better execute one of the oldest organizing directives of the genre. From the roots of the corpus up to the present day, crime stories promise to expose the seamy underworld that percolates just below the benign surface of everyday life. With the red-blooded horror film as North Star, crime writers can fashion ever more vile depictions of the harm criminals visit upon the body public when they come against the thin blue line. Unfortunately, while borrowing from the horror film may make it possible to better limn the rancid heart of a brutal society, terrible scenes of carnage designed to tutor readers about a world gone wrong may not have the intended instructive effect. In conjuring up unforgettable scenes of memorable havoc, the evil achievements of cruel men may become more vital and of greater interest than the spadework done by those who labor in the breach. In representations that overturn the status of the good and true in relation to the unjust, haunting tableaux that depict darkness visible grant benighted outcasts more concentrated attention than they merit.

Apart from fostering a particular affective regard for the heroes or anti-heroes of crime fiction, these emergent textual unions may also be used to bemoan the baleful influence of pop culture of American manufacture along with censuring the unwarranted extent of imperial aspiration. Most generally, referencing the vast image bank of New World horrors furnishes writers with a vulgar tongue that makes magnetic violence an American tale. Across the far reaches of the Earth, wherever bad actors engineer bad ends, those responsible for terrible wrongs and those called to redress such trespasses are at liberty to employ the same contagious idiom when communicating threats.

As crime fictions adopt semantic registers once the sole property of the horror genre, it has become possible, at least in the popular imagination, to momentarily envision and answer the global spectacle of American violence. Creating a tight correspondence between acts traditionally considered the work of unnatural villains and American conscripts is a way to simultaneously label and condemn abhorrent actions. Beyond giving an adequate title to bad acts, siting such terrible works within the sphere of crime fiction is also a way, at least on a fictional plane, to arrest the guilty and call to account those who should answer for their criminal exploits. Popular culture has long been an arena where cultural contradictions can be explored safely and even resolved magically, most often without a concomitant change in the world beyond the generic text; but if justice is not imaginable in pastime pleasures, then it is also likely to be exiled from the corporeal empires that stand outside our fictional realms.

Jonathan L. Crane

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Notes

¹See *Dexter*, the Showtime adaptation that chronicles the travails of a serial killer and Miami PD blood-splatter expert who yearns for the straight life along with the horror musicals *Evil Dead: The Musical* and *Camp Blood: The Musical* (a stage production and direct-to-video film respectively). Nike's 2000 Summer Olympics commercial featured runner Suzy Favor Hamilton escaping a chainsaw killer thanks to superior conditioning, a top-shelf sports bra, and high-end running shoes. What makes these illustrations different from previous genre incursions is that earlier synthetic mergers, like *The Rocky Horror Picture*, *The Munsters*, and *Young Frankenstein* lack any convincing threat or display of gore.

²Making a more radical argument, Mark Seltzer contends that a vast sector of contemporary pop culture, much greater than an isolated genre or two, has become "a public culture in which addictive violence. . . has come to make up a wound culture; the public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound" (1). When wounds open up bodies, both textual and fleshed, such injuries remake our relation to and comprehension of those entities under assault.

³Paratextual blurbs highlighting good work in the crime genre commonly laud a text with a varied and competing set of descriptors. Scan the plugs for almost any crime novel and see it simultaneously described as "an elegant noir," "a classic detective story," "a thriller," "a suspense novel," "a compelling procedural" and so on. Despite the varied vocabulary, browsers all have an accurate idea what they will encounter once they commence reading the text proper.

⁴See Ascari for a compelling review that argues the detective story and other crime fiction with an apparent fidelity to "the facts" remain strongly rooted in the eerie bedrock of the primeval gothic.

⁵The contemporary television treatment of crime detection in the age of horrific violence is substantially different from written accounts of the same quest. See Weissmann and Allen for detailed accounts of how murder and mayhem are visually addressed through the forensic lens on the long-running television franchise *CSI* and a multitude of copy-cat coroner television dramas. Weissmann argues that such shows manage to make televised crime fiction a deeply empathetic viewing experience as a focus on grievous bodily harm allows viewers to feel the pain and suffering of the dead via an obsessive concern with gore and the detailed examination of shattered victims. Editor's note: See also Michelle K. Parke's "Taking Poe to Primetime: Science, Intuition, and Readability in *CSI*" in *Studies in Popular Culture* 29.2.

