



THE LEHIGH  
REVIEW

A Student Journal  
of the Arts and Sciences

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THE LEHIGH REVIEW



A Student Journal of the Arts and Sciences

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SPRING—FALL 2004

Each year, Lehigh University publishes the *Lehigh Review*, a student journal of the arts and sciences. Each issue contains some of the best writing by Lehigh students.

Any scholarly articles, academic essays, or book reviews may be submitted. The *Review* does not ordinarily accept fiction or poetry.

All submissions should reflect the breadth and depth of the liberal arts. We are especially interested in submissions that draw from the content or methodology of more than one discipline. The *Review* expects students to submit well-researched and well-written work that exceeds a mere synthesis of existing sources. Submissions should demonstrate imagination, original insight, and mastery of the subject.



A. Packer

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## The Twelfth Issue, Spring–Fall 2004

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THE LEHIGH REVIEW

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TWELFTH  
ISSUE

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## The Twelfth Volume

*"Receiveth as the sea"*  
- William Shakespeare  
*"Twelfth Night"*

The ubiquity of the number "12" is astounding. It is perhaps of the most sacred and culturally important numbers in existence. "Twelve" pervades our everyday lives in dozens of ways. It would take me at least a year (twelve months) to begin to list the myriad of manifestations in which this number appears in our daily meanderings. Some of the more obvious appearances of "12" can be found on the face of a clock, in the amount of eggs in a carton, months in a year, inches in a foot, days of Christmas, tribes of Israel, volts of a car battery, or maybe in how many years we spend in school prior to college. By psychologically elaborating on the profundity of this number I may need to endure a twelve-step program just to return to some semblance of sanity. No matter how one conceptualizes the function of the number "twelve" in our universe, many elements of the number remain a mystery. Perhaps the twelve apostles hold the secret. Maybe the secret is written in stars and thus revealed in the twelve signs of the zodiac. Either way, this number will continue to mystify throughout eternity.

The twelfth volume of the *Lehigh Review* is just as sacred as the number itself. I want all to "receiveth" this volume "... as the sea," or receive it without limits, as Shakespeare wrote in his *Twelfth Night*. This year's staff must have read chapter twelve of the Bhagavad-gita which is based on devotional service, because all endured the equivalent to the twelve labors of Hercules in creating this magnificent volume. I am so incredibly content with it that I feel compelled to sing out praises while playing my twelve-string guitar. Well, now as the hour approaches midnight. I must conclude this homage to the wonderful number "twelve." I sincerely hope that you all procure copies of the twelfth volume of the *Review* by the gross, just in case you desire to read it in multiples of twelve.

\*- Joe Melchionne  
Editor-in-Chief

*The artwork in this issue was selected from work by students in the Department of Art and Architecture.  
The courses represented are Figure I and II, taught by Professor Lucy Gans,  
and Drawing I, taught by Professor Berrisford Boothe.  
We wish to thank these professors for their support and assistance in gathering and preparing the images.*



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## Sixty Seven Minutes Over Lehigh

BY DR. TOM BIEROWSKI

This is perfect now because I've come to the place where it's perfect to write it perfectly, or as best I can non-stop in one hour's real time. I am hunched at a low desk with notebook and pen, seated on a wooden stool that's got some sway to it. The desk is much graffitied. Radiators hum.

Just before I came in here, I was out front in the crazy cold Sat afternoon sunlight to take it in, and I saw Gallagher. Perfect, because in the fall of '96, first semester here for my doctorate, Professor Gallagher (I was soon calling him "Padrone") brought all of us in his course... what was it? Pre-American? Native American? Pre-Colonial? (I'm such a Ph-Dope.) Anyway, he brought all of us in his class down to Linderman library for our first meeting and here seated us around a long wooden table in the books and told us, "This is where it all begins," or something like that. But it moved me, this Gallagher, this Linderman; sniffing along, just starting out I was, on the final bookish scent of the last academic pursuit. That was seven years ago.

So today, I watched Gallagher kick his winter salt tires in the Linderman parking lot and scratch his bushy head in concern. He opened the back door and soon his arms were full up with bookbags, backpacks, coffee mugs. He didn't see me standing there on the front steps as he walked toward Linderman with a look and gait that said, for just a January moment, "14 degrees my ass. Gimme Tahiti, or Hawaii, or Bikini." (My man!) So I shouted out to him from on high, the full stone eminence of Linderman blaring at my back like a medieval wall of Marshal amps, I gargoyled him and yelled "Quo vadis?" (which is the same thing, legend has it, that Jesus Christ said to Peter in an apparition when old Petey was fleeing from Rome someplace for fear of persecution—and the Big

"J" stopped him right there on the road and asked, "Quo vadis," that is, "Where are you going?") (See, I knew Gallagher would understand this, if not because, like myself, he's a graduate of St. Joe's in Philly (a Jesuit 'learnery'), where, even in my time there, they let the Latin fly frequently—if not because of that, then because (also like me) he is an ex-Catholic-seminarian who long ago traded in a life devoted to God and good for the dark fascinations bound within the leatherns of the world and shelved in places such as this Linderman, where it all begins. Indeed.) Anyway, I knew Gallagher

would understand when I shouted to him again in the cold under the viking clouds, "Quo vadis, Padrone?" And when I did, he deferred in a full-armed hassled way that said wordlessly, "St. Tropez, son. I'd rather be in St. Tropez glistening in sun block." Alas, he was wearing earmuffs in the coldest winter I can remember in my time here. And I don't think I've seen earmuffs since when? A Patti Duke Show repeat? I dunno, but damn, there they are.

Now Gallagher's got a great beard. Looks like he trims it with a live weasel, a beard of the dusty old west, a guy named "Festus" who don't have enough scratch to gamble and spends his last on likker while the stars row around in the saloony skies. A good beard is Gallagher's, no doubt. And, having deferred response to my Latin, he instead asked me, "Where are YOU going?"

"In here," I told him, "Down there to the cellar vaults beneath the rotunda, baby. Gotta write for an hour, commune with the Mothership. Are you having trouble with your tires, Padrone?"

"Yeh," he said, "They seem a little bit flappy to me. I don't like that."

"Ain't that a bitch?" I said. "No parking up by Drown for you today, Padrone?"

"No," he said, "there must be a wrestling match or something going on." Then he pointed toward Linderman with his full arm elbow and noted, "Don't worry, *that* place will be empty."

Yeh, it will be, I thought. We're hanging on to the books with our bony fingers, Gallagher and I. Heaven help her wandering boys.

Anyway, he gave me his blessing and started tramping up the cement steps that lead anywhere on this mountainside campus I arrived at seven years ago and was brought to this library by Doc Gallagher of the Old West in the high desert long riders and book rats of the academic swan song, amen. It was time for me to crawl down to my perfect peace.

The doors on this place could be on a cathedral. They give way to a stony floor tile hallway. (Is it a foyer?) There's a hanging lampustrade from a ceiling or two there. All the stone in this place, inside and out, gives me nebulous fantods that are nonetheless exciting and having to do with dim sexual memories of watching *Dark Shadows* as a toddler. Barnabas Collins was a vampire who danced with beautiful women and he was buried alive in a wall of stone.

Two female undergrads working the checkout desk in the big main room. One's on the phone in hysterics (glad hysterics) at something she is being told, and the other—serene, seated, both feet pulled up under her rear like Ghandi, and she's reading a paperback I guess for her English class. They are both attractive, and though I keep moving toward the perfect place (I have a hot double cappucino snuck in my coat pocket), I do dig them—how they impress me as a live enactment or chance performance of the Greek masks of tragedy and comedy. And I do dig deeply how life (or your brain or mind or little toe for all I know) will serve up the niblets every so often that make you feel like, "Ah... I'm glad I'm around to notice things like that once in a while."

And I move through the main floor rotunda and its newsprint pheromonal aire that reminds how my dad would sit in his work clothes (painting whites, turpentine) when he'd come home and read the *News Item* as he drank one beer only. It's a great space, though— Linderman main floor rotunda with its carpeting and comfy chairs, all them newspapers whiffing me to times past, and three levels of stairs, wood, books, and wrought iron railings all the way up. And topped off with the oft-shown, much photographed (it's everywhere on university promotional literature) (on the cover of the last Lehigh Review, in fact) (hell, let's call a spade a spade)— it's the frikkin *sanctus sanctorum* Eye of God around here! "It's the largest piece of Tiffany glass in the world" is the party line. That dome, that Linderman dome, that stained glass mesmer-fetish, oh behold!

My first couple years teaching here, I would often read, or mark papers, or doze when my eyes gave out in the comfy chair and newsprint ether under the Great Glass (all praise). This was before I learned, yes, and sought out the even quieter places, the buried places, places high up in trees, or in the corners of attics with a bare bulb, or at the top row of the football stadium over the mountain there at four in the morning just to contemplate my panic or my peace and see how they both empty out there, one the same as the other. The places done along the inner spaces where I used to only crawl in my sleep is where I'm always heading this cold winter. (Driving home from a New Year's Eve party years ago, my friend Hemmet once told me, "Tommy, it's all such a dream." Then he opened the car door and vomited on 95 South.)

But my first couple years here, I'd often fall asleep in the comfy chairs of the rotunda; many times to be awoken in the middle (temporally and spatially) of one of those university tours for prospective students wherein a brassy talking co-ed (usually) gives the whole Lehigh schpeel walking backwards while she drags along groups of various sizes (tense moms, dads, their horribly embarrassed kids who are highschool seniors sweating it all, sometimes the younger siblings are along for the ride and they're even more oblivious to everything but their own cool than most of the students already enrolled here.) (There are times, more and more as I get older, where I just feel bad for everybody.) But the brassy talking, backwards walking usually co-ed tour guide pulls these folks through the Lehigh wonderland as if on invisible threads of fairy dust, working the mojo for Big Brown, and invariably she leads them to the Linderman rotunda in order to, I'm convinced, *close the deal*.

Diggit. They're tired, most of these parents. Wrung out. They should be in the office making money— instead they're traipsing around like mountain goats all over the side of this hill getting headaches at the prospect of spending it, a lot of it. Ha! There are times, more and more as I get older, where I have to chuckle at all our hassles. You want your kid to learn? There's a hundred and twelve ways to go. Throw out your televisions and, if you got money, use it to go places with Sally and Johnny, and there spend time with your mouth shut and your eyes and ears open. Don't buy them a lot of crap. Teach them the beauty of the moon and stars, the sexiness of compassion. Frequent used book shops, make a big pile of leaves every fall and shove them in it no

matter how old they are and take what you get, stare at campfires and streams now and then. So many ways, a hundred and twelve, as I said. *And*, and... if you don't have money, no sweat, there's still fifty-seven ways (last count, according to the Mothership) that your kid can learn and learn well, some of which I've mentioned.

But short of that, if you do have the moneymoneymoney, then you can send your kid to this university or one like it. More level, perhaps, is what I read on some of the faces of the tourists. You do remember the tourists, all behassled, who are brought to the Linderman rotunda to view the Great Glass Eye? Many snap pictures of the godhead. Sometimes there's a whole lot of people on these tours. As I started to tell you, many's the time, years ago, when I'd wake up finally in comfy chair (a lick of doze-drool in my beard no doubt) with my face hemmed in inches from some 7<sup>th</sup> grader's panty lines on one side and her dad's Rolex wrist ticking away on the other. My scraggly head waist-level with the whole crew, some of whom would stink-eye my homeless chic fashion sense with suspicion, and I wonder if the tour guides were ever questioned afterwards whether bums from town are allowed on campus, because that guy back in the library there, I swear he was drooling. Ah, my vain wonderings. (They're all I got.) But none of them would look at me long in Linderman rotunda, no—

It was all up. "Look up." And all the hassled heads would crane. I saw all their necks while I gathered myself from sleep to teach the children of last year's tourists. All the necks and tired eyes. For a second, just our humanity. Gimme that. But as the brassy voice would proclaim, "It's the largest piece of Tiffany glass in the world," I could only hear, "It is our shining godhead—It is our mandala—It is one of a kind—Oh, gaze upon it—Behold all its pretty colors—We are one of a kind—Keep looking up—All is well—Your precious will learn here, yes, they'll learn whatever you want them to, that they will—You're reaching for your checkbook now, yes yes— Your little one will be a Mountain Hawk under this jeweled eye."

Tom Bierowski, PhD

Linderman Library

Lehigh University / Bethlehem, Pennsylvania / Earth

Saturday / January 24, 2004 / 1:48-2:55 PM



## Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri

BY EMILY SHUTT

Just off of the Piazza della Repubblica on the east side of Rome lies the ancient site of the Baths of Diocletian. Now in ruins but still impressive, the Baths were once the largest of all the Roman baths, accommodating over three thousand people at one time and covering an area of nearly 136,000 square meters (Macadam 259; Sacristy information panels). Construction was begun in 299 A.D. by the Roman Emperor Diocletian and continued for the next eight years while the Baths grew to include a caldarium (hot water pool), tepidarium (heated area) and frigidarium (swimming pool), along with many other smaller rooms (Sacristy information panels). According to tradition, “the Baths [are] believed to have been built with the labor and blood of Christian martyrs condemned during the last Roman persecutions” (Argan 354).

Even after the Baths became unused they remained unaltered because they were not in the center of medieval Rome. They were also held in high esteem and awe by Romans as the last great baths, so they were not converted or partially used (Sacristy information panels). They remained very well preserved through the Renaissance, when architects studied their forms in great detail (Woodward 87).

In the early sixteenth century, the idea of turning the classical buildings into a church was entertained, but nothing was done other than a few plans being drawn. But in 1541, a Sicilian priest named Antonio Lo Duca claimed to receive a vision that inspired him to “demand from the papacy the establishment of a church in the Baths consecrated to the cult of the angels” and “consecrating the site of the martyrdom of so many Saints” (Ackerman 132; Argan 354). He was initially refused, but Pope Julius III finally gave his consent in the year 1550, when on August 10 he issued a bull officially designating the baths as a Christian temple (von Einem 233; Argan 354). No architectural changes were made to the Baths, but fourteen temporary altars to the seven principle angels and martyrs were installed on the walls of the hall that had previously been the frigidarium of the Baths, with the entrance at the west end and the main altar in the east end (Ackerman 132). In 1551, though, the altars were dismantled due to the feelings of Roman nobility, who were “accustomed to [using] the Baths as a stadium for riding and other sports [and refused] to recognize the consecration” (Ackerman 132). They were legally justified by the fact that control of antique sites

rested with the city government, not with the Vatican, and Lo Duca was unable to gain papal protection for the consecration (Ackerman 132).

After another ten years of pleading, Lo Duca's proposal was once again accepted, this time by Pope Pius IV, who "envisaged the church as the crowning ornament of the Via Pia, the new avenue he had started alongside the Baths" (Ackerman 262). A competition was called for the design of the church and Michelangelo, then 80 years old, won or was called directly by the Pope to create a plan (von Einem 233; Ackerman 132).

"Pius IV issued a bull on July 27, 1561 ceding the new church to the Order of Carthusians of the Rome Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and pledging to provide them with sufficient funds to transform the central hall of the Baths" (Argan 356). "The Papal Act of Concession to the Carthusians expressly stipulated that the new building should not only serve the needs of the Christian religion, but also preserve the memory of the Baths and be an adornment to the city of Rome" (von Einem 234). In short, there was to be minimum new construction on the Baths.

With this in mind, Michelangelo worked out a plan to suit the needs of the Carthusians, the most hermitic of the monastic orders in the time period that, according to their rule, were required to remain separated from the lay congregation and to limit architectural changes to the Baths (Ackerman 263).

Contrary to Lo Duca's ideas about configuring the church in the same way as the temporary church had been oriented, Michelangelo chose to turn the arrangement around and have the entrance in the southeastern rotunda and the altar on the northeastern side. There was really no "nave," only the large transept of the former frigidarium. This arrangement resembled an asymmetrical and lopsided Greek Cross.

Construction began almost immediately, and the Baths began to transform from a pagan structure into the simple, but massive, church that Michelangelo had designed. His design was highly praised by his contemporaries for having succeeded in conserving some of the original features of the Baths, like reusing the original eight colossal granite columns of the Baths, each 13.8 meters high and keeping the white walls free of decoration (Magnuson 192) (see Figure 1). "Thus the great hall retained all the magnificence that was suitable for solemn services" (Asensio 73). Confirming how little the design altered the original ruins of the Baths is the grand total of the project: 17,492 ducats (Argan 356). This is a fairly modest sum and equals only about twice what it cost to construct the

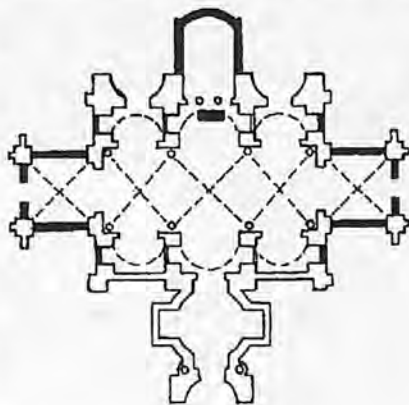


Figure 1:

*The layout of the church as Michelangelo designed it*

Porta Pia. Michelangelo died in 1564 but construction continued following his design until it was completed two years later, in 1566 (Woodward 87) (see Figure 2).

The church, which was declared a titular church in 1565, remained as it was for nearly two-hundred years until 1749, when the architect Vanvitelli was commissioned to make some alterations to the church in preparation for the Holy Year of 1750 (von Einem 235; "Santa Maria degli Angeli"). Vanvitelli made a number of changes to the church and Michelangelo's vision of simplicity. He demolished the apse and extended it, rebuilt the lantern on the entrance rotunda, added a façade to the front of the church (later removed in the interests of authenticity), added six pilasters and a cornice throughout the church, and covered all surfaces except the main vaults with stucco-work (Ackerman 135-136; Woodward 87; von Einem 236). "The present-day church owes much of its form basically to the alterations made in the eighteenth century" (von Einem 235-236).

In the twenty-first century, Santa Maria degli Angeli has become a blend of the last 450 years of art and architecture styles – new blending in with old, the ancient blending in with renovations. As one walks into the church through the concave brick façade, the only remaining portion of the ancient caldarium, one enters into a large rotunda reminiscent of the Pantheon (see Figure 3). The ceiling of the dome is frescoed to look like coffers with different flowers in the middle of each, culminating in the lantern, which is filled with purple, blue, and yellow glass that casts rainbows all around the room. This entryway is flanked by two chapels to the right and left of the doorway, separated from the main floor by a step up and a low marble railing.

The chapel on the right, the Chapel of the Crucifix, contains a painting of the crucifixion, containing St. Jerome (with a lion) and a Dominican Cardinal. To the right and left sides of the chapel



Figure 2:

*The rotunda, looking out towards the apse of the church*



Figure 3:

*Various angels that are found throughout the church*



are the funeral monuments of the sculptor Pietro Tenerani and his wife, Lilla Montebbio (Pisani 12). Each has a small tympanum niche in the wall, Tenerani's supported by Ionic columns and Montebbio's supported by Corinthian.

The chapel on the opposite side of the rotunda is known as the Chapel of Saint Mary Magdalene and is also a baptistery, indicated by the fact that it contains a large baptismal font with the Lamb of God residing at the top.

Both of these chapels are decorated in the same way, bringing unification to the rotunda. The color scheme, which runs throughout most of the church, is in subdued, warm tones. Each has a large window on the upper back wall above the broken pediment that crowns the altar, holding sculptures of two angels and two cherubs with flowers and fruit. Both are frescoed to look like they are covered in rich marbles and the round arch that separates the chapel from the rotunda is covered in flora and cherubs, scenes of the life of Christ, prophets, and sibyls.