⁶Readers familiar with the entire stretch of the Lecter corpus know that the ratio between elements drawn from police procedurals and the horror tradition changes markedly over the course of the series. By the penultimate novel, to date, horrific elements take pride of place as Lecter and FBI agent Clarice Starling find they share a violent affection for one another. Genres are intrinsically unstable conjunctures and any particular syntactic combination is only a passing alliance.

⁷Caper stories and other variants that celebrate criminal enterprise reverse the usual polarity ordering the genre and make getting busted the worst of all possible crimes. Outwitting the law and celebrating justice denied is what matters most in this mirror permutation.

⁸*Quarry in the Middle*, a recent novel by Max Allen Collins, provides a letter-perfect example of anti-climactic construction in the crime genre. The first sentence of the novel, “I had a body in the trunk of my car,” immediately assigns querulous readers the task of working out just how a stiff ended up in the narrator’s boot (13).

⁹Think of any arch-villain in crime fiction from Doyle’s Professor Moriarty to Ed McBain’s *The Deaf Man* who torments the good detectives of the 87th Precinct over the course of a half-dozen novels. The exceptionally devious nemesis is the genre’s acid test for any able squad of detectives or solo investigator.

¹⁰Advancing the foundational genre studies of Todorov, Steven Neale maintains that many genres, including crime stories, are evaluated by well-read audience members with specific reference to these linked questions of genre fidelity. Failure to remain faithful to the rules ordering the game and failing to produce a reasonably authentic portrait of the place and time in which a crime is committed are grounds for expulsion from the collective.

¹¹Some professional reviewers of crime fiction can no longer stomach the move toward more graphic violence in the genre and have left the trade rather than endure further exposure to graphic bloodshed. In announcing their revulsion, reviewers have called these fictions “sick” and “disgusting.” These terms impeach the perverse capabilities of those who pen violent crime fictions as well as indicate exactly how these texts make readers feel. See Hill, Jakeman, and Mann for more on the refusal of book reviewers to entertain any further interaction with horrific crime fiction. The abject alienation experienced by these critics is strong evidence that the genre has changed course in a marked fashion.

¹²All histories of crime fiction document this sea change in violent content over the course of the genre. See Priestman, Rzepka and Scaggs for more detailed discussions of the long and complex advance of violence in crime fiction.

¹³To be fair, the imprecations dumped on America and American modes of cultural production are something of a red herring. Without spoiling anything for future readers of Burdett, there is a Thai connection to the video that will be resolved in a macabre ritual involving soccer, basketry, a transgendered *doppelganger*

and cranky elephants. This is not the stuff of American horror. Nevertheless, few readers are likely to find the references to America that frame the opening to *Bangkok Haunts* opaque or gratuitous. They are the type of observations reliable investigators make when employing good common sense.

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Book Reviews

Amato, Paul, Alan Booth, David Johnson, and Stacy Rogers. *Alone Together: How Marriage in America Is Changing*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007. 323 pages; bibliography, index.

Alone Together is a diligent work that seeks to elucidate the complex and sometimes contradictory factors that describe modern marriage. With such revealing chapter titles as Rising Individualism and Demographic Change (chapter 2) and Changing Gender Relations in Marriage (chapter 5), the authors compare and contrast snapshots of marital quality in 1980 and 2000 using data collected from two surveys: The Marital Instability Over the Life Course and the Survey of Marriage and Family Life, respectively. From the beginning, *Alone's* cultural theme is clear and consistent, namely that the American marriage has evolved from a formal, institutional organization largely bound by social norms and public opinion in the early 20th century to a companionate state based on mutual affection and common interests in the 1950's and finally to a more individualistic form of marriage where personal fulfillment and self-development are the *raison d'être*.

With growing individualism characterizing the last two decades of the 20th century, there is a temptation to ascribe hero or villain status to this phenomenon as the root cause of marital instability or the purveyor of marital freedom. The authors deftly avoid a partisan stance and instead offer a straightforward discussion of their analyses, enabling the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. Various results of this study support both the marital-decline and the marital resilience perspectives, where marital decline assumes that the institution of marriage is weaker and exacts negative effects on adults, children, and society in general. Alternatively, marriage-resilience embraces a "changing" rather than a "declining" orientation, acknowledging that varied family structures have always existed, and today's support systems allow couples to seek healthier unions and enable families to adapt to rapid social change.