There are four monuments on the walls between the entrance and the chapels, and between the chapels and the passage into the transept. These are honoring the painter Carlo Maratta, who has several works in the church, Cardinal Alciati, who was a patron of the Carthusian monks, Cardinal P.P. Parisi, and the artist, Salvator Rosa (Pisani 11, 12, 41, 42).

In the center of the rotunda, surprisingly, is a twentieth-century bronze sculpture of an angel in flight resting on top of a black pyramid called "The Angel of Light" by Ernesto Lamagne (Pisani 44). The work was placed here at the end of the Jubilee in 2000 and does not match the styles of the art and architecture surrounding it, but does not evoke feelings of disharmony either. This could be because of the grand scale of the rotunda, which permits visitors to walk around the sculpture with ease.

From here there is a passageway into the transept. Perhaps one could call this the back of the "nave." On either side there are two angel fountains, the fountains themselves being shaped like large shells (see Figure 4). These were carved by a pupil of Bernini's, and one can tell because of the windswept look that they have, as though their robes are flapping in the breeze (Pisani 13). On the right side there is a statue of St. Bruno who has his arms crossed and his head bowed, making him look very solemn. St. Bruno was the founder of



Figure 4:

*The massive granite columns, cornice, pilasters, and stucco work*

the Carthusian Order, so it is not a surprise to find such a representation of him in Santa Maria degli Angeli (Pisani 14). He was sculpted in this pose of reflection, looking off towards the painting in the apse of the church, "Virgin on the Throne with Seven Angels" by an unknown artist, but in the style of Lorenzo Lotto (Pisani 14).

Just to the left of this statue is a small dark chapel dedicated to St. Bruno, containing a picture of the saint over the altar. Opposite this chapel is an identical one, dedicated to St. Peter, containing three paintings: "The Delivery of the Keys" by Girolamo Muziano, "St. Peter Freed by an Angel," and "St. Peter and St. Paul" by M. Carloni (Pisani 40-41). These two chapels' façades are decorated in the same style as the niches in the rotunda. They have a triangular pediment supported by pilasters with Corinthian columns, and a round arch fits inside of the temple front.

The crowning glory of Santa Maria degli Angeli is its magnificent transept. Flanked on both sides by the red porphyry columns that Michelangelo preserved, the vaults rise to soaring heights above the inlaid-marble floor. Every surface was decorated by Vanvitelli in the eighteenth century except for the vaulting, which remains white and bare and appears almost weightless (Asensio 73). Around the entire circumference of the room is an intricately decorated, over-sized cornice, also provided by Vanvitelli.

Surrounding the transept are eight very large altar paintings from St. Peter's, brought to Santa Maria degli Angeli in 1746 (von Einem 236). The places where these paintings now hang were once openings to large chapels that proved "to be too large to attract prospective donors," so they were closed up in the beginning of the eighteenth century (Ackerman 137). These paintings include two paintings called "The Fall of Simon the Sorcerer" by Pierre-Charles Tremolliere and Pompeo Batoni, "The Resurrection of Tabitha" by Placido Costanzi, "The Mass of Saint Basil" by Pierre-Hubert Subleyras, "The Sermon of Saint Jerome" by Girolamo Muziano, "The Immaculate" by Pietro Bianchi, and "The Crucifixion of Saint Peter" by Nicola Ricciolini.

All of these are fairly regular themes in any Catholic Church, as the Saints and Mary were key in their worship of God because they could intervene on the behalf of the human race. These depictions are meant to focus the thoughts of a worshiper and act as something for worshipers to focus on when praying to God through a saint. Mary was the most important of the Saints because, as Christ's mother, she held the closest tie and most sway with him.

Scenes like "The Fall of Simon the Sorcerer" were especially prevalent during the Baroque period when these pieces were installed, because it showed the Catholic Church triumphing over heresy, which was a very important issue and mission of the church at that time when they were reacting against the Protestant Reformation.

Oddly enough, one of the most prominent features of the great transept is the "Meridiana," or sundial, that crosses on an angle half of the length of the transept on the right side and follows exactly the meridian that passes through Rome: latitude 15° ("Santa Maria degli Angeli"). It was commissioned by Clement XI Albani for the Jubilee of 1700 and served as a solar clock until 1846 (Pisani 15-16). At true noon, sunlight comes in through an opening high on the right wall of the transept and follows

the meridian to tell the time and date and other astronomical information. Along the meridian are depictions of the major constellations in inlaid marble mosaic.

The rest of the floor was laid in the eighteenth century by Giuseppe Barbieri ("Santa Maria degli Angeli"). I found it to be particularly interesting because of the way that it divides the space of the church up into sections with repetitive spoke patterns and so brings the space together, much in the same way that Brunelleschi's churches in Florence are separated into squares and half-squares, which has the effect of making it very pleasing to the eyes and the mind. The center part of this floor, the center of the "cross," has an inlaid-marble pattern that looks like a cross on top of the world, surrounded by seven stars. I can only guess, judging from the time period that the floor was planned out, that this symbolizes the church's influence, or desired influence, all over the world. As for the seven stars, that is a number that appears again and again in the Bible, and on the altarpiece of this particular church, Mary is surrounded by the seven principal angels. Also, there were seven principal martyrs in the first version of the church.

On either end of the transept are two large chapels. The chapel on the right is dedicated to the Niccolo Albergati, a beatified Carthusian monk (Pisani 18-19). The altar painting depicts Albergati performing a miracle. This chapel was constructed in 1746 and is very Baroque in style. It uses a lot of stucco-work and gold, and the fresco around the altar painting is made to look like an elaborately constructed altar made of green and yellow marble. On top of this sits a complex, layered pediment that is topped by two angels with, once again, a ring of seven stars between them. The vaults are very beautifully painted on this chapel. In the center is the dove of the Holy Spirit surrounded by golden light, and on each of the four pendentives are frescoes of the Church's doctors: Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, Saint Ambrose, and Saint Gregory (Pisani 18). Also contained in this chapel are two paintings of the Baptism of Christ by Francesco Treziani, sculptures of the Angel of Peace and the Angel of Justice by Sederico Pettrich, and the twentieth-century funeral monument of Admiral Thaon de Revel, the "Duke of the Sea" (Pisani 20). Just outside of the chapel in the transept on the altar wall is another twentieth century funeral monument to an Italian military figure, Armando Diaz, a general that had great victories in World War One (Pisani 21).

The chapel on the other side of the transept is dedicated to Saint Bruno. Formerly an entrance to the church from the Via Pia, it was closed when the chapel was constructed for the Jubilee of 1700. The architectural decoration is the same as the chapel of Niccolo Albergati. The painting on the altar depicts an apparition of the Virgin Mary giving the rule book of the Carthusian Order to Saint Bruno in the presence of Saint Peter, representing the church, by the artist Giovanni Odazzi (Pisani 37). The pendentives are painted with the figures of the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The major difference in this chapel from the chapel of Niccolo Albergati is that there is a very large organ on the left wall that was crafted completely from solid cherry, walnut, and chestnut. There are also two sculptures, titled "The Meditation" and "The Prayer," both by Francesco Sabi-Altini.

The apse is very different from the rest of the church. Baroque in style, the decoration of the walls and vaults take up the massive space of the ancient Baths. There is a lot of stucco-work and use of gold. The ceiling is a fresco of the dove of the Holy Spirit and the Ascension of the Virgin that reminds me of the Baroque ceilings of Il Gesu and Sant' Ignazio. There are four more large oil paintings from Saint Peters, entitled "The presentation of Mary at the Temple" by Giovanni Francesco Romanelli, "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian" by Domenico Zampieri, "The Baptism of Jesus" by Carlo Maratta, and "The Death of Anania and Safira" by Roncalli Cristoforo (Pisani 26-27, 30-31). On the very back wall is the painting of the "Virgin on the Throne with Seven Angels." The seven angels that surround her are the principals of the angels: the Archangel Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, Barachiel, Salatiel, Jeudial, and Raphael (Pisani 28). The painting is surrounded by stucco angels and clouds, creating much drama and calling attention to the focal point of the apse and high altar. There is a presbytery and a relic chapel adjacent to the apse but they are closed to the public. The relics contained in the church are of several martyrs supposedly from the building of the baths (Saints Cyriac, Largo, Smaragdo, and Massimo) and of the four doctors of the church (Pisani 29).

Drama seems to be a theme in the apse of Santa Maria degli Angeli. When visitors enter the church in the rotunda, their attention is immediately called to the apse because of the dramatic use of light and decoration, and because it glows from the use of warm colors and yellow glass in the clerestory windows. This differs from the rest of the church that has a clean, white light and cooler colors. This is a technique used by Baroque artists and architects, the period when the apse was altered, to try to focus the attention of the congregation and to let them know which was the most important altar in the church. They were setting the stage for the mass. Another reason that they decorated so elaborately was because they were acting out against the Protestant Reformation, which had banned most forms of iconography. They were showing that they did not think that they were doing anything wrong and that the Catholic Church was just as strong as it ever was.

The church may be described as a "juxtaposition of static and directed space. The visitor who enters the portal... is clearly directed towards the main altar, but when he reaches the enormous hall of the former tepidarium, that directional impulse is checked by the static space of this 'transept'" (Lotz 157). It is true that when one stands in the massive hall of the transept, one can feel the weight and enormity of the surrounding walls. One cannot help but be overwhelmed by it unless focus is drawn away onto one particular part of the church.

There are several feelings that Santa Maria degli Angeli evokes, the first being that it feels incomplete because of all of the changes it has gone through over the thousands of years that it has been standing. It is an eclectic collection of so many different time periods, cultures, and lives, and only more can be added to it.

The second is that it does not feel like a solemn place of worship, like many churches in the world. Maybe this is because of its pagan beginnings, but I also think that it

has to do with it being such a large space that you can walk around and forget that there is an altar just over your shoulder. As noticeable as the apse of the church is, it gets lost in the space of the transept. Because the church is so immense, visitors do not feel like they have to talk in hushed tones or be contemplative and solemn. It feels more like a public space where the community can gather to share their religion and interact with each other.

The third feeling that the church evokes is one of peace and stability, in two different ways. First, it is the feeling of the ancient building that has stood and will stand, quietly, for thousands of years. It is also the feeling that the actual structure of the building gives to you. It is almost completely symmetrical in design, even in the small decorations and architectural elements, such as the columns, pilasters, cornice, stucco angels, and clerestory windows.

The church of Santa Maria degli Angeli has a long and rich history culminating in a structure of fantastic size and inspiration to those that enter its walls (see Figure 5). It is befitting of both the solemn services that take place there and a community gathering place. Its architecture and decoration are a rich tapestry of ancient design, Michelangelo's simple vision and the larger-than-life Baroque of Vanvitelli.



*Figure 5:  
The layout of the church as it looks today*

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<http://www.home.online.no/~cnyborg/mariaangeli.html>

THE LEHIGH REVIEW



*Amy Zatterman*



## Two Tone Music

BY JACKIE GARDOCKI

New pop cultures and subcultures do not just appear. The emergence of such are more often than not the result of one era remolding itself into another. As society learns more about what it wants, cultures and ways of life change. As Ellis Cashmore writes in *The Black Culture Industry*, "the histories of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings".<sup>1</sup> This paper will discuss the gradual wake of Two Tone music, a unity movement borrowing from mod growing into skinhead and eventually becoming two tone. It will also examine its positive effects on British race relations. Two tone, a part of 1970s and 80s pop culture expressed the social problems of both the white and black underclass. Furthermore, it brought the two groups together because of these shared problems. Instead of competing between each other, the groups bonded to express their frustration at the upper class. The emergence of two tone out of ska, punk, and reggae, is a perfect example of a type of pop culture worth understanding.

This whole evolution began when British whites became interested in 'black music'. Obvious cultural exchanges had been going on between white and black since immediately after the War due to black US servicemen intermixing with locals at nightclubs.<sup>2</sup> The immigration of many West Indians to Great Britain however introduced even more types of musical sounds to the English. There was such a large influx of Caribbean peoples in the 1950s because of the unlimited immigration policy and post war labor shortage.<sup>3</sup> Between 1955 and 1962, about twenty five million Caribbeans settled in England.<sup>4</sup> In order to understand the eventual rise and impact of two tone, one must first understand the impression that Jamaican music and eventually punk had in England. The latter was introduced by the large influx of Caribbean immigrants. The social and geographical immediacy with poor whites made the bond between Caribbeans and white youth almost inevitable. Jamaican music, particularly reggae and ska, began to appear attractive to the white kids of England. Although it was a small minority of the white youth who embraced these musical styles, this was the beginning of what would eventually become the unity of two tone music.

Although there had always been white interpretations of black music, (i.e. jazz and blues) the white interest in ska sparked the path towards two tone. These white hipsters, or "modernists" (a.k.a. mods), latched onto Jamaican music in the early 1960s and



began emulating the Afro-Caribbean males living around them.<sup>5</sup> They would come to be the first white youths directly culturally effected by the surge of West Indian people. The Punk Rock Dictionary labels the mods as, "a subculture which originated in England and gave roots to the skinhead and punk subcultures... was characterized by the desire for poor, working class, mod kids to live the good life despite their different circumstances".<sup>6</sup> Ska music attracted these whites because of its unconventional rhythms and its heavy drum and bass.<sup>7</sup> It was thought of as cool to be knowledgeable of such "exotic" music, almost a status symbol because of one's ability to hunt down and uncover such underground sounds.<sup>8</sup> Gradually as styles of Afro-Caribbeans began to be more heavily imitated, the Rudie or rude boy emerged. This type of man typically wore narrow trousers, cropped hair, and pork pie hats.<sup>9</sup> These white rudies were known as the very first generation of skinheads.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to common, modern belief about skins, these were not fascists, rather enthusiasts of black music and culture.

Blacks in Britain and skinheads had more than style in common. Black immigrants were forced into inner city ghettos where there was already a poor white working class.<sup>11</sup> Both groups were frustrated at the conditions they lived in. "Young Jamaicans found common ground with unemployed English youths" and the relationships between the two created this new skinhead culture, one that still emanates in parts of society today.<sup>12</sup> It is natural that the skins emerged from the exchange between Afro-Caribbeans and mods. Virtually every collision of two cultures results in a new, adapted one. No culture is impermeable. It was this era in which whites and blacks not only appreciated the same music, but also participated in the same social events.<sup>13</sup>

Although the skinheads listened to Jamaican music, they are most generally known for their creation of punk. This aggressive music differed from reggae in form but was similar in that both were expressions of rebellion.<sup>14</sup> The youth in the mid-70s had become disenchanted with white rock stars who had turned into rich commercialized acts. No longer was contemporary rock a haven to the oppositional values it once had been. Bands like Pink Floyd seemed "complacent and self-satisfied, far removed from the young people of the 1970s".<sup>15</sup> The rock stars had made it while the youth was still out of work. In fact, the youths of this decade were suffering the worst unemployment rates since World War II.<sup>16</sup> England in the 1970s was not a place of economic success. It was part of the world recession in 1974-1975 and the inflation rate in 1977 was between 20 and 30 per cent.<sup>17</sup> The youth blamed the recessions on the government and needed to find a new form of music to express these feelings. These punks came to identify with the everyday values of reggae and drew much of their own discourse from it to create punk. Reggae differed from the mainstream pop culture of the time because it was able to "integrate explicit lyrics with musical intensity".<sup>18</sup> No longer did contemporary rock contain the spontaneity and closeness to its audience that the white youth yearned for.

The 1970s were not only a time of economic crisis, but also racial crisis. Musical groups that discussed racial ideas did not form to express how perfect their society was, they formed to change an unequal one. The National Front, a nazi group, was

strongest during this decade and wrapped itself in British Patriotism.<sup>19</sup> What these fascists didn't understand was British identity was changing and there was not much they could do about it. There were numerous riots in England during the 1970s and 80s including a 1977 confrontation between police and anti-fascists who were joined by black youths.<sup>20</sup> 1976 experienced a race riot after the Caribbean carnival in Nottingham; 1979 one was sparked by the National Front during the general election in Southall, London; in 1981, Brixton was set on fire after a race riot between blacks and police.<sup>21</sup> Various immigration bills limited the number of incoming people and the notorious "sus laws" were put into effect. These laws made it legal for police officers to question and/or detain any individual who 'looked suspicious'.<sup>22</sup> It was more often the case that young black males were the 'suspicious' looking individuals whether or not they had actually committed or intended on committing a crime. West Indians increasingly registered as UK citizens, but at the same time found that ingrained racial discrimination undermined their legal status. They were given less for housing, employment, education, and representation in the justice system.<sup>23</sup>

As music continued to evolve, some experimented putting reggae and punk together, but the two sounds did not mix well. So instead, many whites turned to the faster sounds of ska and the original rudeboy was once again brought into pop culture. The late 1970s became a sort of ska revival as bands such as the Selecter, the Specials and the Beat culminated punk, ska, and reggae into a musical form perfect for dancing. All three of these groups were at one point signed to the label, created by the Specials Jerry Dammers called "2 Tone Records", thus giving the name to the movement.<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that such groups were mostly multiracial. The Specials consisted of five whites and two blacks. The Specials and the Selecter (both multiracial) hailed from Coventry, in the West Midlands of England.<sup>25</sup> This was a more "mixed" community than London and the emergence of these groups show its success in racial harmony. Pauline Black of the Selecter states it clearly, "Two tone was basically about black and white people playing together".<sup>26</sup>

Two tone became pretty popular and by 1979 it was in the British charts.<sup>27</sup> The groups of the two tone movement differed from punk because its message was not as explicitly violent. Although it clearly defined the problems of the youth such as unemployment, racism, and frustration of police, authority, and the government, it did so gracefully.<sup>28</sup> Take for example, the Specials' single "Racist Friend".

"If you have a racist friend/Now is the time, now is the time/For your friend-ship to end/Either change their views/Or change your friends".<sup>29</sup>

It also succeeded in creating a culturally hybrid identity among the youth that focused on its British experience. No longer did they want to focus and depend on American style.<sup>30</sup> They created an identity of their own for the British, one which celebrated unity. The two tone logo portrays the black and white equality of most groups from this movement. Jerry Dammers created it by taking the negative side of

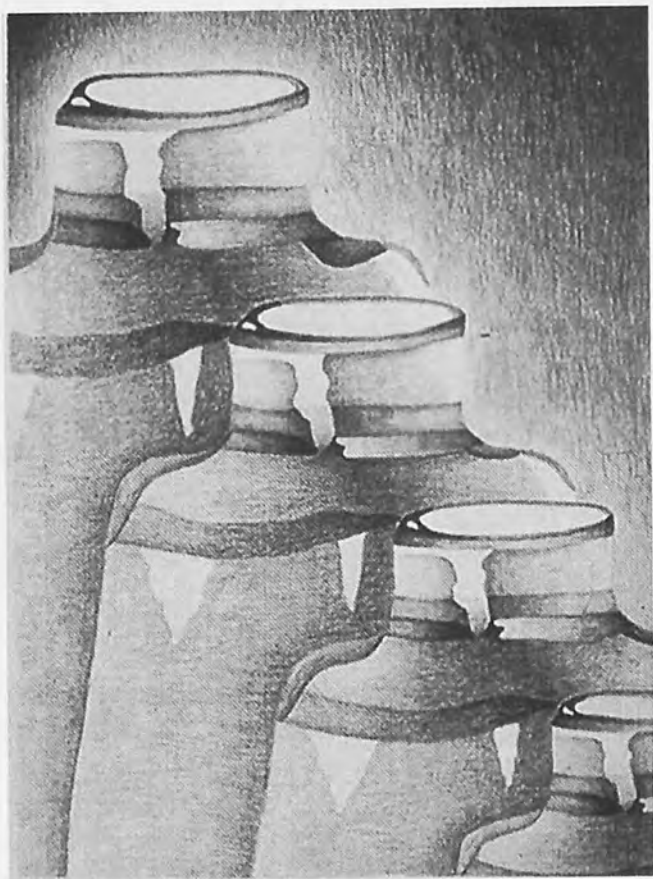
a photo of Peter Tosh from an early Wailing Wailers album. This icon became known as 'Walt Jabasco' and is surrounded by black and white checkers.<sup>31</sup> As Hebdige says, this represented equality as "black and white, adjacent yet separate, different but connected like squares on a chessboard."<sup>32</sup>

Those involved in the two tone movement more often than not were involved in the anti-racism movement. The Specials became a key part of Rock Against Racism. This organization (RAR) formed in 1976 in reaction to progressive rock star, Eric Clapton's suggestion that Britain was too overcrowded because of immigrants.<sup>33</sup> In a direct stab at such ignorance, RAR was formed and would often hold protests and concerts against racism. It sponsored the "Carnival Against the Nazis" in April 1978 in which over 100,000 people marched.<sup>34</sup> Without the inspiration of two tone groups, Rock Against Racism would not be as successful as it had been.

Two tone music is a perfect example of how popular culture is not simply an expression of mass-media's imperialism. It had been created by the people to express the social problems of the day. It's blend of reggae, punk, and ska create a genre of music that has the ability to teach even today's generation of the possibility of racial harmony, at least in the arts. Those who claim pop culture to be trash might agree with critic Ernest van den Haag that it lessens "people's capacity to experience life itself".<sup>35</sup> However, that would be arguing that *living* is not life. Are racism, unemployment, and recession not parts of life itself? The popular cultures of mods, skins, and those involved in the two tone movement explicitly show how despite these negative aspects of life, some of the youth out there were attempting to bridge the gap between black and white. Instead of focusing on the differences between the British black and the British white, bonds were being formed through the parallels of pop culture. These oppositional cultures, the mods, punks, and rudies, had much to teach the public through their music. As Herbert Gans would say, these participants of pop culture have "provided much more information to people about their own society by describing...the different lifestyles, aspirations, and attitudes currently coexisting in the society".<sup>36</sup> A small crack in the wall of racism has been shown through popular culture from the late seventies and early eighties. It is up to today's generation to decide whether or not they *want* to be taught what earlier pop culture has to teach.

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*Brandy Gottlieb*



## Displacement, Diaspora and the Quest for Kinship

BY LISA MAYERNICK

*"For two hundred and fifty years I have listened to the many-tongued chorus. And occasionally, among the sundry restless voices, I have discovered those of my own children [...] I have longed to tell them: Children, I am your father. I love you. But understand. There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return [...] You are beyond. [...] And I who spurned you [...] have waited patiently for the wind to rise on the far bank of the river. For the drum to pound across the water. For the chorus to swell. Only then, if I listen closely, can I rediscover my lost children."*

—Caryl Phillips, *Crossing the River*

The term diaspora is central to an understanding of the complex multicultural framework of today's modern society. The term is particularly relevant to a discussion of the African American experience, past and present. Prior to such a discussion, one must have a base understanding of the definition of *diaspora*. Maggie Morehouse notes Avtar Brah's definition in her expository paper entitled "The African Diaspora": "the concept of *diaspora* specifies a matrix of economic, political, and cultural inter-relationships which construct the commonality between the various components of a dispersed group" (Morehouse, 4). Joseph Harris, author of *Theory of African Diaspora* notes the dynamic nature of the concept, "The African *diaspora* assumes the character of a dynamic, continuous and complex phenomenon, stretching across time, geography, class and gender" (Morehouse, 14). Multitudes of definitions exist, all noting the common themes of dispersion, alienation and the resulting cultural identity formation.

The concept of the relationship between the African *diaspora* and African American identity formation is worthy of close analysis. Ruth Sims Hamilton refers to "communities of consciousness" which are "expressed over time" (Morehouse, 12). Robert Cohen refers to the African American diasporan experience as that of a "victim *diaspora*" (Morehouse, 6). One may understand this in terms of the suffering and oppression imposed upon Africans by the institution of slavery, and the consequent identification between blacks sharing a similar experience of suffering. Paul Gilroy provides insight into the concept stating, "we are bound by our common suffering more than our

pigmentation" (Kitson, 5). Cohen continues this idea of victimization as a unifying force, affirming, "We must look for the point of "victimization" and then uncover the multitude of ways that the diasporic communities forged identities" (Morehouse, 10). It is only through the thoughtful integration of these varying definitions of *diaspora* that one may come to possess a meaningful understanding of the concept. Clearly, the shared sense of displacement of the African American people during the era of slavery served as a unifying force that shaped their respective diasporan identities. Thomas Kitson affirms, "the drastic alienation from humanity was a first step on a continuing modern journey of identity formation, noting the "restlessness and homelessness", (Kitson, 6), which characterized the *diaspora*. Two novels which may provide additional insights on the subjects of *diaspora* and identity formulation are Caryl Phillip's Crossing the River and John Edgar Wideman's The Cattle Killing. A thorough analysis of the depiction of the African American diasporan experience in these novels reveals the common themes of the tireless quest for kinship and family ties, both biological and otherwise, which mark the lives of the central characters. Through an analysis of the character of Nash Williams in Crossing the River, as well as Liam Stubbs in The Cattle Killing, one may conclude that these characters each demonstrate an intense, all-consuming desire for familial ties to the extent that they essentially define themselves by the salience and depth of their familial connections. This quest for kinship may be seen as a unifying theme of the African diasporan experience. The institution of slavery served to break apart and disperse families in such a way that its victims were forced to forge new kinship ties. This need for identification and kinship, necessitated by the institution of slavery, may be seen as a unifying theme of the 18<sup>th</sup> century African diasporan experience.

The notion that the quest for kinship and family lies at the heart of the diasporan experience is a central theme of Caryl Phillip's Crossing the River. Gail Low observes, "Its extended mediation on the question of kinship, its exploration of loss and yearning in the connections between (substitute) fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, lovers and partners within and across racial lines, offers a poetics of the *diaspora* and an alternative narrative of freedom and belonging" (Low, 2). She further argues, "Crossing the River offers a chorus of voices from across the generations [...] their tales are at once unique and individual, and also emblematic and symbolic of stories of survival of the black slave *diaspora*" (Low, 8). It is this chorus of voices that may serve as a representation of the African *diaspora*. One particularly poignant individual voice of this chorus is that of the liberated slave, Nash Williams. The story of Nash's voyage to Liberia and his somewhat disheartening assimilative experiences serve to demonstrate this theme of family and its linkage to the concepts of *diaspora* and identity. The story is documented through a series of letters written by Nash, to his former master, Edward Williams. A close reading of these letters reveals that Nash views Edward as a father figure, finding in him a source of mental fortitude. For Nash, Edward is a reservoir of strength to deal with the challenges of attempting

to re-assimilate into African communal life. For example, Nash defines himself in an early letter as, "more akin to son than servant" (21). He proceeds to thank Edward for the Christian values that he instilled in him stating, "Had I been permitted simply to run about, I would today be dwelling in the same robes of ignorance which drape the shoulders of my fellow blacks [...] Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart" (21). Clearly, Nash fancies himself Edward's son, perhaps in an attempt to replace the father he lost when originally forced into the shackles of slavery. However, Nash's earlier letters do not convey a sense of bitterness relating to his time spent in America: "America is, according to my memory, a land of milk and honey" (25) He does, however note the cultural differences between the two countries, "Things that seemed to me then to hold so much value, are now, in this new country, and in my new circumstances, without value" (25). Here Nash may be seen as beginning the process of re-assimilating into African culture.

As the story progresses, the reader may begin to detect a tone of bitterness and resentment in Nash's letters. This bitterness is the result of Nash's repeated entreaties for monetary support, which are repeatedly ignored by Edward. One particularly significant observation is the fact that as Nash becomes increasingly disillusioned and alienated by Edward's continued denial of financial assistance, and his failure to reply to his letters, Nash begins to reformulate his identity as a freed slave in Liberian society. As the story progresses, he recognizes the incompatibility of his American culture with that of his African brothers, "...it would appear that my present domestic arrangements have caused some offense to those who would hold on to America as a beacon of civilization, and an example of all that is to be admired. Are we not in Africa" (40)? As the image of Edward as a father-figure slowly deteriorates, Nash recalls his time in America, and a former self, referencing "memories of what I was before" (42). The deterioration of the father-son relationship may be seen as Nash questions Edward, "Why have you forsaken me" (42)? This quote carries with it biblical connotations, calling to mind Christ's lament, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). In this example, we see Nash as a dependant child in desperate need of a father's guidance and assistance. When he realizes that this is not to be, Nash begins to abandon his previous attachment to his American culture and Christian religion. Evidence of this idea may be found in Nash's last heartrending letter. Nash states, "Perhaps you imagine that this Liberia has corrupted my person, transforming [me] from the good Christian colored gentleman who left your home, into this heathen whom you barely recognize" (61). Nash acknowledges the internal shift in values that he has experienced, "We, the colored man, have been oppressed long enough. We need to contend for our rights, stand our ground, and feel the love of liberty that can never be found in your America". Interestingly, Nash notes that his time in Liberia has permitted him to "cast off the garb of ignorance, which has encompassed me all too securely the whole course of my life" (62). This statement stands in direct contrast to Nash's earlier views of his positive experience on the Williams plantation. The fact that



Nash abandons Christianity is telling as well, as he comes to the realization that he cannot embrace the culture of an American, while simultaneously living in solidarity with his fellow Africans:

The truth is, our religion, in its purest and least diluted form, can never take root in this country. Its young shoots will wither and die, leaving the sensible man with the conclusive evidence that he must reap what grows naturally. It has taken my dark mind many years to absorb this knowledge, and while it would be true to assert that the man I love is Christ, and I love him as one might love an intimate, having no means to return to America, and being therefore bound to an African existence, I must suspend my faith and live the life of the African (62).

Nash's letter concludes with a reaffirmation of his initial dependence and faith in Edward, which through neglect, has been destroyed, "You, my father, did sow the seed, and it sprouted forth with vigor, but for many years now, there has been nobody to tend to it, and being abandoned, it has withered away and died. Your work is complete. It only remains for me once more to urge you to remain in your country" (63). Clearly the deterioration of the father-son relationship has resulted in an altered identity. As Betty Lowenthal observes, "After he accepts the loosening of his bonds to Edward, America and Christianity, Nash seems to rediscover the joy of being African, and the spiritual freedom of being among his own people" (Lowenthal, 11). This linkage between identity and family ties is one that may be seen as a common theme of the African diasporan experience.

The theme of the tireless quest to re-forge familial ties may also be seen through the experiences of Liam Stubbs, a black, British immigrant living in Philadelphia with his white lover. Liam's story commences with Mrs. Stubbs' recognition that, for many years, Liam has been silent and detached. This silence is only broken when the narrator of the story arrives at his doorstep. As Mrs. Stubbs acknowledges, Stubbs finds a true confidant in the narrator, confiding in him and sharing with him stories from the past. It is through this dialogue that the theme of familial interdependency may be seen. For example, Stubbs relates a story of his previous master's experiments with anatomy and dissection. His tales are grisly at times, casting Master Stubbs as a somewhat deranged man, consumed by his gruesome work. Stubbs, however, has a different perspective. He says of his master, "The power of Stubbs' obsession lent it a sort of purity [...] I observed the hidden colors in Stubbs, how they made themselves known in his creations. I envied him. He made me aware of a double lack in myself. A double hunger" (125). Stubbs proceeds to reveal his reason for voyaging to America, "Crossing the ocean, I expected the colors inside me would be freed" (126). Clearly, Stubbs hopes to find identity and meaning in America, living freely with Mrs. Stubbs. When Stubbs realizes that his hopes amount to nothing but a utopian dream, he becomes increasingly detached, noting, "My vocation became merely to watch the

light in myself dim, flicker, expire" (126). Stubb's failure to realize a meaningful love relationship with Mrs. Stubbs in America leaves him disheartened, without a sense of true identity and life purpose.

Numerous other examples may be cited that support the theme of the quest for kinship as one central to the 18<sup>th</sup> century African diasporan experience. For example, Liam reveals his longing for children to the narrator, recognizing the void in his life: "Anything might grow here. Anything but my seed. I know my African seed shrivels here [...] So I have refused to sow and now I reap the bitter emptiness [...] She could have bourne me children [...] But I couldn't bear the necessity of reaching them to live a lie. The lie required of us to live here under the terms other people's lies demand" (130, 31). Evidently, Liam longs for a family. It is significant to note that he envisions his children of mixed race to be "so much stronger, so much more able". Perhaps Wideman is making a statement regarding the possible benefits of interracial marriage and procreation. However, Liam recognizes the hardships that his children would be forced to endure and consequently chooses to remain childless. This example demonstrates the effect that slavery, and its associated discrimination, had on the African people. Not only were existing families broken apart, but individuals were prevented from building families, the families which may have helped them to re-formulate a sense of identity and belonging. Another particularly poignant example occurs when Liam confesses that he envisions himself as the preacher's father, "So many stories to tell. Too much bitter silence for too many years. Too much lost. I couldn't begin to talk, son, till I learned you were willing to listen. Ha. There it is. My confession in a word. *Son*. Fathering you in my fancy" (131). Here we see Liam torn apart by the ravages of living in a world wrought with racial hatred and intolerance. He is a desperate man in need of kinship, of someone to relate to, of mutual understanding. He finds these qualities in the preacher and makes him a surrogate son.

A final, powerful example of the desperate need to seek comfort and solitude in one's kinship ties may be seen during one of the narrator's fanciful visions. The vision occurs as he is massaging Mrs. Stubbs' back, imagining that he is "peeling layers" (141), wishing that he were able to see her through Liam's eyes:

He sees Liam working [...] to construct a woman from this hair and meat and bone. Liam's hand in what is present and absent in her, the windows of her green eyes, the holes and folds and hollows of her that are porches, doors, stairways, rooms, [...] the raked earth into which her foundations sink [...] his weariness, his desire something he will spread like rugs on the plank floor of her [...] he sees her as a place where Liam's sweat and toil are no longer separate from hers but are this edifice, this body where two people live and are dying, there is no room therein for him to hide and he's ashamed of his trespass (142).

Here, Wideman uses the image of a house to convey that Mrs. Stubbs' represents a place of refuge, fortitude and comfort for Stubb. The connection between the two

is so intense that the narrator paints them as one being. It may be significant to note that this "house" is Stubbs' creation; it is his construction. Stubbs builds a dwelling place in her. Tragically, they must isolate themselves in this place of refuge, as society will not permit them to live and love publicly. They are ironically prisoners of a relationship built upon foundations of love. It may be interesting to note, however, the fact that the narrator is able to penetrate the virtual fortress, which serves as a barrier between themselves and the rest of society, to become an extension of their stunted family. Liam states, "No need to turn away. I did not mean to say you are a stranger still. You're much more. You abide my whining. I didn't know how deeply I missed another like myself beside me until you arrived" (131).

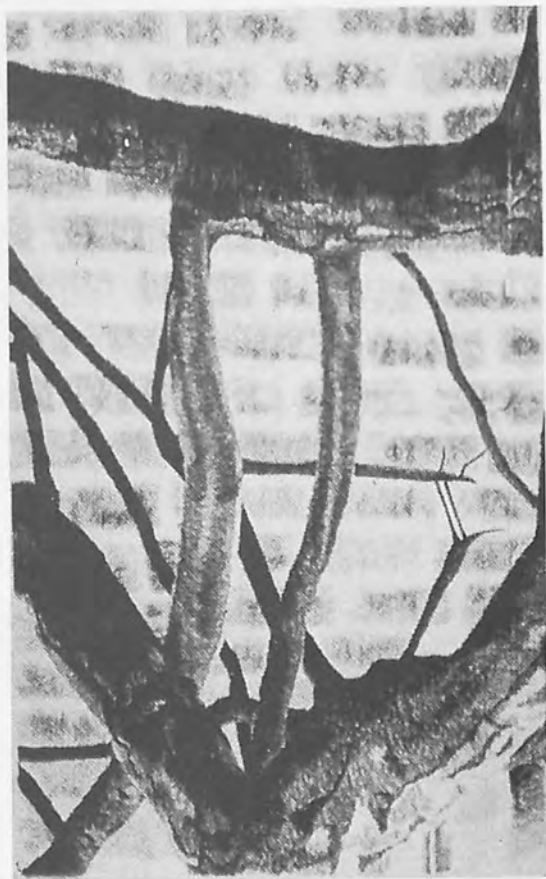
A close analysis of the character of Liam Stubbs in Wideman's *The Cattle Killing*, as well as that of Nash Williams in Phillip's *Crossing the River*, reveals the common theme of the relentless quest for kinship as a means of reformulating a sense of self and identity. This quest, engendered by the physical dispersal and alienation of the African people is the indirect effect of the institution of slavery and may be seen to be a unifying theme of the African *diaspora* experience. Numerous other examples to support this contention may be found in these novels. Martha Randolph's journey west in *Crossing the River* is also representative of this idea. However, one must take care not to limit a discussion of the effects of the *diaspora* to African Americans alone. As George Shepperson notes, "the two-way aspect of the slave trade needs to be expanded to encompass the marking or victimization of all participants-to address what happened to the Viceroy as well as what happened to his "cargo" (Morehouse, 10). The effects of the *diaspora* touched the lives of all participants in the slave trade. As Gail Low notes, Captain Hamilton himself was not entirely unaffected, "his log book records a necessary 'commercial detachment', but his letters home confess to 'deep feelings of revulsion'. Hamilton's orphaned status renders his demand for the security of love and familial affection all the more acute" (Low, 11).

In dealing with issues of *diaspora*, one must recognize the varying interpretations of the concept. In his work, "The Black Atlantic", Paul Gilroy presents us with the interesting metaphor of the slave ship, in order to enrich his audience's comprehension of the exchange aspect of the Diaspora: "I have settled on the image of ships in motion [...] as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise [...] the ship- a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion [...] Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to the African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists" (Gilroy, 4). This chronotope may be representative of, "the idea of *diaspora* as a utopian eruption of space into the linear temporal order of modern black politics which enforces the obligation that space and time must be considered relationally in their interarticulation with racialised being" (Low, 7). This image of *diaspora* as a concept that transcends both time and space is evidenced in both of the novels. Literary critic V.R Peterson says of *The Cattle Killing*, "four story lines and others crisscross through time and space, ultimately blending into one another [...] the whole novel is a text of morphing faces, each one an extension of

some earlier one, all of them somehow the same" (Peterson, 13). This idea is powerfully echoed in Phillip's *Crossing the River*, in the voice of the narrating diasporic father: "For two hundred and fifty years I have listened [...] Survivors. In their diasporan souls a dream like steel [...] A many-tongued chorus continues to swell [...] My Nash. My Martha. My Travis. My daughter. Joyce. All" (237). Perhaps Wideman summarizes the concept most eloquently: "different stories over and over again that are one story [...] Death keeping someone alive, till another day, another story. Ramona lights her candle- passes it to Mandela- passes it to Mumia- passes it to Huey [...] in one of the cities where I search for you, to join you, save you, save myself, tell you stories so my dead are not strangers, so they walk and talk, so they will know us and welcome us. Free us. To love" (207).