Some of the study's findings that are congruent with the marital-decline perspective include that premarital cohabitation and demographic differences between spouses, rebuffs of traditional constraints, tend to be more conflicted and unstable than other marriages. Similarly, the increase in the

percentage of spouses who grew up in divorced families indicates that many parents are modeling behaviors for their children that emphasize personal happiness over commitment to marriage. This translates into a growing exposure to parental divorce in one generation, which the study found was followed by an increase in marital conflict, marital problems, and divorce-proneness in the next generation (236).

Not to short-shrift the resilience perspective, study results show that the modern American marriage has experienced improved economic well-being, holds less traditional views about gender arrangements regarding housekeeping and childcare, and pursues egalitarian decision-making between husbands and wives more frequently, all of which are associated with improved marital quality.

These are but a few of the myriad factors and their relationships explored in this study. To its credit, the book presents a useful chart on page 214 that summarizes the net change between measurement periods, depicting how the explanatory variables (namely demographics, employment and income, gender relations and social integration) correlate to marital quality, measured by the following five dimensions: marital happiness, marital interaction, marital conflict, marital problems, and divorce-proneness. The fact that the chart uses plus and minus signs rather than correlation coefficients to depict how variable relationships have changed over the past twenty years, further underscores the intent that this work be accessible to and informative for marriage counselors, policy makers, academics, and anyone that has an interest in the state of marriages and families.

Alone is both a primer for the uninitiated and a timely addition for the libraries of professionals and scholars. By discussing previous findings of other researchers, the authors help to position the current study within the larger body of literature. For example, the authors found that their study replicated previous findings, which stated that couples experience higher marital quality when they marry at older ages (e.g., mid 20's), have similar demographics such as education level and ethnicity, and participate in religious activities together. New findings include that step-children are no longer a risk factor for marital quality and that people reported increased support for the norm of lifelong marriage. This second point would suggest that people may be growing weary of a culture in which nearly half of all marriages end in divorce (202).

Another new finding for those interested in the relationship between gender and labor has to do with the impact of working wives. It is not surprising that in 2000 more women were working and women were spending more time at work than in previous generations. What is different, however, is that the role of work in women's lives has changed. As young adults delay marriage, often to complete their educations, women are able to pursue careers rather than work for the sake of making ends meet. In 1980, the work situation was a source of stress because wives wanted to work fewer hours or not at all. Conversely, professionally-employed women find more fulfillment; and while there is no getting around the stress of balancing dual careers, wives' incomes have contributed to the improved economic well-being of the family. Freedom from economic stress has positive outcomes for marital quality.

The accompanying advantages and disadvantages of trends such as this are but another illustration of the richness of this book. The title, *Alone Together*, alludes to the fact that this work contains multi-faceted strata of revelations, some of which give a tidy explanation of change and others which require deeper consideration of their meaning. One thing is clear, however. Just as culture changes slowly over time, *Alone Together* shows that the marital ship of state is gradually making necessary adjustments to remain viable in today's American society.

Christie Burton

Clayton State University

Decker, Mark T., and Michael Austin, eds. *Peculiar Portrayals: Mormons on the Page, Stage, and Screen*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2010. 203 pages; index.

Fox News' recent decision to "phase out" reactionary Mormon pundit Glenn Beck encapsulates the dichotomy Mark T. Decker and Michael Austin explore in this collection of essays: Beck simultaneously embodies the homogenized, squeaky-clean image propagated by the Church of the Latter Day Saints and the equally popular perception of Mormons as "scheming" maniacal polygamists (2). Of course, Beck is no polygamist, but Decker and Austin's point is well made: dualistic perceptions of Mormons, largely based on nineteenth-century lore, persist. Theirs is a unique and "peculiarly American trope" (3). Accordingly, and in light of heightened media interest

in all things LDS—whether Mitt Romney or Warren Jeffs, *Big Love* or the Church’s opposition to Proposition 8—this eclectic collection of essays is both timely and culturally significant. Though not overtly polemical, many of these readings emphasize a perceived sea change in Mormon writing that rejects the reactionary politics espoused by the Prophet, the First and Second Counselor, and the Twelve Apostles in Salt Lake City. In its place comes a putative mainstreaming which, rather than rejecting Mormonism outright, promotes an individuated, pluralistic American vision: though generally sanguine, *Peculiar Portrayals: Mormons on the Page, Stage, and Screen* is by no means consistent. J. Aaron Sanders, for example, contends that Mormons remain ensnared by their historically violent, tribal legacy, and Juliette Wells vaunts a chaste remake of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* as an exemplar of morality.