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*Brandy Gottlieb*



## Melodramatic *Mentalities*: Deconstructing Masculinity in Three Sirk Films

BY MEHNAZ ARA CHOUDHURY

Douglas Sirk tells Jon Halliday in his book *Sirk on Sirk* that “America ... was feeling safe and sure of herself, a society primly sheltering its comfortable achievements and institutions” (Halliday 98). The “America” Sirk refers to is postwar America in the 1950’s, when Sirk made several of his most important films, such as *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), *There’s Always Tomorrow* (1955), and *Written on the Wind* (1956). Sirk uses the conventions of the melodrama to “project [a] complex and paradoxical... view of America, at once celebratory and severely questioning of the basic values and attitudes of the mass audience (Schatze 150).” In many of his films, Sirk’s critique of the bourgeoisie targets the ways in which the American middle class perpetuates negative ideologies of gender, and his deconstruction of postwar masculinity shows how frequently these negative ideologies contain both women and men. Melodrama, sometimes called “the weepie,” or “the women’s film,” generally targets a female audience and highlights issues that concern women, such as romance or domesticity. Since melodramas traditionally focus on female protagonists and ideological dilemmas that are important to women, it seems out-of-place to write a paper on representations of masculinity in such films. However, Sirk’s male characters can be as unstable, eroticized, and chameleon-like as his female protagonists, and they are often contained by similar patriarchal forces and ideologies. Sirk describes another one of his films from this period, *All I Desire*, as being about “a woman comes back with all her dreams, with her love – and she finds nothing but this rotten, decrepit, middle-class family” (*Written on the Wind*, DVD extras). In the three films I’ve chosen to analyze, Sirk brings several of these themes together – but the director looks at the cracks in the *masculine identities* of his protagonists, and provides insightful commentary on the standard postwar image of harmonious families and material security.

### **Caught Between a “Rock” and a Hard Place: *All That Heaven Allows*.**

In the film *All That Heaven Allows*, Cary Scott (Jane Wyman) falls in love with her younger gardener, Ron Kirby (Rock Hudson), and is criticized severely by her bourgeois friends and children. Cary is torn between Ron’s Thoreau-like lifestyle, surrounded by nature and “people who take with both hands, all that heaven allows,” (Film Preview,

*Heaven* DVD Extras) and the stuffy, materialistic, and self-interested milieu of her country-club set. Sirk not only exposes the trappings of the American dream that promises class mobility for all, but also reveals the constraints of the American myth of returning to nature, which is only open to the “ideal American male [who is] a virile adventurer, potent [and] untrammelled man of action,” but not to the “ideal female,” who is usually a “wife and mother, perfect companion, endlessly dependable, mainstay of hearth and home” (Wood 291). Sirk is not interested in the simple reading that Cary’s middle-class world is bad, or that Ron’s “working-class” world is good; nor is he attracted by the even less satisfying conclusion that Ron’s world is “slightly better,” so it must be the better choice for Cary. However, Sirk *is* interested in showing how Cary and Ron are trapped by competing discourses, which force them to make choices that support the patriarchy. Neither seems able to find an “ideal place,” so common to melodramatic films, outside of spaces inscribed by dominant ideologies. Sirk draws attention to Cary who goes through the greatest change, leaving her upper-class life for Ron’s nature paradise. I would argue that Ron can be read as an unstable character, and it is he who “changes” the most in the film – both emotionally and physically.

**Kay Scott:** Personally, I've never subscribed to that old Egyptian custom.

**Cary Scott:** What Egyptian custom?

**Kay Scott:** Of walling up the widow alive in the funeral chambers of her dead husband along with his other possessions. The theory being that she was a possession too. She was supposed to journey into dead with him. The community saw to it. Of course it doesn't happen anymore.

**Cary Scott:** Doesn't it?

When Kay (Gloria Talbott) returns home from Princeton, the above exchange with her mother indicates the gulf between the two – the daughter does not see the oppression that her mother believes she suffers from. Cary’s husband’s recent death has left her lonely and “walled up” in the tomb of their upper-class home—one of his sports trophies adorns the mantle, and less tangible possessions, such as his good name, appear to choke and stifle her, creating a picture of the older, asexual widow. Sirk’s comparison of the American suburban home to the Egyptian crypt and the widow walled up with her husband’s possessions is echoed at the end of the film when Cary is entombed in Ron’s home by the doctor who tells her Ron will need undivided attention and her loving care. However, Ron is also walled up in the same tomb, with possessions that he disavowed earlier in the film. Cary’s sexuality is contained since she is confined to a mothering role, yet Ron is no longer the virile “ideal man,” and he is stretched out and wrapped up like an Egyptian mummy: harmless and non-threatening as Cary stands guard over him and his newly-decorated house. For Cary to assume a new power over him, Ron must lose control of his physical body and lose control of his surroundings as well.



The last scene from the film shows Cary standing before the large window in Ron's home, against an artificial tableau of "nature" (See still above). The sky shines an unnatural blue, while the trees in the background, as well as the one featured prominently to Cary's left, are without their glorious leaves (in sharp contrast to the fall foliage featured earlier in the film), suggesting that Cary's choice to stay with Ron is either doomed, or their future a much bleaker prospect than she imagined. Also, when the deer appears, Cary stands in front of it, suggesting that she, like the deer, is one of Ron's possessions, which he has "tamed" and will come when he beckons. Earlier, we saw Ron feeding the deer, who follows the feed bucket when he leaves it in the snow. In the final shot, the deer runs away, Ron is surrounded by upper-class luxury, and his lumberjack red and black flannel shirt have been traded for a pair of silk blue pajamas. Ron is no longer in control of nature; he has been entombed in a watered-down version of Cary's upper-class living room, and he is reduced from his hyper-masculine, adult self to a feminized child. Since the deer leaves the window frame almost as soon as it appears, Sirk may be suggesting that "real" nature as encapsulated by the deer, not the nature that is shown in silk leaves or fake snow, can no longer exist in Ron's new home. What is left is an artificial background of a cold, crisp sky and dying trees covered with fake frost.

As the still shows, there is a division between the tableau created by Cary, the deer, the window and the scene outside, and where Ron lays on the couch. This gives a dreamlike quality to the scene (many films which show characters dreaming, move the cameras above their heads into a wavy dissolve), as well as a separation between Ron and the natural world, further emphasizing that the choice Cary has made is not the promise of Thoreau's *Walden*, since she is looking away from the window towards Ron, but instead she has entered a world that is similar in oppression to her own and has forced Ron to accept it as well. If the tableau is "Ron's dream" as he lies sleeping on the couch, then Cary's desires are almost absent from the "choice" she is forced to make. Sirk also posits the possibility that the tableau is Cary's real dream – to enter



into a relationship with Ron where she can make him live the lifestyle that she is used to, and to remain shielded from nature behind solid oak walls and glass windows. When she first meets him, it is Cary who suggests that Ron give up his home (a cabin connected to a greenhouse filled with lush and exotic plants) for the solid oak mill which contains a broken Wedgwood china set that he later repairs. The final pairing is only allowed because Cary's sexuality is repressed and the relationship is now non-embarrassing, but also because Ron is no longer potent: Ron is no longer a threat to Cary's need for society and order by his sexuality, but "he has also annexed himself to the bourgeoisie through surfaces in his décor, and has become detached from nature through his new shut-in quality." This implies the only way a woman can enter the Walden myth is by emasculating a man, which adds to the negative image of women as devouring or castrating, and also suggests that when a man combines his virile, untrammled self with a domestic relationship, he will be physically neutered and his philosophy must be undercut. We especially see this when Ron is injured. He is returning from hunting pheasants, an activity that places him in his true home, the outdoors, and spots Cary's car outside the mill. As she drives away, Ron calls out to her and then falls off the edge of a precipice into an embankment of snow. His desire to be with Cary emasculates and almost kills him.

Positive readings of Cary's decision to leave her world for Ron's argue that Ron is a "new man," and that they can perhaps create a more egalitarian relationship. However, if we explore Ron's Walden ethos as well as the ways he "helps" her choose, we can see how his world is as problematic as the materialistic world Cary leaves behind in the town of Stoningham. Sirk describes Rock Hudson's as Ron as representing an especially "stable" masculine figure:

Because in melodrama it's of advantage to have one immovable character against which you can put your more split ones. Because your audience needs—or likes—to have a character in the movie they can identify themselves with: naturally, the steadfast one, not to be moved. Now this character preferably ought to be the hero of the story—then it's Gary Cooper, John Wayne, and so on. Or Rock Hudson... You couldn't make a split character out of Wayne if you tried. I couldn't out of Rock Hudson.

*(Sirk on Sirk, 98)*

Sirk's assertion seems particularly disheartening since he claims that Ron is immovable and staid, thus making Cary, splintered and emotional. In some ways, Ron is presented as the more "stable" character, but his stability is also shown as overbearing and his Walden ethos as a patriarchal trap for both Cary and himself. The Walden ethos is based on two paradoxical ideologies: the virile, adventure seeking male vs. the pacifist who hears the bear of another drummer. The pacifist is a feminized figure, so the masculine, stable Walden myth is fraught with contradiction.

It is also possible to deconstruct Ron's image as the back-to-nature hero, which compounds Cary's concerns about entering his world. Alida tells us that Ron has never read *Walden*, "He just lives it." But as one Stoningham country-club guest reminds us, in order to have contempt for money, you have to have some in the first place. The *Walden* ethos that Ron lives is possible because of property and a home he inherited from his family, and money that will allow him to wait patiently as his *silver*-tipped spruces grow. Although Ron is a gardener, much of his "work" is characteristic of the leisure class such as hunting, carpentry, and pottery. When Ron repairs the Wedgwood teapot, the suggestion that he can exist in Cary's materialistic world is ironic, since he will not allow her to continue driving back and forth between her world and his, as he is quite capable of doing. It also points out that his ethos might have some cracks through which Cary can gain control over him.

Later in the film, Cary returns home from a Stoningham Country party, and we see her daughter in the front yard, explaining the specifics of sexual attraction between men and women to her new football player beau. When she tells him that a man's bravado and virile persona are simply cries for love and affection, he replies, "I don't get it." Although we are supposed to snicker at her buffoonish boyfriend, who may be too dumb for the intellectual Kay, his confusion at "not getting it" suggests that a blurred masculinity is incomprehensible. It is noteworthy that Kay's boyfriend does not understand a theory that challenges the masculine persona he and other men in the film seem to embody, as a false front that hides their need for "affection." Kay tries to explain again, but Cary returns home from the party and Kay tells her boyfriend "not here," moving him from the frame where her mother is, to an off-screen area where she and the viewers can't see or hear them. This forces the audience to also "not get it," which suggests that there is no real answer to how man can operate under competing ideologies of patriarchy.

Kay is now heading towards the same patriarchal trap her mother is in—she paints her nails red and also wears a red dress, but her transition is considered proper since she separates herself from her mother's body. But Kay has trapped her football player beau into the domestic trap as well, forcing him to abandon his masculine sport for a responsible, family life. It is interesting that Cary's son, Ned, decides to work for a foreign company, a common starting occupation for novice business-men in America and England in the last part of the century. Ned wishes to escape American home-life for a foreign shore where he won't be burdened.

Ron's song at the country party also hints at how the domestic ideology and virile adventurer myth can't coexist:

My, My, My,  
I got rovey eye  
How he fly, All around the town!

Aye, Aye, Aye (Eye, Eye, Eye?)

Every passerby,

He look-a her up

He look-a her down.

Ooh-oo, ooh-oo

Lady what a pleasant view!

Ooh-oo, (Wolf Whistle)

I make the flirty eye at you.

My, My, My

No more rovey eye,

No more fly, all around the town.

Not since I, find a passerby,

She look-a me up, I look-a her down.,

She and me, we go to town!

The song considers the male gaze/camera's gaze as synonymous, since both continually look Cary "up" and "down," as Ron does earlier when he supposedly tells Mick that she has the prettiest legs he'd ever seen. By pointing out that when the "eye" ("I") joins the woman, he is no longer allowed wandering about town, Ron's song shows that the domestic ideology and virile adventurer myth can't coexist. Ned, Mick and Ron may be living their lives according to masculine scripts; however, they are trapped by the domestic ideologies which the "ideal woman" and the "ideal man" embodies. The only man who is still allowed to wander is the one who remains unmarried—Ned, who leaves for a trip to Iran with no woman in tow, which encapsulates the American myth of the potent man against the foreign wilderness.

Does melodrama close off the possibility for ideal non-patriarchal supporting places for both women and men? Yes, in *All That Heaven Allows*, both aesthetic and ideological evidence informs the reading that Cary's desires must be channeled and controlled by dominant ideologies. But equally important, Sirk shows how Ron is caught between competing ideologies and discourses which monitor his desires and his choices as well. All the choices made by men in this film force them to uphold patriarchal ideologies, and any disruption (especially by entering the domestic realm) results in harm to the male/masculine subject. When Ron tries to force Cary to make a choice, he is following a patriarchal script which demands the subjugation of women to support a virile and untrammled lifestyle; and this script can be connected to the postwar American lifestyle which forced men and women into inflexible domestic roles as provider and homemaker. Sirk commented that "The studio loved the title. . . they thought it meant you could have everything you wanted. I meant it exactly the other way round. As far as I am concerned, heaven is stingy" (*All That Heaven Allows*, DVD extras). Many critics argue that, for Sirk, America in the 50's was a far cry from Willa Cather's vi-

sion of America in *My Antonia* or Henry David Thoreau's in *Walden*, two novels the director admired.<sup>1</sup> To qualify this, Sirk's love of America related to all things western: the desert, Native Americans, "sheltering woods, open country...old farms (Halliday 101)" and values related to western expansion, such as individualism and a strong work ethic. Sirk says that his "love for America was shaken" by wars, Hiroshima, and, later, the McCarthy trials. Conformity through consumerism, required for membership in suburban neighborhoods, fit none of the values that his vision of America endorsed. Sirk's film lays bare several social and gender contradictions -- not to resolve them, but to contain his characters: making his melodrama not a triumph over repression, but instead complicit with it while illustrating how patriarchy is as much of a trap for men as it is for women.

**All that America Allows: Desire and Transgression in  
*There's Always Tomorrow***

The staples of middle class life – handsome houses, lavish decors, fast cars, busy social lives, spoiled, demanding, children – were the bars of prison. The mirrors and frames that are Sirk's visual trademark reflect, among other things, both the frozen, artificial quality and the illusory nature of these creature comforts.

Molly Haskell (*Written on the Wind*, DVD extras)

In a 1955 ad for Van Gab Sport Shirts, we see a bevy of bathing beauties swimming among neatly folded shirts and molded ties. The shirts eerily float in between their curvy, bikini-clad bodies and the tagline beckons, "c'mon in...the wearing's fine" (Ad 480). The image of sirens welcoming men to the murky green water was my first impression, yet the eerie floating shirts also suggest the disappearance of the male body completely, since it is not needed to help the shirts stay afloat. The masculine subject has been reduced to an empty symbol (clothes with no wearers), and unlike the colorful bikinis the girls wear, the man is forced into a drab and conformist uniform. Postwar America, with its secure economy and rampant consumerism, was maintained by the men who drove new cars into "the city," leaving their wives at home to take care off families that averaged 3-4 children. As the women felt confined by the drudgery of domestic life, the men were also trapped by the routine jobs and careers that were often connected to the military industrial complex.

A 1955 army recruitment poster suggests one such "masculine script" the young American man could follow. Thousands of young men were like "Mike," forced to join the Army because of financial constraints or a sense of duty, placed in careers that were connected to military-science training or other jobs created by the new technological age, and settling down to marry "high school sweethearts." Although the "explosive economy, combined with the generous benefits the government doled out to returning veterans" would allow men and women to marry young, have children, and live a life of luxury on one income, it was still the husband who was expected to earn the income

that would support the lavish suburban lifestyle of multiple appliances, vacations, and parties (Collins 399). The shirt ad highlighted in the beginning of this section depicts the emptiness many of these men experienced, by connecting the masculine scripts they followed to uniforms of masculinity that disconnected them from their untrammelled lifestyle, and suggesting that their "manhood" was hollow. Popular films of the period such as *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, connected male malaise to the uniform of the advertising agent, the grey flannel suit, while films like Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* attempted to gloss over the possibility that men would have to choose between their own desires and their prescribed, necessary roles.

Sirk's *There's Always Tomorrow* attacks the postwar domestic lifestyle and the claustrophobia that it creates for men. The story focuses on Clifford Groves (Fred MacMurry), a toy maker who is beaten down by his "perfect" home, his trophy wife, Marion (Joan Bennett), and his self-interested children, Vinnie (William Reynolds), Ellen (Gigi Perreau) and Frankie (Judy Nugent). At the beginning of the film, Clifford approves an exciting new robot toy called "Rex, the Walky-talky robot man." The toy's mantra, "I'm Rex, the robot man, push me and steer me wherever you can," describes Clifford's oppression perfectly, but he finds hope when an old lover, Norma Vale (Barbara Stanwyck) drops by to visit him one night. There are indications that Norma may still have feelings for Clifford, but he doesn't seem to be aware of this and they keep meeting innocently, visiting his offices and vacationing together at Palm Beach. Clifford's son, Vinnie, suspects them of adultery and not sharing his suspicions in order to protect his mother, proceeds to treat them both disrespectfully when Clifford invites Norma to dinner. Along with Ellen, he bemoans the fact that their father is tearing the family apart. They decide to not tell their mother but to confront Norma, who accuses them of creating a home with no love for their father. They beg her "to not take father" away from them, but she doesn't promise them anything. Clifford finally reaches the breaking point and tells Norma that he wants to be with her, but Norma disagrees, arguing that he belongs with his family. This bleak look at suburban life ends with Clifford looking forlornly out his home's window at a plane overhead, which carries Norma away from his life. Marion appears at this side, takes his arm and leads him away from the window, as his children gaze on, approvingly.

It's not surprising that such a depressing deconstruction of masculinity in postwar America and of the suburban dream received lukewarm reviews and kept audiences out of the theatre. Its commentary on the American family shares much in common with *All that Heaven Allows*, where Cary's children cannot imagine that, as a parent, she might have any desires that do not involve keeping up her house, her image, or providing for her children. Clifford Groves supports his family in a job that places him in the forefront of the new technological age but also infantilizes him -- he operates a toy-manufacturing company. The film opens with a still that announces "Once upon a time, in Southern California," suggesting an everyman tale and a dreamy, tranquil quality fairy tale to the story we are about to see. The camera shows us the entrance to Clifford's toy manufacturing company (whose windows look Dickensian and thus

unreal) and follows a delivery girl as she gazes at a child's rocking horse. The girl exclaims, "What a dreamy place to work in!" to which the secretary responds, "I suppose so." Sirk disturbs the placid surface of the toy-company, exposing the over-worked secretary and consumerist excess of the plastic clown dolls and rabbits that adorn the wall as far removed from the beautiful toy-shop of dreams. Instead of a lone-craftsman creating a porcelain doll or a train-set, Groves has an army of men resembling a factory, designing concepts for toys behind him. One of his workers presents Clifford with "Rex, the walky-talky Robot Man," which he shelves for later review. Clifford is about to leave for the day with theatre tickets for his wife's birthday, but he complains to his secretary that he didn't see his wife before he left home and that he is worried she might have made other plans. The narrative already suggests that Clifford's job and Marion's domestic duties are taking up so much of their time that they may not even get to see each other before he leaves home in the morning. His secretary tells him that she has been calling his home for almost an hour, but hasn't been able to get through, and we realize why when Clifford comes home – Vinnie and Ellen have been on the phone with friends and significant others, planning for evening parties and weekend get-togethers. The children are shown as self-interested and worried about clothing and appearances, a judgment on the postwar teenager and their consumerist excess, that made their fathers into nothing but powerless providers.