The bulk of this collection, though, is liberal and left-leaning. Christine Hutchison-Jones sets the tone in “Center and Periphery: Mormons and American Culture in Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*” by identifying the rejection of “institutionalized reactionary conservatism” as a central paradigm in the portrayal of Mormons (25). The critic observes that Kushner’s play distinguishes between religious practice, which invariably aligns Mormons with the far-right, and a diasporic history that ought to yield a “different” kind of Mormon, one with “liberal social values” (26). Similarly, in “Elders on the Big Screen: Film and Globalized Circulation of Mormon Missionary Images,” John-Charles Duffy contends that the ubiquitous, jealously-guarded corporate “brand” of the normative Mormon missionary—clean-shaven, short hair, slacks, white shirt and tie—“function[s] metonymically” (123). Theistically hybridized, these young men transform on film into “generic evangelists,” poorly-viewed conservative characters who ironically emblemize moral and/or personal transformation. The greater irony, though, is that filmic portrayals often do unexpected cultural work: they represent LDS as a Christian religion with the potential to “change your life,” perceptions the Mormon Church has sought to advance, with only limited success (135).

Mormon sexuality—simplistically dichotomized as it is between chastity and orgiastic polygamy—also comes under scrutiny. Michael Austin’s excellent “Four Consenting Adults in the Privacy of Their Own Suburb: *Big Love* and the Cultural Significance of Mormon Polygamy” proposes *Big*

Love as an arbiter of cultural change in the face of divisive, reactionary LDS politics. With straight men “coming out” as monogamous and women voluntarily engaging in plural marriages that seal them together in same-sex relationships, Austin argues that *Big Love* enacts, and militates for, the permissiveness Kevin Kolkeyer’s students perceive to be quintessentially American. Austin argues that by aligning polygamy with homosexuality, *Big Love* exposes the hypocrisy and intolerance of a Church whose members were themselves persecuted for their sexual mores. Karen T. Austin examines the chaste side of the dichotomy in “Reality Corrupts; Reality Television Corrupts Absolutely.” She contends that mainstreaming Mormons is possible because “sexual virtue” and “innocence” are quintessentially appealing to Americans, but that the “premium on sexual virtue...is simultaneously bound with three socially disruptive ideologies: racism, sexism, and homophobia” (194). The salvation reality television offers—to either integrate and become more tolerant or to remain in the reactionary bosom of the Mormon Church—replicates the incorporative “melting-pot myth” (195).

Kevin Kolkmeier’s pedagogical reflection examines this assimilative impulse from an altogether different perspective. In “Teaching *Under the Banner of Heaven*: Testing the Limits of Tolerance in America,” he invokes the outsider status of immigrant students, who, when studying Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven*, balk at the exclusionary nature of doctrinal Mormonism. His students, the writer observes, reject fundamentalism and ghettoization in favor of assimilation, but also retain strong cultural attachments. Their outsider status recalls the diasporic history of Mormonism, but steadfastly rejects its intolerance in favor of a permissive, pluralist American vision. Mark T. Decker appears to endorse this vision in “‘I Constructed in My Mind a Vast Panoramic Picture’: *The Miracle Life of Edgar Mint* and Postmodern, Postdenominational Mormonism,” noting the waning attachment to religious metanarratives. For Decker, the nineteenth-century portrayal of Mormons is past; in its place, he finds a “locally experienced, subjective Mormonism that resonates with our postmodern, postdenominational society” (160). His sanguine extrapolation, in keeping with his reading of Brady Udall’s novel, is that social and religious labels mean little in a time when “spiritual bricolage” is the watchword of the day (152).

Not all the essays in the collection are quite so optimistic, however. J. Aaron Sanders' "Avenaging Angels: The Nephi Archetype and Blood Atonement in Neil LaBute, Brian Evenson, and Levi Peterson, and the Making of the Mormon American Writer" casts doubt on the assimilative impulse, tolerance, and individuation vaunted by the majority of critics in this collection. Drawing on the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious, Sanders argues that a deep-seated propensity for blood atonement—based on the Nephi archetype—means that, for Mormons, "the past is always present" (89). The ingrained urge to avenge apostates and individual lapses of faith indicates that "myths reach out of the past to cripple, incapacitate, or strike down the living" (96). More anomalous even than Sanders is Juliette Wells' "Jane Austen in Mollywood," in which she defends a watered down remake of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, contending that the film represents individuated religious practice; however, she remains disturbingly uncritical of the awkward rewriting of Austen's storyline. Instead, citing an unnamed blogger, she lauds the film's reactionary moral stance, specifically chastity for unmarried women, as suitable for families.

All in all, *Peculiar Portrayals* is an enlightening read. Disparate, yes, but the collection provides useful insight into a peculiar branch of American culture, popular or otherwise, and undoubtedly resonates with the American experience as a whole.

Carl Jenkinson
Mount Ida College

Telotte, J.P. *Animating Space: From Mickey To Wall.E.* Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 2010. 296 pages; notes, bibliography, index.

J.P. Telotte is a professor of literature and communication and culture at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He also has a number of major contributions to the subject of the fantastic and science fiction film to his credit. His timely book is both a historical study of animation and a means of giving theoretical grounding to it as a product of a cultural industry that has its roots in the late nineteenth century and has morphed (as Fredric Jameson might say) its way into the second decade of the twenty-first.

It is also an excellent and entertaining read and, unlike much criticism I have recently come upon, does not lose its object of study in its attempt at critical tour de-force; thus it is both academic and interesting, something we

could use more of. Telotte starts before the beginning with his chapter “Early Animation of Figures and Spaces,” then moves from Winsor “McKay’s Warped Spaces” to “Ub Iwerks (Multi) Plane Camera,” to “Looking in on Life” and then finally “The Digital Effects of the New Highbred Cinema,” with a number of fascinating chapters in between.

He covers his subject in a historical and critical manner that reflects his familiarity with the Frankfurt school approach to popular media, though he does not limit himself to its strictures, or its deprecating approach to American popular culture. For example, I was delighted to find that the epic Soviet film maker Sergei Eisenstein took Walt Disney quite seriously. Eisenstein refers to Disney “as an upheaval, a unique protest against the metaphysical immobility of the once-and-forever given” (64). Nor does he ignore the importance of eleven decades of technological advance, now driven by the process of accumulated and accelerating computer processing power articulated by “Moore’s law,” which indicates processing power has doubled at constant rate every eighteen months (since 1966) with no end in sight, an issue I address in a forthcoming anthology on Tolkien.

Telotte is made particularly relevant and timely since social media networks like YouTube allow us to engage in a kind of collaborative effort with him and his text. He draws us to his historical, artistic exemplars, and discusses market- and technologically-driven change, and the individuals and artists that were both its product and its agents from the start. For example, the illustration from page fifty with the caption “A submarine periscope produces a threatening space in Winsor McKay’s *The Sinking of the Lusitania (1918)*” acted as a pointer to take us to the cartoon itself on YouTube, which still carries the great emotional impact of 1150 lives lost to two torpedoes from a German submarine U39 less than a half hour within sight of the coast of Ireland. Even ninety-five years after the event, this first example of a technology- enhanced wholesale murder of civilians maintains poignancy in ways that stress the limits of verbal or typographic expression. Incidentally, within the body of the cartoon itself we are reminded by Winsor McKay that *The Sinking of the Lusitania* “involved the making and photographing of over twenty five thousand drawings,” for its ten-minute sequence.

I was captivated by Chapter 7, “What’s UP- and Down-Doc,” in which Telotte shares with us producer Chuck Jones’s reaction to his 1957

cartoon *What's Opera Doc?*, featuring Elmer Fudd as a Wagnerian hero and Bugs Bunny as his betraying temptress. He quotes Jones as saying, “[W]e took the entire Ring of the Niebelungen, which runs I believe sixteen hours . . .and condensed it into a six-minute picture, a chestnut stew, and [a peasant dish to please aristocrats]” (161). Yes, as we watch *What's Opera Doc* on YouTube, we must agree that Chuck Jones made a parody of Wagner of Wagnerian proportions. As Bugs says, “It’s opera; what did you expect, a happy ending?”