Advertisements and photograph-spreads in magazines such as *McCall's* and *Life* emphasized family "togetherness," but the reality of this family was far from these images. By 1956, the average teenager had an income of \$10.55 a week from allowances and jobs such as baby-sitting (what could have constituted an entire disposable income for a family in 1940), allowing women and young men "unprecedented power as consumers" (Collins 409). Most teenagers were too busy listening to records, driving their cars, and watching more than 4.4 million television sets to pay attention to family time (Collins 410). To further keep them away from the home and hearth, middle-class teenage girls entered long-term "steady" relationships as early high-school, signified by a pin or ring from their boyfriend. When Vinnie calls his girlfriend Ann, he asks her whether she will be wearing his cap and pin at the "dance tonight" referencing the practice of wearing a marker that showed a couple was going "steady." Popular teenagers were expected to go on dates every weekend, a script inspired by television shows such as *Gidget*, where Sandra Dee waited until the "leading man," distracted by another seductress, would realize his mistake and finally call her (Collins 409). The self-interested and self-serving teenager, who didn't have to work and contribute to the family income as in earlier decades, was not commonplace in many movies or television shows where all we see are harmonious families with a father that works, a mother who stays at home, and a family that always seemed to be spending time with each other.<sup>1</sup> Sirk's film highlights how men such as Clifford were being trapped by the many contradictory ideologies and images of postwar America, especially by the domestic ideology of family and home.

Their lack of interest in his emotions, results in his "empty masculinity." We see this when Clifford comes home from work – no children rush up to greet him, his son even asks him to be quiet because he is on the phone with his girlfriend. Clifford calls to his wife, who doesn't come down until she is called by their youngest daughter Frankie. When Clifford tries to give her the flowers he has brought and wish her a happy birthday, the children interrupt her asking to borrow some clothes. Clifford surprises Marion with an invitation to dinner and a show, but she reminds him that tonight is the "world-shaking event" of Frankie's ballet recital. Clifford argues "I'm very, very grateful that you were born, and may I remind you, this day belongs to you," but they are again interrupted by Frankie who appears in her tutu and asks, "will my hair glitter across the footlights?" Marion turns away from her husband and hugs her daughter exclaiming, "Like a glowbug, my dear!" Clifford and Marion's domestic responsibilities pulls attention away from their needs and their enjoyment, and when Clifford tries to force her to go, she reminds him that she learned in "Child Guidance Class" that she can't disappoint her child. Clifford mocks her child guidance class and adds, "I'll explain to our little prima-donna that her mother is entitled to a life of her own, at least occasionally." Clifford's derision of the "child guidance class," isn't a derision of his wife but the growing psychiatric control over parenting skills. Clearly the "child guidance class" has taught her about "family togetherness" and supporting one's child, however, Marion cannot see that her husband and their relationship needs equal attention. Marion picks on Clifford for "being out of sorts," but doesn't seem to acknowledge that he is forced to work all day and return to a house that is lonely and virtually empty; or that in this case, "father knows best." No one chooses to go with him to the play with Vinnie and Ellen citing dates and a meeting with a friend to "discuss emotional problems," and Ellen even asks him for money on her way out, saying "I guess it's okay," when Clifford only gives her a dollar.

The contradictory discourses of patriarchy which demands that men settle down to raise families makes Clifford impotent and we see him eating dinner in a frilly apron, and spilling the coffee that he tries to make. It is not surprising that it is at this moment that Norma Vale arrives. Norma Miller, who was once Clifford's lover, left him and changed her name to Norma Vale to start a fashion firm in New York City. Norma looks at his home and a portrait of his family, and tells him "the house is beautiful – warm, cheerful, just as I had imagined it – the kind you always wanted." Clifford mumbles his response, "I guess...I guess I did." Clifford's response implies that he was the one who desired the domestic lifestyle, yet Norma didn't and she left to continue her own career instead of becoming dissolved into the picture of the all-American family. The portrait of the Groves family she looks at while talking about her new life is telling because Clifford isn't shown in it, just Marion and the children. Clifford may be the one taking the picture but he is then reduced to an invisible figure that is only defined by his family. Even his job is not important – his family doesn't acknowledge that he works hard and that his money supports their "activities" such as dates and dance classes. Norma, on the other hand, has created a product, a

fashion design firm that bears her name. Her life is defined by her work, but not by the routine of a suburban lifestyle or domestic duties. Clifford takes her to theatre where she reminds him that he once dropped all assignments at the toy company and took her to a play and dinner afterwards. Her comment becomes another reminder of how Marion and he can no longer live a life characterized by impulsive decisions – he is tied to his work because it is a necessary for his family, and it no longer brings him joy. When Norma looks at the dolls and pronounces them “marvelous,” Clifford teases her, “I didn’t think you’d be interested in the doll business,” to which Norma replies, “Why? I dress live ones now.” Norma’s comment is resurrected later when she invites Marion to her clothing store to try on a new couture ballgown. Marion goes to buy the dress and emerges from the dressing room in a ball-gown with a low black top, and a full white tulle skirt. Norma insists she have the dress, but Marion refuses, telling her that she is no longer an ingénue, and such a dress would be inappropriate. Norma argues that she wears similar clothes even though she isn’t young herself, and that Clifford will simply love it. But Marion teases her, “There speaks the bachelor girl... after twenty years of marriage a husband never raves about anything his wife wears.” Marion’s dress gestures towards her as a being a sexual person, since both Norma and Ann try and convince her, it will make Clifford “rave”. Marion reminds Norma that, as a mother, she is no longer a sexual being, and becomes a live doll without any sexual or emotional desires. Even worse, her comment makes Clifford impotent since it erases any desire that he might have and points out to the viewer that “twenty years of marriage” has replaced sexual desire with sexual repression or boredom. Marion clearly looks at this as a positive sign suggesting that it is the sign of a solid marriage, yet Ann, who has accompanied Marion to the store (who may be marrying Vinnie and know about Clifford’s “infidelity”), looks on with horror, realizing that Clifford’s desires are overlooked by his entire family, including his own wife, and none of them seem to notice this.

Thomas Elsaesser writes that melodramas “explore psychological and sexual repression...in conjunction with the theme of inadequacy” (67). This explicit sexual code is broken down into “male impotence and female frigidity” – and Marion is clearly frigid. She is often shown falling asleep before her husband comes to bed, and rarely shares a goodnight kiss or hug. While Norma wears clothes that show her neck, her shoulders or extremely boxy clothes which highlight her power, Marion wears outfits that hide her body and can best be described as a housewife’s uniform.

The most telling difference would be Norma’s nightgown, a sexy, clinging silk sheath, versus Marion’s Victorian nightie dripping with lace and a high collar tied with a large ribbon. Clifford’s impotence and Norma’s frigidity also point to a favorite plot device of Sirk’s – regression. One could argue that the Groves children have regressed into demanding, younger, pre-adolescents, and both Clifford and Marion have regressed to an asexual childhood. Even Clifford’s job which provides for the family is associated with children and regression, and Norma’s comment that she has moved onto “live dolls” implies that she has followed a normal trajectory, detaching herself from a child-like





Norma's couture clothing

state. Sirk seems to be pointing the finger at the 50's lifestyle, evidenced through the mise-en-scene of the suburban home, as the culprit which has transformed Clifford into a powerless and ineffective patriarch. What's worse is that Clifford wanted this lifestyle – Norma references her own unsuccessful marriage by telling him, “No one should marry out of loneliness,” pointing out that Clifford's reason for marrying may have been his own loneliness when Norma left him. Clifford wills his own emasculation by choosing a lifestyle that stifles him. Even when he is enjoying spending time with Norma doing many of the things that he hasn't done in a while, such as horse riding and dancing, he imagines himself as a young man:

So easy for a man to slip into a rut. Once he's caught in it, he didn't dare do the things he's used to do, he doesn't feel the excitement he used to feel. If anything, he feels a little scared of life. You know something? Right now I feel like I've made my first touchdown. Not a day older.

Clifford isn't imagining himself as a child but a teenager – he doesn't want the all consuming, pleasure seeking existence of a child, but the carefree days of a teenager. When he and Marion fight later, she reminds him “if life were an adventure, it would be very exhausting,” which completely deflates his masculine identity; Marion's pronouncement shows that his life is defined by routines much like a young child who is told that they must wake up, they must go to school and they must go play – Marion continually reminds him to come out of the cold, or take a hot bath, or to change his clothes, just as a mother would. Clifford is told he must be a provider and bury his desires for his own life, but it isn't just a realization that he has regressed and that

he is emasculated that bothers him. After a dinner where his children treat Norma disrespectfully, he complains to his wife:

Coddle them, as if they were still in their cradles... I'll tell you why [I'm so upset], I invited a friend to my home... I hoped it would be a pleasant evening. Well thanks to the children, it was anything but that... I'm tired of the children taking over, I'm tired of being pushed in the corner... I'm tired of being taken for granted. Becoming like one of my own toys – Clifford Groves, the walkie-talkie robot. Wind me up in the morning, and I walk and talk. I go to work all day. Wind me up again, and I come home night and eat dinner and go to bed. Wind me up the next morning and I drive to work and work all day to pay the bills. I'm sick and tired of the sameness of it day in and day out. Don't you ever want to get out of this house...?

Clifford acknowledges that his children are coddled by their mother with negative consequences, but he also compares himself to the toy his company has developed, Rex, the walky-talky robot man. Clifford points to the disturbing consequence of “domestic bliss”: his body is no longer his own, it has been replaced by a metal man who calls out “Push me and steer me wherever you can.” Sirk injects the situation of “good homemaker/bad career woman” so that Clifford can project his anxieties onto another surface. After the dinner party, Marion tells Clifford that she thinks Norma is lonely, and when Clifford responds, “Her life's too exciting, too successful” for her to be lonely, Marion corrects him: “Cliff, excitement never means as much to a woman as to a man. Nor do they exclude the possibility of loneliness. I also saw the way she looked at this house. The way she looked at Frankie and Ellen and Vinnie. I feel sorry for her.” Marion doesn't see her own containment, but is quick to suggest that another woman *is* contained: “She's missed what every woman really wants, oh I know she's successful... but tonight I was very proud and thankful for my children, my home and you, of course dear.” In a scene that closely resembles an image from *All that Heaven Allows*, we see Marion talk to her husband as she looks at her reflection in her vanity mirror. After her tirade against Norma, she pulls out a memo pad and says “ooh! What a day I have tomorrow,” going over a long task list of chores, such as returning library books, taking Frankie to the dentist, dealing with a laundress, and marketing. Sirk doesn't allow Marion to get away with bashing a career woman – Marion's reflection (with Cliff behind her later) is framed by the mirror, suggesting that she and Clifford are the ones who are really contained. Ironically, Marion's comments points to a new phenomenon for upper-middle class women, the fact that housework was becoming easier and women were increasingly dependent on their children for identities (Figure 6). Marion has a laundress and a maid who take care of all household chores; we see the maid cooking, cleaning, ironing and even taking away the dishes. Marion tells Cliff that she is “constantly moving around, running the house, looking after the children,” which is enough adventure for her, but in reality, she has nothing to do

but run around following her youngest child since the older ones are living their own self-absorbed lives. I am not devaluing mother-work, but pointing out that Marion's parenting seems based on no "real" work at all, which means a lifestyle completely dependent on her husband's earnings. Marion attacks Norma, suggesting that she desires the domestic lifestyle that the former possesses, however, Clifford and the audience know better: Later in the film, Norma tells friends that she cannot marry a man, because that would be bigamy since she's already married "happily" to 738 Madison Avenue. Her unconventional job and lifestyle provides enough satisfaction; Clifford on the other hand must support a family and has lost any chance at a real happiness. When he finally decides that he does want Norma, he tells her:

I've fallen in love with you. After you called I went home. It's the same house I've lived in for years; I've always felt comfortable there. I sat down, I tried to read the paper, I tried to relax. But I couldn't, Norma, all of a sudden I felt desperate sitting in my own living room. I felt as though I were trapped in a tomb of my own making. And all the years until today were stones closing up the tomb and I had to escape because I was still alive, alive and wanting you.

Clifford echoes *All that Heaven Allows* and Cary's protest against being locked into an Egyptian style tomb as one of her husband's possessions – seeing Clifford "feeling desperate in his own living room," echoes the image of Cary's reflection frozen in the reflection of her new television set. The boundaries of consumerism have been pushed to include products that will combat loneliness, and for Cary and Clifford neither the TV nor the suburban home provides comfort from the stones closing up their tombs.

When the children go to confront Norma, they tell her it is for their mother. She tells them that they only think of their mother, and never their father's emotions:

Your father has been neglected for a long, long time, by a family he loves. You've treated him shamefully, taken him for granted. Everyone has taken him for granted because he's sweet and thoughtful and because he's a good man. Do you know how much he loves you? You should hear his plans for your future Vinnie, or they how his eyes shine when we speaks about the princess. In spite of the lack of your interest and rudeness. Do you think if you gave your father half the love you gave your mother, you would have needed to come up here with your accusations today? Why should Cliff need me if he was given love at home, why should he go on the outside for it? [...] Why do you take and take and not give back one shred of love in return? How many years do you think a real man will put up with that? ...And to your father, the most important thing...is family's happiness. You couldn't be as blind not to have known that. Can you blame anybody but yourself if he is thinking about leaving you?

When defending Clifford, it is interesting that Norma refers to his dreams for Vinnie and Ellen. Earlier, when Frankie announces that she wants to be pretty “not for a man” but for “her dancing career,” Clifford interjects, telling her that she will change her mind when she is older. This is surprising, since Frankie is hinting at a path similar to Norma (she even asks her whether Norma knows any dancers herself), a path that Clifford would wish for his daughter instead of the domestic nightmare that has ensnared him. Sirk’s telling comments about the children in his movies perhaps points out the complicated position that Clifford is placed in:

I am extremely interested in the contrast between children and adults: there is a world looking at another world which is going downhill, but this new world does not yet know if its own fate will be the same...the look of a child is always fascinating. It seems to be saying: is that what fate has in store for me, too?  
(Halliday 107)

Frankie tells her mother that she wants to be as pretty as Marion, but not in order to attract boys, but to define herself with a dancing career. Her comment suggests that she might realize her mother’s prettiness is vacuous, and that Clifford married her to have a perfect trophy wife, not realizing what it means to have a spouse one doesn’t respect. For Norma to evoke the “plans” that Clifford has for his children, and the way his eyes shine when he thinks about their future, suggests that she herself also knows that Clifford is trapped by his lifestyle and can never leave it behind for hers. This point is further emphasized when Ellen begs, “Please don’t take him away from us--” much like Ned and Kay selfishly denying Cary’s desires, Vinnie and Ellen can’t imagine allowing their father’s happiness with Norma. As Norma sees, they are “blind” to his desires, and even if he chooses to leave them, he can’t be happy without them. Ironically, Clifford’s position – having to choose between parenthood and sexuality – is a choice more often discussed in terms women such as Cary from *All That Heaven Allows*. Sirk opens up the possibility that men’s desires are also thwarted by patriarchal dichotomies when Norma tells him, “Norma Vale is leaving because she can face reality. I too have a life. And I’m going back to it.” Norma doesn’t allow him to leave with her not because she doesn’t want it, but because she knows that his life will not really allow him to leave. As she delivers these lines, we see a long shot of the couple and Rex the robot man standing on the table in front of them. Norma adds, “What will you do the day we’re together and you hear Vinnie Groves is about to graduate and you’ll want to run to him but you’ll wonder if he’ll see you again? You’ll know you want to see Marion again, hear her voice, quarrel with her over the bills and the children. It’s such a good life. It’s such a good life. What have I to give you to take its place? Be happy Cliff. You will be happy.” Norma knows it isn’t a “good life” since she reminds him earlier that she has a life that she wants to get back, a life that she chose twenty years ago when she initially left him. When Norma rushes out and leaves him, he follows her only to see her cab leave in the rain. He comes back to

his office and looks at the robot on the table, and as he walks to the window to watch the rain, Rex starts walking chanting, "Push me and steer me wherever you can." Even Norma is able to push and steer him back to his domestic life, because there is no space in which they can exist which would not hurt others. Norma accuses him of wanting to go back to the days of his youth when he was "carefree," which is odd considering the selfish representation of his children, especially the uptight Vinnie who sneaks around suspecting his dad of adultery and is shocked that he would do such a thing to their "happy family." In Michael Stern's biography, Sirk reveals that he had hoped to end the film on a hopeless note: Rex would march off the table and fall to the ground. After flailing for a bit the credits would roll over his metal body. We see the robot walk away from Clifford accompanied by extremely melodramatic violin music signaling the "end" of the film, but a slow dissolve takes us back to the home. Connecting the robot's death to Clifford's death connects the oppression of postwar culture to the oppression of melodrama. Sirk tells Stern, "In tragedy the life always ends. By being dead, the hero is at the same time rescued from life's troubles. In melodrama, he lives on—in an unhappy happy end." Sirk believed that melodrama was connected to a long tradition of Greek tragedies, but as a genre, and American melodrama in particular, there was a possibility to create a more complicated bleak picture: "I think often of the connection between 'play' and 'please.' They are the same thing: a play must please. And, in a way, the American melodrama allowed me to do this." Sirk introduces the melodrama as a genre that can please both the conservative morals of some people, but can also be an area in which he can "play" with a vision of a comfortable America.

Even as Sirk was asked to stick on a happier ending, he "plays" with it until we can see the depressing vision of the state of American masculinity, as well as the American family, that is emphasized throughout the film. The camera moves from Clifford's office to his home, where Vinnie asks for Ann's forgiveness and her hand in marriage; the film is suggesting that heterosexual marriage is still an important institution and should be the answer for good Americans. Vinnie assures Ann that he's "learned what it means to really care for someone," which also suggests that a caring relationship within patriarchal confines is possible. However, the camera moves inside the home to the framed picture of the family without Clifford, a first hint that Vinnie and Ann will not be a promising vision of the future. Sirk adds to his remarks about children:

The point is: are children really pure? I don't think so...they are symbols of melancholy, not of purity. Children are usually put into pictures right at the end to show that a new generation is coming up. In my films I was to show exactly the opposite: I think it is the tragedies which are starting over again, always and always. (Halliday 107)

When Clifford comes home, his children make feeble attempts to communicate with him, but they ignore his clear unhappiness. Only the audience is privileged to

know that Clifford has been forced into a home where he doesn't want to be, and Sirk makes it clear that he cannot leave. As he watches the plane through the window, (which carries Norma away), his wife comes up to him and takes his arm, saying, "It's not like you to be irritable and depressed." Clifford puts on a weak smile and responds, "You know me better than I've known myself," and Marion replies "I should after a lifetime with you." We can see his wife is leading him away from the window in her usual motherly way, and the three children look on as they walk away, through bars that separate the foyer from the living room. Frankie sighs, looking longingly at her parents and says, "They make a handsome couple don't they?" while Ellen and Ned smile at each other, satisfied and happy. This happy ending is clearly ironic since the children look like animals behind the bars of a cage, indicating, as Sirk says, that they are "not pure" but are instead "symbols of [Clifford's] melancholy" (Halliday 107). Their wistful look at their parents indicates that they might be doomed to repeat their parent's lifestyle. Sirk also suggests that they have kept their parents prisoner and are looking at them through the bars, and because of this they do not indicate the potential of a new generation since their selfishness keeps their father prisoner in a place he does not want to be.

**Swing Along with Mitch: Crisis of Masculinity in *Written on the Wind*.**

There's an imperial grandeur to the ironic antics of the unhappy oil billionaires in Douglas Sirk's corn-fed Greek tragedy... This was Sirk's greatest hit. It's the essence of 1957 America – luridly color-coordinated, deliriously mambo-mad, and petit bourgeois to the max.

**J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice* (*Written on the Wind*, DVD extras).**

*Written on the Wind* is the culmination of several of the themes that Sirk explores in *All That Heaven Allows* and *There's Always Tomorrow*: excessive consumption, spoiled children, the "myth of lost innocence and purity," and finally, the changing face of masculinity in the "Virgin land that has so rapidly become one of the most technologically advanced countries of the world" (Wood 24). Hadley, Texas is a desert town that was created by the Hadley oil fortune, and as the still below illustrates, it is a dismal landscape of oil fields. Kyle and Marylee's bright yellow and red sports cars are vulgar reminders of their wealth, in a town where most of the inhabitants work low-paying jobs connected to the Hadley Oil Company.

In this ugly landscape, it is not surprising that the film imagines several "ideal places," the most important being "the river," which Kyle, Mitch and Marylee visited as children. When Marylee revisits "the river," we see that it is a lush green field, with a small creek that is hidden away from the harsher landscape of the town. Leaning against a tree, she hears voices from their childhood surrounding her like ghosts. The river and their memories of it suggest a queer ideal space where their gendered identities



Mitch and Marylee with the Hadley oil fields in the landscape.

didn't matter; however, Sirk even troubles the image of this ideal space. "The river" is identical to Ron Kirby's greenhouse home in *All That Heaven Allows*; it appears to be a more ideal place with more authentic values, but instead is a space that has been corrupted by postwar culture. Marylee has fond memories of this space, and even Kyle calls out as he dies from the shotgun wound, "I'll be waiting down at the river waiting...waiting;" however, the memory isn't as happy for Mitch, who has been taking the blame for all of Kyle's mistakes.

In *Sirk on Sirk*, the director discusses the major unifying theme in the film as being *échee*, or failure. The French form of the word doesn't just mean failure, but also "defeat," "no exit," and "being blocked" (Halliday 119). For Sirk, the film points to the "hopeless [or] ugly kind of failure," from which there is "no exit" (Halliday 119). The major failure in the film is the failure of a coherent masculine identity and, thus, a failure of a coherent American identity.<sup>2</sup>

When we first see Kyle at the 21 Club he is describing Mitch to two other women, and refers to him as being "eccentric," because "he's poor." Kyle joke points towards the postwar consumer driven phenomenon where anyone who wasn't traditionally successful could be considered "eccentric." Kyle adds that Mitch is "just a country boy," with "assets...you can't buy with money." Mitch is almost always shown wearing tan or brown suits, shirts, and khaki colored pants, emphasizing his job as a geologist who works with the land -- similar to his costuming in *All That Heaven Allows*. Kyle, in pattered suits, and Marylee, in body-hugging bright colors, stand out starkly against the Texas landscape. Kyle later tells Lucy that Mitch's father was his own father's idol, a small rancher who is a legend in their county, and a "great hunter... a throwback to Daniel Boone." Kyle also confides that he wished Mitch's father could have been his father. Mitch's father is shown as a kinder and attentive patriarch, who allowed Mitch to hang around the Hadley children in order to expose him to better opportunities. The

Wayne home is a small cabin, with a running stream and several dogs, and both Mitch and his father are shown hunting and actually talking to each other on their porch. This stands in sharp contrast to Kyle and Marylee's existence, which is characterized by violent fighting, drinking, and excessive sex and almost no communication with their father. The values that Sirk admires about the American West are embodied by Mitch's father, who is shown as a hunter, an "untrammled man of action" like Daniel Boone. Mr. Hadley, as seen in the portrait behind Marylee below, is connected to an oil well which his daughter clutches and weeps over at the end of the film.



Marylee weeping over her father's oil well.

Sirk calls the oil well a "frightening symbol of American society," connecting it to the major technology firms that would control American consumption, and Marylee weeping over the oil well shows her crying over an American dream that is decaying and possibly finished. The oil well also serves as a symbol of failed masculinity. Earlier in the film, Mr. Hadley tells Mitch that he offered a doctor a million dollars to save his wife but she died, and he also threw money at his own brother, a playboy like Kyle, who was also killed. He confides in Mitch, "I failed them all – my wife, my brother Joe, my children." Hadley, like Clifford Groves, is a failed patriarch because his children reflect that he has failed – allowing Sirk to also point out the American family has failed.

The idea of the oil well as representing *échec* or "being blocked" is also ironic because Kyle's "failure" is connected to his doctor's diagnosis that he suffers a "weakness" which will prevent him from having a child. The notion that tests show a "weakness" in Kyle is terrifying to him, and is connected to the fact that "weakness" was a terrifying word for postwar American men. During WWII, several discourses focused on over-mothering, or excesses in any childrearing practice, resulting in feminized men who would make ineffective soldiers. Phillip Wylie's 1942 work, *A Generation of Vipers*, is a particularly



insidious example of this type of discourse. These discourses later evolved and were utilized by Joseph McCarthy during the HUAC trials, where the senator argued that weakness in the form of homosexuals and communists would have to be rooted out from the American landscape. Kyle's anxiety over his impotency is immense and forces him to break his year-long effort at sobriety, indicating that an accusation of "weakness" in postwar America denoted failures that often had serious consequences. Although not explored in this study of the film, the possibility of a queer relationship between Kyle and Mitch is also exposed as a part of the diagnosis of a "weakness," since medical discourses considered homosexuality a disease. Kyle's inability to produce a child and his untimely death are the "end" of the Hadley line – and when Kyle beats Lucy causing a miscarriage, he kills hope for a new generation, thus the symbolic phallic oil is, in fact, "blocked." This failure is starkly represented when he finishes his conversation with the doctor and emerges from the drugstore to see a child aggressively bouncing on a mechanical horse and mischievously laughing at Kyle. On one level, the child simply represents the lost son that Kyle will never have, but he also stands for Kyle's "impotence," as Robin Wood argues, because of the sexual overtones of the rocking (Wood 24-25). I disagree with Wood's assertion that it represents Kyle's yearning for his lost innocence, instead, I believe the boy stands for Kyle play-acting a successful, adult, masculinity. The image of the horse connects to a comment made by Mitch's father earlier in the film, where he tells Mitch he always mistrusted cars because their speed always makes one feel that they haven't gotten someplace truly far away. By extension, Mr. Wayne is then arguing that a horse, a symbol from the mythic West, is a potent symbol of masculinity which allows one to feel that they have traveled and thus achieved something; and the image of the boy laughing on a violently lurching and mechanical horse perverts this image, pointing out that Kyle will never achieve a real masculinity akin to the Western cowboy. The boy is a stand-in for Kyle but only as a grotesque imitation of his state.

Kyle continually sees himself as a failed reflection of Mitch: when Mitch introduces himself as a geologist, Kyle tells Lucy that he had "rocks" in his brain during college, so he failed out and never assumed control of the family business, as Mitch clearly has. Wishing Mitch's father was his own, he tells Lucy "that his [own] father is so big," that he "can't fit his shoes." This doesn't mean that his father isn't failed – the portrait of him in the still above shows his "bigness" – but depends on symbols of masculinity that are unstable such as oil wells, money, and material security. It isn't just that Kyle is the spoiled son who cannot live up to his father's demands; Sirk points out that these demands are inadequate measures of masculinity – the correct shoes to fill are those of Mitch's father, who is connected to the more agrarian and manly image of the American West versus the more industrial and impotent image of America which Hadley represents. It is interesting to compare *All That Heaven Allows* to *Written on the Wind* on these terms: the former represents an image of America that still shows some faith in its patriarchal institutions and discourses; while the latter shows individuals who are exposed to the frustrations of the promise of the American dream and its

institutions. In *Written on the Wind*, the military-industrial complex and consumerism did not allow escape from *échec*, but instead were directly a cause of failure. 1956 saw the release of *Giant*, another film about a Texas family that tames the wilderness with their three-story house, "Cadillacs, oil wells, private places, and dresses from Neiman Marcus," but with a significant implication that most of this wealth didn't belong to several generations, but to the nouveaux riche (Marling 2). *Giant* locates the solution to all its problems, including racial unrest and troubled gender identities, within the heart of the materially secure all-American family. On the other hand, *Written on the Wind* indicts the rich, materialistic and spoiled family and projects onto them a hyper-vision of the state of postwar America, particularly the suburb. Mr. Hadley's career suggests that he has control over the land since he mines for oil, but it is Mr. Wayne, Mitch's father whom he idolizes, the "Daniel Boone" type who is really connected to the meritorious myth of the West.

Sirk's earlier assertion that he couldn't make a "split character" out of Rock Hudson, rings more true here—Hudson is the more stable vision of American manhood, and he serves as a reminder of a disappearing masculinity under the new industrial regime. He doesn't "change" in this film, as he does in *All That Heaven Allows*, but is instead set free when Kyle is killed. For Mitch, "the river" that Kyle and Marylee nostalgically call out for represents his oppression, since he always had to take the blame and punishment for Kyle's mistakes whether it was stealing or philandering. Marylee asks him to marry her and take her back to "the river," or she'll testify that he was involved in Kyle's murder, to which Mitch ironically points out "Look how far we've come from the river." Marylee begins to storm off, thinking that Mitch sees her behavior as much less innocent than it used to be, however, she stops and turns around when she realizes that Mitch is really pointing out that he will again have to take the blame for one of Kyle's mistakes.

The mistake that both Mr. Hadley and Kyle seem to have made is to become consumed in the lifestyle of postwar America. Jacob Hadley, like Clifford Groves, works at a job that doesn't provide him with satisfaction, supports a patriarchal institution that exploits people, and allows his children to become rampant consumers: Kyle's courtship of Lucy involves him picking her up from a restaurant, flying her to Miami, and filling the hotel room with countless evening gowns, designer purses, lingerie and perfume. When she becomes angry with him because he thinks that he can buy her love, she threatens to leave, but his solution is even worse:

Just suppose I came to New York again – Not to play, but to work, to behave like --- like every Tom, Dick and Harry. I'd think seriously about all the things I used to laugh at, like having a wife, a home and kids.

Kyle's solution to act as a provider in a traditional domestic role shows how his vision of American masculinity has been corrupted, as he can only imagine himself living in excess or trapping himself within the boundaries of a traditional relationship. It is

even more surprising that he believes that he and Lucy should live such a conventional relationship, when she stressed that what would make her happy isn't a "walk down an aisle and [to] wind up in a suburb with a husband mortgage and children," but instead continue to have a career in an advertising firm. Kyle even twists this vision, when he begins to call a Madison Avenue firm, to "buy" it for her, not understanding that she and Mitch, who studied to become a geologist have defined themselves by their work and have earned it. Kyle's vision of himself as a "provider" entails buying an advertising firm on a whim for his future wife – hardly a satisfying venture for her. That Lucy wants to head an advertising firm, the vehicle by which a consumer society encourages its materialistic drives is troubling, but it is another example of how all choices in these films will support the patriarchy. However, compared to Marylee who seeks entertainment in her surroundings from the local gas station attendant, Lucy sees her own income as providing a safety net away from insincere men, if not patriarchy completely.

It is not surprising that Mitch, like Ned in *All that Heaven Allows*, plans on leaving America for Iran, which will allow him to escape the trappings of a postwar lifestyle. It is not clear where Mitch and Lucy are going at the end of the film, however, by leaving it unclear, Sirk posits the possibility that it will not be the trap of immense wealth that destroyed the Hadleys nor will it be the suburban prison that traps Clifford Groves. Because of Mitch's background and the fact that Lucy is also from a small town in the West, the film suggests that perhaps they will live a life that is closer to Mitch's father—untouched by postwar America.

### Conclusion

**In any case, is melodrama straightforwardly to be understood as a feminine genre? Or...does the believed femininity of that genre then exclude the male spectator from it, on the grounds that his fantasies are too "masculine" to allow him to be addressed by movies that to an appreciable extent deal with the realm of private emotion?**

**Kenneth Mackinnon, *Love, Tears, and the Male Spectator*.**

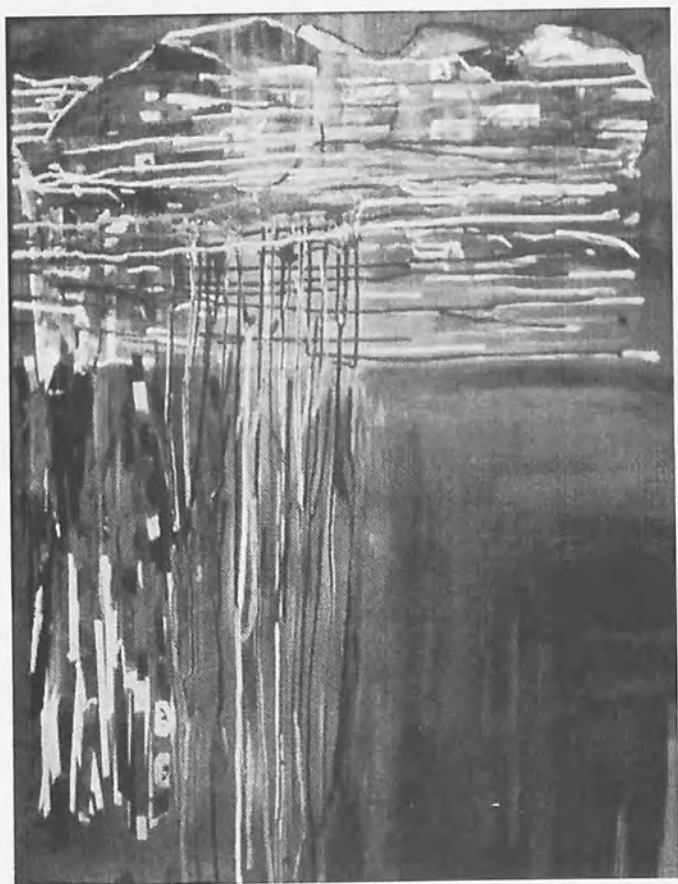
Molly Haskell argues in her book *From Reverence to Rape*, "Movies are one of the clearest and most accessible of looking glasses into the past, being both cultural artifacts and mirrors" (Byars 68). Haskell's work has been used to explain how women may or may not have responded to their images onscreen, and her sociological approach has been criticized for missing complex ideological nuances in audience reception. I am not arguing that audiences of postwar America received these films as scripts which endorsed or chastised their own choices – the social criticism of American culture by Sirk is a satisfying reminder that subversive messages can exist within a medium such as melodrama that seems insistent on preserving the status quo. Outlining the contradictions embodied by men, in a genre so associated with the feminine that its name

is interchangeable with the "women's film," is particularly difficult when discussing films from the 1950's. "Making men central to the female-oriented melodrama" is not anti-woman, but allows viewers to explore themes that are not often discussed in terms of masculinity, such as sacrifice, domesticity, the male body as focus of spectatorial pleasure, or the desires for a private self (Byars 93). Reading Sirk's melodrama as critical eyes gazing upon the state of American masculinity allows us to posit the possibility that men suffer under the burdens of patriarchy as well. The choices made by the male protagonists in this film both uphold *and* undermine the domestic ideals of the family implying that their choices are as complex and limited as the ones women are forced to make.

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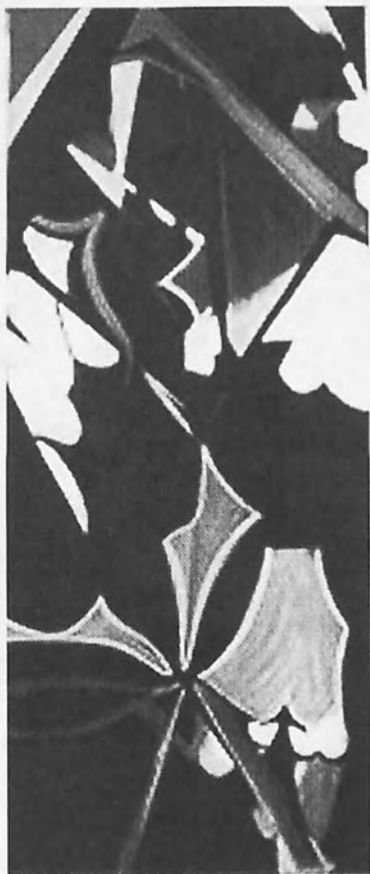
THE LEHIGH REVIEW



*Chris Tarrantino*



*Chris Tarrantino*



*Sabrina Slater*



## More Than Words:

### E.E. Cummings and the Confucian Creativity Connection

BY AMY FANTASIA

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**by: e.e. cummings**

Creation is a pursuit that occupies the thoughts and endeavors of many people. From the scholar, to the artist, to the inventor, the hope of a creation that is unique and has not yet been explored fuels many efforts. The purpose of this paper is to describe the ways in which no idea is truly original. Utilizing Confucian philosophy, the avenues of creation will be explored and evidence that all efforts at creation stem from previously existing knowledge will be offered. Support for this fact will be offered through an analysis of the poem "l(a" by E.E. Cummings. This paper does not argue that there is no such thing as creativity, but rather that creativity is based in our existing reality.



*The Analects* by Confucius forms the base of Confucian philosophy. The majority of the verses are quotes from Confucius himself, detailing the ways to become a gentleman. For this discussion, we will be focusing on the importance of keeping the rites in order and following the patterns that have been established and the focus on learning and teaching.

The following of rites arises very often in the verses. There is a focus on the correct way to treat parents, government appointment, and religious ceremonies. This focus illustrates the importance of following predetermined courses of action and not deviating too far from them. In Book 2, Verse 23, Confucius speaks to Tzu-chang:

Tzu-chang asked, "Can ten generations hence be known?"

The Master said, "The Yin built on the rites of the Hsia. What was added and what was omitted can be known. The Chou built on the rites of the Yin. What was added and what was omitted can be known. Should there be a successor to the Chou, even a hundred generations hence can be known. (66)

This quote illustrates the practicality of building on patterns that have already been established. There is a certain convenience in using preformed patterns. Confucius comments on this convenience. It allows generations to make connections to the past and see their roots, what changes have been made, and what changes were advantageous. This same convenience is used in the formation of ideas and art. The ability to look at and expand upon what has already been done is a standard way of creating. This mode of "creation" does not leave room for complete and utter originality. Some might view this realization as negative, but Confucius would not agree. He states, "The Chou is resplendent in culture, having before it the example of the two previous dynasties. I am for the Chou" (69). He views the progression from the past and the reliance on tradition as a way to enrich the present, rather than a way to impede creativity.

The focus on learning is also ever-present in the verses. Confucius discusses not only learning from others, but also the importance of learning in general. He states, "Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them. The good points of the one I copy; the bad points of the other I correct in myself" (88). In this example, Confucius highlights the importance of observing others and their works in order to enrich our own character. It is also important then, to consider the works of others when attempting to make something creative. By observing other's works, we can see their faults and successes and use these observations to our advantage.