On a sub-textual level in his later chapters, Telotte causes one to reflect on how the demarcation line between the real and the imagined in media has transformed itself across the century-long course of his study. The frontier has become as permeable as the Berlin Wall in its last weeks before it fell in 1989. For those of us who can remember, it feels as if we are living inside a Philip K. Dick novel.

The book has something for everyone, from the precocious high school student enchanted by his family’s last visit to The Magic Kingdom to a student of the last days of twenty-first century neo-liberal global visual rhetoric who will wonder how we have come to love the GENERAL ELECTRIC *ECOMAGINATION DANCING ELEPHANT*, a corporate non-verbal spokes-animal who is now dancing across all our screens, morphed into an infinite house of mirrors and colonizing what used to be the real.

Philip Kaveny

University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire

Vessels, Joel E. *Drawing France: French Comics and the Republic*, Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2010; 305 pp; notes; bibliography; index.

The twentieth century saw the merging of the cultural traditions of the West—high, bourgeois, working class—into a single, democratized thread whose various strands mingled in often uneasy equilibrium. Movements or ideas once considered “working class” have been “liberated” to become simply one part—often a major part—of western culture. Association football, the “game for gentlemen played by louts,” for example, has spawned a massive spectator sports complex that dominates television and radio, yet another “cultural industry” developed from the music hall and vaudeville of nineteenth-century entertainment. This fusing of low-brow/high brow tastes

into a “western culture,” or perhaps, more accurately, a series of national “western cultures,” is a fascinating aspect of modernity. Nowhere has it developed with more study and perhaps with more angst than in France, where culture and its norms have always been important, and where the creation of modern French culture has in every era been a subject for study and debate.

Joel Vessels (Nassau Community College) provides an examination of one French cultural artifact that illustrates important aspects of the process of fusing together a country’s culture; that artifact is the *bande dessinée*, (BD), the French comic book. *Drawing France* is not a history of this medium (although the reader will acquire a reasonable sense of that history); instead Vessels examines the shifting position of BD in modern French culture. Indeed, he makes the broad claim that in examining the place of BD in French culture, important insights are gained into the modern construction of “Frenchness” itself.

Vessels lays out his work in six broad chapters. He shows how the first daring depictions of King Louis-Philippe as “the pear” in the 1830s ultimately led to the even more partisan and vitriolic political cartooning of the Third Republic, and culminated in the vicious polemics of the notorious Dreyfus Affair. Political cartoons became the standard fare of most journals, and they in turn led to the development of tabloid-size newspapers, the first BDs, devoted entirely to cartoons and caricature. Given the emphasis placed on education in the early Third Republic, it is not surprising that these comic books were soon being printed expressly for children.

By the turn of the (twentieth) century, these child-oriented publications were intensely scrutinized by Left and Right—the communists and the Catholics—and their objections (obviously, from very different perspectives) helped create new, didactic, ideologically-driven BD’s. These objections to some degree mirrored the fight in the greater society over secularization. By the 1920’s these message-laced French comics faced competition not only from French proprietors who simply wanted to make a buck, but from outsiders—especially Americans—whose efforts, in “Mickey Mouse,” for example, or in the emerging pantheon of “superheroes,” threatened the cultural community. Ironically, it was in this same period, the ‘20s and ‘30s, that the BD was relegated to the world of children, since the

medium was neither secure in its aesthetic nor deemed serious enough to engage adults.

The crisis of modern French culture, a crisis mirrored in the BD art form itself, occurred in the 1940s, specifically in the war years of occupation, collaboration, and in a relatively few instances, resistance. Vessels rightly emphasizes the determination of the Vichy regime to carry out a true national revolution whose object was to uncover and exalt the “true France,” as opposed to the bastardized, decadent, cosmopolitan culture of the Third Republic. Even though Vichy seemingly had little use for the visual arts, it seized the BD to purge from the genre foreign influence and use its undoubted hold on the young to trumpet a message of national regeneration, including explicit anti-Semitism as a platform for this rebirth.