The focus on learning also reflects the Confucian thought on creative endeavors and originality. The most intense verse on learning comes from Book 17, Verse 8:

The Master said, "Yu, have you heard about the six qualities and the six attendant faults?" "No" "Be seated and I shall tell you. To love benevolence without loving learning is liable to lead to foolishness. To love cleverness without loving learning is liable to lead to deviation from the right path. To love trustworthiness in word without loving learning is liable to lead to harmful behavior. To love forthrightness without loving learning is liable to lead to intolerance. To love courage without loving learning is liable to lead to insubordination. To love unbending strength without loving learning is liable to lead to indiscipline." (144)

Learning must accompany any attempt at the attainment of the six qualities in order to avoid the six faults. The focus on learning works to highlight the importance of understanding. Without learning, the attainment of creation could not be reached because one would be wrought with faults that would prevent creation. This idea supports the importance of having a working knowledge of existing works before attempting to alter them in any way.

Through the examples of the focus on rites and learning, it is apparent that Confucian philosophy understands creative efforts as a function of their base in past efforts and that learning about what has come before is vital in order to become a whole person. Upon first inspection the poem "l(a)" by E.E. Cummings seems completely creative and does not seem to fit the Confucian logic. When explored more closely, however, it is based more in preexisting concepts than imagined.

In order to begin discussion, it is best to parallel our example with an example offered in Confucian verse. In Book 3, Verse 23, Confucius comments on music, "This much can be known about music. It begins with playing in unison. When it gets into full swing, it is harmonious, clear and unbroken. In this way it reaches its conclusion" (71). Confucius states that we cannot know everything of music, but his statement captures what we do know of it. The beginning stages involve a collaborative effort that forms a collective whole. 'Unison' describes this whole in the Confucian example. We can parallel this whole to the body of knowledge that has been assembled regarding a topic. In my example, this body of knowledge would be all of the literature, in particular poetry, which was the basis for Cummings work. This body of knowledge is appreciated, but is categorized as a whole.

The second part of Confucius' example is the divergence of the music from a unified sound into a collaboration of harmonious parts. Musically, a harmony requires at least two parts. These two parts are different, but inform the work as a whole. There is a strange choice of words then, connecting the thoughts of harmonious music to something "clear and unbroken." Harmony, in the plainest sense, is a disjointed moment that comes together to form something pleasant. The idea of something being disjointed and still unbroken is very interesting. Though the parts are distinct, Confucius, it seems, views the parts as something unbroken. In efforts to gain autonomy through distinct parts, the collective whole remains and the parts inform it.

Without the basis of the unison of the beginning parts and the underlying sound, the harmony would not be able to achieve the same result. The beginning unity lends itself to the harmony. The connection to Cummings' work should be simple to understand in regards to this quote. Cummings worked from the unified body of knowledge to form a base for his work. Though his poetry is very experimental, it still has elements of the whole in it and, as a result, works to flavor the unified whole from which it springs.

The final section of the quote assures that "in this way [a musical piece] reaches conclusion." Without divergence and a harmonious section to color the unified collective, a musical piece does not reach fruition. In the same way, a Confucian thinker would urge a creative person to test the limits of what can be created. This would push the boundaries of what had already been tested and assimilated into the collective. It seems that Confucius would support the creation of new things that expand our knowledge of a subject, but still inform the subject and increase its richness and complexity.

The poem selected illustrates these points. The first area to examine is the way in which the poem informs the body of work from which it came. We can regard the body of work from which the poem came as all the preceding works of literature. Cummings is viewed as a creative writer who tested the boundaries of many conventions in literature, primarily poetry. He manipulated common usage of abbreviations, capitalization, and punctuation to suit his style and inform his works. He is regarded as a truly creative writer because he took poetry to a place where it had never been before, but remained grounded in some key elements of literature, and more precisely, poetry.

The first area of interest is the subject matter selected as foci for Cummings' works. He frequently wrote about subjects such as sex, love, dialogue, religion, and various emotions. It is easy to see how Cummings' work is grounded in concepts common to most of the reading public. Rather than try to mix his experimental style with experimental topics, Cummings focused his poetry on concepts familiar to most adults. In this way, the reader is asked to appreciate what Cummings is commenting on, but, and perhaps more importantly, the reader is left to focus on Cummings' original use of structure. In Book 3, Verse 21 Confucius states, "One does not explain away what is already done, one does not argue against what is already accomplished, and one does not condemn what has already gone by" (70). Cummings' selection of themes for his poetry attests to this fact. He selects ideas that have been written about time and time again, but does not argue that his interpretation is any more right than another. His works do not try to change our understanding of a subject, but present it in a way that we may not have considered.

The poem selected for analysis comments on the subject of loneliness. At one time or another, most people have experienced feelings of solitude. Cummings selection of this simplistic topic allows him to experiment with the way he illustrates this emotion; though he chooses simplistic topics, he brings them to life with examples from life. In the poem, a falling leaf is used to highlight the solitude of loneliness. The parenthetical phrase breaks up the thought of loneliness, but, in the end, the feeling

is supported by the action of the falling leaf. Cummings' interesting use of structure allows a commonly experienced sensation to be seen in a new way.

Though we can view literature as the body of work in which Cummings' poetry is based, it would also benefit to widen the scope. When we view the base for Cummings' work to be language, we see that his works enriches our understanding of language and broadens its use. In the selected poem, the shape that the words are put into highlight the falling action of the leaf. In this way, the words become not only descriptive, but also have an action of their own. This action reflects what we would visually observe while watching a leaf fall. His ability to bridge a gap between words and motion is a unique stylistic element. Though his poetry is based in the collective ideas of both poetry and language, he manages to include a visual aspect that is not present in many other works.

Another action that is reflected in the poem is that of conscious thought. Thoughts are frequently interrupted by seeing or hearing something. Cummings achieves this interruption through the placement and separation of words rather than description. Cummings works become not only something to read, but also something to see. If the poem were read aloud, it would be imagined to look like this on the page:

### **I(a leaf falls)oneliness**

It is clear in this example that something important is lost when Cummings' work is simply read aloud. By viewing the poem on the page, we can see the way in which Cummings manipulates it to lengthen the experience and capture the emotion. We are familiar with the word 'loneliness' and also the emotion attached to the word. By the careful placement of letters, Cummings changes the way we understand loneliness. The separation of the word "one" from the body of the word forces us to focus on the solitude of the emotion. Also, the pronunciation of the poem causes a change in the pronunciation of the word. The "l" sound from the beginning is nearly forgotten and the word at the end becomes "oneliness." This causes a shift in thought and, essentially, a new way of understanding a preexisting notion of language. 'Loneliness' becomes 'oneliness' and the word shifts from a concept of being without others to a concept of solitude.

Though E.E. Cummings work is based in preexisting notions of poetry and language, it still diverges a sufficient amount and is considered by many to be a truly experimental form of writing. His style captures a side of words that is frequently left untapped by many writers, that side being the form of the words themselves. Confucius states, "A man has no way of becoming a gentleman unless he understands Destiny; he has no way of taking his stand unless he understands the rites; he has no way of judging men unless he understands words" (160) Though it is impossible to contest to Cummings' position as gentleman, he understands both the basis for his works and the "importance of the rites." His ability to "judge men" by capturing their emotions is obviously a result of his ability to "understand words" and language in general. Cummings is both a creative artist and one who captures the Confucian philosophy of creativity.

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*Dan Morse*



## *Black Hawk Down:* A Propaganda Case Study

BY SARAH SMITH, KYM MURPHY,  
AND TUCKER HOTTES

### **A Brief History**

The United States' relationship with Somalia can be traced back to the 1970's when at the height of the Cold War, the country, then a client of the Soviet Union, allowed Soviet forces to establish a Naval base at Berbera on the strategic northern coast near the Red Sea. In exchange, the Soviet Union provided arms to Somalia in their claims to the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and a piece of Kenya as part of "Greater Somalia." The client relationship was continued by Somali dictator Siad Barre in response to the large-scale American military support of Somalia's historic rival Ethiopia, then under the rule of the feudal emperor Haile Selassie. Selassie gave the U.S. "unhampered use of a military base in return for military aid" (Shalom). However, when a military coup by leftist Ethiopian officers toppled the monarchy in 1974, declaring the country a Marxist-Leninist state, the superpowers changed allegiances, with the Soviet Union now backing Ethiopia and the U.S. siding with the Barre regime of Somalia (Zunes).

In June 1977 message to Barre, President Carter told the dictator that whatever he did in the Ogaden was his own business, but if he dropped his claims to Kenya and Djibouti, Washington would sympathetically consider his "legitimate" defensive needs. Within a month, Carter approved a decision to cooperate with Somalia, notifying the Somali ambassador that the United States would provide weapons. Barre took this as a green light to proceed with his invasion of the Ogaden. By November, however, Moscow had increased its arms shipments to Ethiopia, and Cuban troops were airlifted into Ethiopia, expelling the Somalis. In 1978, Barre withdrew from Ethiopia to end the war, yet hundreds of thousands of ethnic Somali refugees poured into the country from the Ogaden, placing strain on the already impoverished economy. Barre, however, would not renounce claims to the Ogaden, and continued to aid guerrillas on the Ethiopian side of the border. During this time the U.S. would not provide any arms deal with Barre, yet according to National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter instructed the Chinese to provide aid to Somalia (Shalom). Over the next few years, other nations would provide funding for the import of large amounts of weaponry.

From the late 1970s until early 1991—just before Barre's overthrow—the United States sent hundreds of millions of dollars of arms to Somalia in return for the use of the military bases that had been constructed originally for the Soviet Union. The average annual arms sales totaled \$50 million. These bases would eventually be used to support U.S. military interventions in the Middle East.

Throughout the 1980's African specialists, human rights groups, and humanitarian organizations warned that continued American support to the Barre regime would create chaos. In fact, during his fifteen years of power, Barre's regime killed thousands of civilians and served as one of the most repressive governments of the era by disallowing any citizen participation in groups not sanctioned by his government. Through his process of greatly centralizing his government's control, Barre succeeded in weakening the traditional structures of Somali society that had served in keeping civil order. Furthermore, to help maintain his power, Barre pitted different Somali clans against one another, sowing the seeds for the fratricide and mass starvation to come (Zunes).

The elimination of all potential rivals with a national following created a "power vacuum" that could not be filled after Barre's regime was overthrown in January 1991. Washington could not be bothered.

Washington's indifference to Somalia's fate was very much a function of the Pentagon's realization that the base at Berbera was strategically superfluous. Somalia's disintegration was taking place at exactly the same time as the build-up to the Gulf War, but since the United States was able to obtain extensive bases directly in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the region, Berbera had become redundant...[and was] abandoned in December 1990, after the storage tanks were emptied of fuel. The United Nations, too, pulled all of its agencies out of the country. (Shalom)

Somalia descended into chaos, and the country's control fell into the hands of warlords and clan militias. In the capital, Mogadishu, disorder prevailed. In November 1991, two warlords battled for control of the city, General Mohammed Farah Aidid and Mohammed Ali Mahdi (Zunes). Yet, in December, the U.S. rejected proposals to put Somalia on the UN Security Council agenda. Not until March 1992 did the Council vote to send experts to study whether UN military observers should be sent to enforce a cease-fire the warlords had agreed to a month prior, as well as to protect relief supplies. The experts, upon their return from Somalia recommended a 500-member peacekeeping force be sent. Washington, however, insisted that it would be inappropriate to send a peacekeeping force to Somalia until the contending parties agreed to the deployment. Non-governmental agencies were in agreement. They had "expressed fears that large numbers of blue berets may threaten not only the food distribution process but also their own lives" because of a new emphasis on security, as well as a created impression of an invasion (Awori). Soon the United States changed its position.

In early August, a U.S. official stated that UN forces should be sent with or without the agreement of the warlords. Ali Mahdi, whose "interim government of Somalia" was acknowledged in the UN-mediated February cease-fire agreement though he controlled very little territory, favored UN troops, believing they would help legitimize his position. Fearing just that, Aidid opposed a UN presence. Then on August 13, the UN special representative in Somalia, Mohammed Sahnoun, got Aidid to agree to the troops. Five hundred Pakistani troops were ready to go....In the meantime, the Security Council authorized another 3,000 peacekeepers, but without consulting anyone in Somalia or even informing Sahnoun. Aidid saw this as a plot... (Shalom)

The U.S. again had another abrupt announcement, this time two days before the opening of the Republican National Convention in August. The White House declared the undertaking of a military airlift of food to Somalia (Shalom).

This is perhaps where the film, *Black Hawk Down*, directed by Ridley Scott attempts to tell the story of armed conflict in the city of Mogadishu. It begins with minimum information. The U.S., in 1992, sent Marines as part of a United Nations hunger relief effort. But "Aidid waits until the Marines withdraw, and then declares war on the remaining" U.N. forces, ambushing and killing Pakistani peacekeepers. The Rangers are then sent to "remove Aidid and restore order." What the opening text of the film does not tell the viewer, however, is that Aidid was a clan leader that was militarily more powerful than any of the other groups contending for the control of the city. As a clan that is seeded deep in Somalia's past and present culture, the killing of Aidid would more likely have caused citizens of the clan's area to be angry (Kaus). Phase II was that of working out peace between the various clans. Aidid and his organization believed they had the legitimate right to rule, yet the UN concluded, "He should be politically marginalized" (Kaus). The decision to "marginalize" Aidid occurred well before the Pakistani peacekeepers were killed. A portion of the *Black Hawk Down* press packet, according to Mickey Kaus in "What *Black Hawk Down* Leaves Out", notes that "one of the Habr Gidr clan's responses to the UN efforts was to ambush 24 Pakistani soldiers under the world body's flag and literally to eviscerate them." Kaus goes on to write that the UN had decided to shut down Aidid's radio station that was broadcasting anti-UN segments, while allowing the station of Aidid's rival, Ali Mahdi, to remain open. The soldiers had also entered the radio station looking for weapons, and a later independent investigative commission called the inspection "highly provocative and unwise." A few days later, Pakistani troops fired on an unarmed crowd. The United Nations was drawn into what appeared to be a blood feud with Aidid's militia. As the feud continued to escalate, special forces conducted hapless raids in quick succession. They managed to capture innocent civilians and aid workers, along with the chief of the UN's police force (Monbiot). Among these ill-informed raids, tragedy would seal the bloody relationship between military forces and Aidid's clan.



When some of the most senior member of Aidid's clan gathered in a building in Mogadishu to discuss a peace agreement with the United Nations, the U.S. forces, misinformed as ever, blew them up, killing 54 people. Thus they succeeded in making enemies...[and] were harried by gunmen from all sides. In return, US troops in the UN compound began firing missiles at residential areas (Monbiot).

*Black Hawk Down* suggests the purpose of the raid of October 3 was to prevent a ruthless murderer from starving his own people to death. On the other hand, the opening information makes no reference to the "feuding" other than the initial attack on the Pakistani peacekeepers. Furthermore, there is no mention that the worst of the famine has passed when the U.S. military comes to Somalia; instead we are left with an image of complete starvation, with text reading that a famine of "biblical scale" was in process. With history erased from the record, there emerges a common theme: the unfolding actions of October 3rd indicate a battle between polar opposites—good "heroes" and evil "villains".

### **The Soldiers as "Heroes"**

Perhaps the clearest bias of *Black Hawk Down* is the overly heroic way in which the American soldiers of the film are portrayed. There is no doubt that these men were, in reality, a very brave group for struggling to survive while the odds were stacked against them, however, this film glorifies them in a manner that is pure Hollywood schmaltz. The soldiers are depicted as unflinching heroes who can do no wrong—they are idealistic family men who constantly look out for one another. Any facts that may contradict this heroic image—their contribution to the Somali death toll through previous brutal attacks, for example—are conveniently omitted or glossed over. The only shortcoming of these soldiers in *Black Hawk Down* is that they lost the battle, and the movie places no blame on them for that. Clearly, the conflict in Mogadishu on October 4, 1993 was not a clear-cut matter of "good" versus "evil" or "hero" versus "villain", but director Ridley Scott and Producer Jerry Bruckheimer would certainly like the audience to believe it was. By establishing the soldiers as saviors of the Somali people who are wrongfully attacked, using clichéd mantras and dramatic camera shots to drive home themes of dedication and comradeship, developing the personal appeal of the characters, graphically displaying injuries and fatalities to evoke sympathy, and removing all blame for the incident from the soldiers themselves, *Black Hawk Down* paints a picture of the Rangers and the Deltas that is thoroughly heroic and patriotic—and thoroughly misleading.

The film opens with shots of Somali people either dead or severely ill from starvation. As words providing the "history" of U.S. intervention in Somalia flash across the screen, images of corpses in the desert and poor, starved children are shown to the audience, tinted blue to heighten a feeling of sadness. It seems to be a desperate case, with children caring for their dying parents, and the living conditions seem to

be unbearable, as most of these families live in dilapidated huts without any of the amenities Americans are used to. After several minutes of this, while the audience is full of sorrow for the Somali people, the shot changes from the somber, blue pictures to a bright image of a convoy of U.S. military vehicles, bringing food and supplies to Somalia. The subtitles tell us that the U.S. intervened to feed the Somali people. As an audience, we are relieved by the thought that these people are finally receiving the help they need, and we are subconsciously thankful for the shift from the sad, blue tint of the images to regular color. So, from the very beginning, the audience is indebted to the U.S. military for being "saviors" of Somalia, and the audience's sympathy with the soldiers that dominates the rest of the film is established.

The plot of *Black Hawk Down* focuses on the armed engagement of the Battle of Mogadishu. There are no subplots or counterplots to appeal to a wide audience, as was the case with the Bruckheimer film *Pearl Harbor*. However, a movie that strictly consisted of battle scenes would be dull and would have no broader messages to offer the audience; therefore messages of comradeship and dedication to "the cause" are emphasized in this film, often in clichéd, banal ways. The tagline of *Black Hawk Down* is, "Leave no man behind"; this is repeated in some form or another no less than four times throughout the course of the film, to the extent where the audience can predict when the line is coming. The audience is inundated with similarly trite statements of solidarity and dedication. Sgt. Matt Eversmann, the main character of the film, remarks, "I think I was trained to make a difference." When the Rangers and Deltas are requested to return to Mogadishu to rescue their comrades who are trapped in the city, one soldier tells another, "It's what you do right now that makes the difference." Sgt. Lorenzo Ruiz, while lying on his deathbed, says to his commanding officer, "Don't go out without me. I can still do my job." Even SFC "Hoot" Gibson, the "rebel" of the film, has a sentimental moment when talking with Eversmann: "They won't understand why we do it. They won't understand it's the men next to you. That's it." While this dialogue is undoubtedly used to emphasize the honor of and enhance the sense of camaraderie between the soldiers on the screen, it ends up detracting from the realism of key moments of human interaction by reducing them to unoriginal statements of emotion or motivation. For example, the phrase "making a difference" is both ambiguous and overused—what does Eversmann hope to make a difference in? In his response, Eversmann sounds more like a young child answering what he would like to do when he grows up than one of the most highly trained soldiers in the world. The repetition of such dialogue, however, demonstrates the heavy extent to which the filmmakers wish to portray the soldiers as "good" and "moral" heroes, and they don't care how many times they have to tell you! Perhaps the simplicity and banality of these quotes were intended. In a cinematic representation where distinguishing between good and evil is meant to be cut and dry, repeated affirmations of solidarity and dedication can make the distinction between the "hero" and the "villain" even easier for the audience to accomplish.