In a cultural sense, Liberation simply renewed the question of “Frenchness” that Vichy had been so determined to answer. Not only did the murderous years of occupation need to be expunged, but continuing attempts to submerge French culture by outsiders, most specifically, by Americans, whose economic and military power dominated the West, had to be resisted. These cultural concerns found their focus in legislation to control the content of BD’s, to limit the influence of a “microcephalic Hercules” like “Superman” on impressionable French youth. Ultimately the Fourth Republic established an “Oversight Commission” charged with guiding and shaping the content of the now ubiquitous BD’s. Such efforts were only a part of initiatives by succeeding French governments during the *trente glorieuses*, the thirty glorious years of economic boom begun in the 1960s, to recognize and include this art form in official French culture. Today, BD’s have their own national institute, and an annual festival for scholars and aficionados to celebrate the art form.

Vessels’ work is based on extensive research in several archival collections, as well as an impressive collection of secondary sources. He succeeds in showing the broad nexus between the ever-evolving concept of “Frenchness” and popular culture as typified in the BD. The student or general reader will gain much from the volume; the researcher/teacher will be afforded numerous insights and points of departure to deal with French history, modern French culture, or to indulge a once guilty, but now newly liberated (by this monograph) pleasure in reading comic books.

Gary P. Cox

Gordon College

Contributors

Sabrina Boyer is in the final stages of her Ph.D. work at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, in Educational Leadership and Cultural Studies. Her research interests include cultural studies, critical race theory, gender studies, LGBTQ rights, Queer Theory, and education. She is an avid *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan, having taught a course as well as organized and led a conference at UNCG in spring 2007 titled “It’s the End of the World...Again!: Why Buffy Still Matters.”

Jonathan L. Crane is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He has written widely on genre and horror films and is the author of *Terror and Everyday Life: Singular Moments in the History of Horror Film* (Sage 1994). Crane is currently researching the status of old, old popular recordings as historical artifacts.

Katherine Gantz is an associate professor of French at St. Mary’s College of Maryland. While originally trained as a specialist of nineteenth-century Decadent fiction and French literature from the early twentieth century, she has recently expanded her research interests to include urbanist criticism and visual studies. She has published articles in the areas of French cultural studies and American sitcoms, as well as in the field of French queer theory. Her current project is a discussion of graffiti, amateur public art, rallies and marches, and other present-day uses of public space in Paris originally designed during the Second Empire.

Steve Hamelman is a professor of English at Coastal Carolina University, where he teaches courses in American literature and critical theory. His essays on early American fiction have appeared in *Legacy*, *Studies in American Fiction*, *South Atlantic Review*, and other journals. Evidence of his other main interest, popular music, includes articles in *Popular Music and Society*, the book *But Is It Garbage? On Rock and Trash* (Georgia 2004), and Chapter 7 in *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles* (2009). Hamelman has also published creative pieces in *Dirt Rag* and *Pindeldyboz*. Outside the classroom, he is an avid mountain/road cyclist and rock drummer.

Laura Jeffries is Professor of English at Florida State College at Jacksonville, teaching composition, research writing, and several introductory and British literature courses. She holds a B.A. from the University of Virginia, an M.A. in English from Virginia Commonwealth University, and a Ph.D. in English from Emory University, where she specialized in medieval literature, hagiography, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Her teaching and research interests include women’s literature and language, British literature of all periods, interpretations of Shakespeare, experiential learning, and critical thinking about popular culture.

Carey Martin is an associate professor at Liberty University. He earned his undergraduate degree with a major in Radio-Television-Film from Northwestern University. He earned his Master of Fine Arts degree in Motion Picture, Television, and Recording Arts, and also his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Communication, from Florida State University. Martin has a wide-ranging background in the mass media, including work as an award-winning scriptwriter, corporate director and producer, member of a TV news crew, and radio DJ. His academic publications have also appeared in diverse forums, including *The Encyclopedia of Communication and Information*, *The Holocaust Film Sourcebook*, and *The Journal of Media Education*.

Ananya Mukherjea is an assistant professor of sociology and women's/gender studies at the City University of New York's College of Staten Island and in the public health program at the CUNY Graduate Center. She is a regular attendee and presenter at the Popular Culture Association of the South's annual meetings and at the international conferences of the Whedon Studies Association. Mukherjea is a Whedon Studies Association charter associate and a board member of the Foucault Society; she has published on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and on *Twilight* fandoms. She is also the editor of the volume *Understanding Emerging Epidemics: Social and Political Approaches* (Emerald 2010)