The audience is also urged to think of the soldiers as "heroes" through the film's very personal portrayal of the Rangers and Deltas. Unlike the Somalis, the soldiers have clear identities. There is the protagonist (Sgt. Eversmann), the "bad boy" (SFC Gibson), the "rookie" (Private Blackburn), and the "underdog" (Spec. Grimes), to name a few. And, just in case you weren't clear, their names are always on their helmets to remind the audience who's who. The filmmakers go to great lengths to make the audience feel that the soldiers are people like them: they play basketball and chess in their free time, they watch TV with their friends, and they poke fun at authority figures. Their scenes play out with familiar music in the background, like Elvis Presley's "Suspicious Minds" or House of Pain's "Jump Around." But, above all, the soldiers are depicted as devoted family men. One soldier calls his wife at home before he leaves, and the only part of the movie that clearly takes place in the United States is a shot of his wife coming home from the grocery store, barely missing his phone call. A soldier who is severed in half during the battle, ready to die, can think only of his family: "Tell my girls I'll be okay." Similarly, Cpl. Jamie Smith, while taking his last few breaths, says to Eversmann, "Tell my parents that I fought well today, that I fought hard"—even on his deathbed, he is seeking his parents' approval. These examples cause the audience not only to relate to the soldiers in that they have families they care for too, but it reminds audience members that any one of these soldiers could be family members of their own, making the bond between the characters and the audience an intensely personal one.

With that potential familial connection in mind, the gruesome and graphic way in which the injuries and fatalities of the soldiers are conveyed is extremely effective in cementing the audience's sympathy for the plight of the Rangers and Deltas. Most of the gore presented on screen belongs to the Americans, not the Somalis. It is an American who we see severed from the waist down, an American whose thumb is attached only by a thread, an American whose detached hand is picked up by a soldier on the street, and an American who is pierced through the stomach by a missile. The fact that the most physical damage depicted in the movie involves Americans is telling of whose side the filmmakers want the audience to be on. The end of the movie reveals that a thousand Somalis were killed in battle that day, but little of their carnage is shown in as graphic detail as that of the Americans. Thus, the American soldiers are portrayed as the "good guys" and "abused victims" of the conflict in contrast to the brutal, aggressive Somalis who are responsible for their casualties.

Finally, *Black Hawk Down* erases any doubt that the American soldiers are anything but "good" by removing all responsibility for the battle from them. They are characterized as a group of very inexperienced soldiers, despite their status as Deltas and Rangers—two very elite groups of the Army. Private Blackburn is a naïve eighteen-year-old who believes he's there to "kick some ass". Spec. Grimes has never seen combat before, as he was an office clerk through all previous engagements, but was "called up" to fight when another soldier injures his arm. And Sgt. Eversmann, a first-time chalk leader, appears scared and unsure of himself through his nervous facial expressions before the

mission. The audience may wonder who in command thought it was a good idea to send all of these young, inexperienced soldiers into such a hostile area; so blame for the outcome of the event may be positioned within the chain of command. There are also references to the fact that Washington did not send over the equipment the Army had needed, and questions surface as to what the soldiers are doing in Somalia anyway as they sit around the base and talk (the scene of Eversmann's previous quote), which seems to place blame on the White House. However, none of these options are deeply explored by the film, as if it is saying that the fault is no one's. Or, if someone has to be at fault, then it is the militant Somalis under Aidid who are to blame for causing the humanitarian disaster in the first place and acting so barbarically toward U.S. troops. Regardless, the soldiers are consistently shown to simply be following orders and trying to survive, and any wrongdoings they may have committed in reality are not mentioned in the film, upholding their reputation as the "heroes".

The portrayal of the soldiers as the "good guys" is consistent until the very end of the film. In the final scene, Eversmann talks to Smith's corpse about the battle and what he has learned. In perhaps the sappiest, most cliché moment of the movie, he says, "Nobody asks to be a hero. It just sometimes turns out that way." The camera zooms out to slow music, mournfully sung by a woman with a somber, quiet voice, and we are left with a feeling of loss. A letter is read from a soldier to his family at home, saying to give his kids "a kiss from Daddy." We are once again called to remind ourselves that these men have families and could be our family, making the "loss" we feel as an audience even more heart breaking. This final shot has nothing to do with the Somali people or the humanitarian effort that the beginning of the movie stresses—it is an homage only to those Americans who died in the battle. Finally, after a few words pop on the screen about what "happened" to the Rangers and Deltas on that day and the following few, the credits begin rolling with a drum cadence and an anthem-like tune playing in the background. On this final note of patriotism, we are urged to remember the soldiers whom we were just mourning as American "heroes".

Throughout *Black Hawk Down*, the audience is flooded with images of the Rangers and Deltas as moral men who spew out dialogue highlighting their dedicated and loyal attitude while fighting the "good fight". We are shown nothing but positive portrayals of the soldiers, as people like us who do what we like to do and have families like we have. We are encouraged to feel their physical and emotional pain, and we grant them reprieve from any responsibility in the atrocities that happened that day in Mogadishu. But when it comes to our "heroes", we are not given a choice. There are no other characters portrayed in such a wonderful light who we may decide to be the protagonist instead of the American soldiers. The filmmakers of *Black Hawk Down* have put restraints on our range of opinion by dichotomizing the conflict in Mogadishu into "hero" versus "villain"—the American soldiers versus the Somali people (as there is little distinction between militia and civilians by the end of the film). In forcing us to sympathize with the Deltas and Rangers through their wholesome depiction, *Black Hawk Down* pushes the audience to view the Battle of Mogadishu solely through the eyes of the U.S. military.

### The Somalis as "Villains"

The polarized representations of Americans as "good" creates a seemingly natural need for an opposite, leaving the Somali people to fill the role of "bad" or "evil". In the first appearance of Aidid's militia, harsh music blares against a sea of shadow-covered faces. The dark, throbbing techno music becomes a staple throughout the film when Aidid's men appear. Furthermore, we are unable to distinguish who these men are. There are no names given to the militiamen; however, the one Somali who repeatedly appears is dressed almost uniformly in the color black. The dark clothing and shadowy presence imply sinister actions and the intent to inflict harm. Their actions also appear entirely unmotivated by anything less than pure thirst to see a dead white man—in particular, a dead American. One militia member is filmed at an angle that makes him appear as if he fired the shots that ultimately caused the crash of the first Black Hawk helicopter. He then becomes the ultimate villain and the only memorable face of Mogadishu.

Even prior to fighting, scenes shot in the Bakara Market never show the face of a single Somali unless they were involved in the sale of arms or were members of Aidid's militia. The experiences of the average citizen are thus trivialized. The Somalis are on the "margins" in a movie about their own country. Even the people used as "extras" in the film look nothing like Somalis, but rather have the appearance of West Africans (Yusuf).

What becomes more distressing throughout the film is that the "militia" and "citizenry" become indistinguishable, leaving the audience confused as to who the "enemy" really is. While military officials in the movie refer to those holding weapons as members of Aidid's militia, another scene has the same official saying, "The whole city is gonna come down on them." At this point in the film the distinction between citizen and militia has been erased, leaving us to believe the entire city is engaging in combat. This would also leave us to assume that the whole city sides with Aidid. *Why* Somalis are firing arms becomes insignificant, despite the reports that many Somalis believed they were being invaded and picked up arms in order to protect their homes. Fast moving scenes of Somali hands grabbing at the fallen helicopter, snarling at the fallen soldiers, and shooting haphazardly at a corpse conveys a sense of unexplained hostility. The styling of the film's scenes lends itself to a feeling of rabidity—Somalis appear like packs of animals in the use of aerial views of herd-like running and swarming bodies.

In the sense that the citizens of Mogadishu are interchangeably depicted as a cohesive militia, their deaths also become trivialized. Those fired upon in the movie are always in possession of a firearm. Furthermore, their deaths are clean and fast. Single shots prove to be fatal to the Somalis throughout the movie. The violence towards the Somalis on behalf of the Rangers and Deltas was very sanitary and efficient; blood was systematically erased. It is safe to assume that *their* deaths are then deemed tolerable by the filmmakers, in that we do not see the bloody, mangled bodies and grotesque injuries of Somali victims. Suffering becomes one-sided and above all else, we do

not see the deaths of the women and children, killed by gunfire pouring down on their homes from the U.S. gun ships. In these ways, *Black Hawk Down* prohibits the audience from realizing the full scope of devastation that the people of Mogadishu experienced through thousands of Somali deaths on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, allowing only for the interpretation that the Somali people are “villains” (Dowden).

### **Misinformation and Omissions in *Black Hawk Down***

Upon close inspection of *Black Hawk Down*, it becomes clear that several aspects of the conflict in Somalia are glossed over or omitted completely. While on the surface the film seems to be quasi-critical of the U.S. government, it is essentially a giant commercial for the U.S. military. It also has several propaganda and hegemonic elements in the way it presents the conflict to viewers.

The opening text provides little background on the conflict (and what background is provided is distorted to the point of absurdity) and quickly moves to a scene in which a large crowd of Somali swarm around a truck with food. They behave like animals, ripping and tearing at the packages.

Men holding guns standing on the top of the truck begin firing their weapons in the air, proclaiming the food to be the property of general Aidid. The crowd begins to panic even more. Cut to a shot of U.S. soldiers circling the mayhem secure in their helicopters requesting permission to fire at those causing the disturbance. Denial of the request comes in a cold restatement of the rules of engagement. The noble-minded soldiers shake their heads and turn the helicopter around, with a menacing shot of one of the Somali militia men pretending his bullhorn is a weapon pointed at the helicopter to close the scene.

Director Ridley Scott seems to be trying to tell us that U.S. forces are gentle and care about the people scattered below them, but the Somali people are portrayed with absolutely no compassion whatsoever. They appear to us on the screen as savages – wild dogs fighting over a carcass with a few alpha dogs snarling and growling at them. As the film progresses, it becomes clear that the U.S. soldiers don't care any more about the Somali people than the lion they shoot and eat in the beginning of the film.

Throughout the film, in fact, Somali people aren't given a true voice. They are referred to by U.S. soldiers by the derogatory term “skinnies,” there is nothing of their culture, and the only thing we learn about them through the film is that there are two types of Somali: profiteering followers of a warlord and mindless savages who run around and get in the way of things. An arms dealer is captured early in the film, and shots of him enjoying cigars and musing about his place in the world (to give out guns and make money, according to the film) are scattered throughout.

Toward the end, a U.S. soldier is captured and held captive by a Somali militia leader. The scene in which the Somali leader interrogates the soldier is Scott's attempt at providing an explanation for why the conflict occurred. Instead, all Scott achieves is a portrayal the Somali people as bloodthirsty and having a broad-reaching love for ongoing war. The Somali military man explains that removing general Aidid (the only

justification the film offers for the troops entering Mogadishu on that day) will achieve nothing and that there will always be killing.

Despite the heavily racial overtones in the film (mostly-white U.S. soldiers versus all-black Somali savages), it seems Scott felt the need to further perpetuate some of the myths and misinformation that characterized the media coverage of the conflict. After the briefing on the way the military action in the city is to be carried out, a soldier is asked why he's not happy with the plan. One of the reasons he gives is that, "it's the afternoon when they'll all be f---ed up on khat."

Hyped by many mainstream media sources as a dangerous stimulant, there is little evidence that the leaf chewed by the majority of Somali is any worse than everyday U.S. stimulants like coffee ([sas.upenn.edu](http://sas.upenn.edu)). In fact, the U.S. military freely admits prescribing stimulants and anti-sleep drugs to its soldiers during battle. Col. Gregory Belenky, lead sleep researcher at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research said in an article about the use of stimulants in the Army, "Stimulants have their place and are very effective." (Fleming-Michael)

An article from July, 2001 on [abcnews.com](http://abcnews.com) blames stimulants like khat for "keeping the world ... on edge." It also goes out of its way to point out the drug's current illicit status in the U.S. (Donnelly). Experts, however, paint a different picture of Khat. Dr. Andrew Weil told NPR that he did not believe khat to play a major role in the actions of Somali soldiers (Naureckas).

Outside of showing the Somali people to be savage and brutish, the film also subtly paints a different picture of the conflict than what really happened. The most startling omitted fact is the source of the weapons the Somali people use. On capturing the arms dealer early on, it is suggested that he is the source for the weapons that are so widely available they're sold in open markets on the street (Urbina).

With the supposed source established, no further attempt is made to question where local arms dealers got the weapons in the first place. Of course, many of the weapons used by the Somali against U.S. troops were of U.S. origin to begin with (Shalom).

Throughout the film – from the beginning market scenes with people selling guns in the street to the firefights that make up the rest of the movie – there isn't a single weapon of U.S. origin in the hands of a Somali fighter. There are AK-47s and other foreign-origin weapons all over, however, and there are even scenes which depict the weapons of the Somali as inaccurate and unreliable. U.S. soldiers, however, are shown as deadly accurate and their weapons always work with perfect precision.

This portrayal of U.S. troops in Somalia is very similar to the way the mass media showed them during the conflict. The "human" stories of the soldiers and the routing of U.S. military prowess in the film closely mirror news reports from the time of the intervention. Troops are shown calling home to wives, playing chess, joking about making coffee, and other 'everyday' activities that make them seem more real to the viewer.

Troop actions are carried out in the film with accuracy, and mistakes are caused by individual carelessness as opposed to command or mechanical error. The camarade-

rie displayed between soldiers is played up, and during the beginning the only real conflict in the film seems to come from the 'cliter-than-thou' attitudes that split the Rangers and Deltas.

In the end, the two groups reconcile their differences after being brought together by battle. Back at the UN base in the closing scene, a grizzled and experienced Delta explains to a young Ranger commander that the only real reason for going back out is because of the "guy standing next to you."

Another interesting aspect of the characterization of U.S. troops is the "no man left behind" mantra repeated tirelessly throughout the film. It seems the command takes every opportunity it can muster to speak the line, and when one of the soldiers is captured, a truck rolls up and down the streets shouting it over a megaphone. Interestingly enough, when two machine gunners are accidentally left behind, nobody seems to care. The "no man left behind" chant fits in with H. Bruce Franklin's exploration of the POW/MIA myth and its place in U.S. propaganda (MIAFacts.org).

The heroic and selfless actions of U.S. soldiers are played up throughout the film, and possibly at its height in the end when a group of Rangers unable to fit on a UN armored convoy out of the city run out amidst gunfire and finally reach the base where smiling children wave them inside the gates. Viewers are filled with a sense of pride and compassion for the brave troops. After all, look at the hardships they endure in the face of serving their country and fellow man!

Unfortunately, the question is never raised whether they should be there in the first place. Thought is never given to the fact that they never would have been placed in the situation if the government hadn't sent them over in the first place. Brendan Sexton III, one of the actors in the film, spoke out about it at an anti-war rally at Columbia University. "In certain scenes, U.S. soldiers ... were asking whether the U.S. should be there, how effective the U.S. military presence was, and why the U.S. was targeting one specific warlord in Somalia Aidid," he said. "As we moved closer to actually filming the script, the script moved further and further away from the little that existed of its questioning character." (Sexton).

So the film didn't start out as a propaganda tool for the military, but the final product definitely has such a feel. Instead of questioning U.S. motives for being in Somalia, the film takes an insider view that is somewhere between technocratic and hawk. The film seems to say U.S. involvement was a necessary and humanitarian effort that failed because proper support wasn't given to the military.

One of the commanders during the briefing suggests they won't be able to do their job efficiently because "Washington, in all of its wisdom" did not provide proper equipment. The film seems to spend the next two hours or so trying to justify that claim.

This sort of quasi-critical portrayal is what makes the film so dangerous. Viewers feel like they are being shown a more or less factual account of an event (bolstered by "background" and statistics in the opening and closing texts – the U.S. numbers game present throughout). Then, questions of the effectiveness of the military and the hindrance of Washington bureaucrats makes the viewer shake his or her head at



the injustice of what happens to 'our boys' and the ungratefulness of the people 'we' were there to "save."

Instead of making people wonder why a history of U.S. interventionism drives atrocities like U.S. troops killing over a thousand people in one day in one battle in Mogadishu, the film makes people click their tongues and say we should have tried harder. They see the film and begin to feel that the U.S. really was there to try and tame the savages, especially since the Somali people can't seem to get themselves together and act civilized.

One of the biggest injustices about *Black Hawk Down* is the complete dismissal of its potential to really make people think. Even without including an accurate background or outsider view during the film, the potential was still there to do so with the release of the DVD. With the technological capabilities and potentials of the DVD format, one would imagine the producers of the film would strive to include more information about the conflict in Somalia.

Unfortunately, however, there is no such supplemental content. There are director commentaries and making-of features (and even a trailer for the Spider Man movie!), but not even one snippet of text with regard to history or pointers to external resources. This is a very disappointing omission, since the DVD would be a great way to provide a more rounded view than the film gives.

### **Government Propaganda Surrounding the Battle of Mogadishu**

By now, it should be clear that there exists a fair amount of bias and propaganda in the film. But, is the propaganda in the film tied to anything bigger, or is it just an example of particular bias? To answer that question, it is necessary to look toward the representation of the Battle of Mogadishu in the mainstream media. By comparing the portrayal of the conflict in the mainstream media to the depiction of the conflict in *Black Hawk Down*, it will be evident that there is, indeed, a systemic bias in the overall portrayal of the event in the media, induced by the government to limit dissent and place boundaries upon ideological discourse regarding U.S. intervention in Somalia.

The portrayal of the Battle of Mogadishu on the day after the event in two mainstream media sources, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, is anything but balanced. In each case, the newspaper paints an extraordinarily heroic picture of the fallen soldiers and does little to place the event in the context of a larger conflict. In the October 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the *New York Times*, an article with the headline "5 G.I.'s are Killed as Somalis Down 2 U.S. Helicopters" fails to mention that there was a daylong battle in the Bakara Market or that any conflict at all led up to shooting of the helicopters. The first line reads, "At least five American soldiers were killed and several were wounded today when a Somali militia shot down two American helicopters during United Nations military operations in Mogadishu, Pentagon officials said" (Cushman). This intentional omission of detail makes it sound as if the American soldiers were simply following through with a peaceful United Nations mission and played no part in agitating the Somali militia. This article thus adds to the perception

that the Americans were viciously assaulted by the Somalis for no reason, encouraging national sympathy with the soldiers. The article does mention, however that the mission to capture several of Aidid's comrade, so the Americans can be applauded on a job well done. After describing how several Marines had previously been rescued, a sub-heading—"Sympathy from Clinton—captures the reader's eye. In this section, the President is quoted as saying the soldiers "lost their lives in a very successful mission against brutality and anarchy," stressing a characterization of the troops as "saviors" against evil forces. He also remarks, "The international effort in Somalia has succeeded in bring order to most of the country. These positive developments must not be lost because of the unwillingness of a few who reject the peaceful political process and seek to achieve power by force." These statements are largely anti-Somali and do not take into account the fact that the U.S. had *intervened* in the political affairs of Somalia by force. The words of the President, which many readers likely took to heart, depict Somalis as "brutal" and anti-democratic, unthankful for the "order" the U.S. has brought to their country (a very misleading statement in itself—conflict still dominates Somali life today). The article closes by warning readers that the Somalis may now have surface-to-air missiles, which the UN are worried about, leading readers to further perceive Somalis in a negative light. So, in this *New York Times* article, the bravery and honor of U.S. soldiers is praised while the actions of Somalis are condemned under broad and deceptive generalizations.

*The Washington Post* article is no different in its pro-American, anti-Somali character. The headline of the October 4<sup>th</sup> article reads, "At Least 5 Americans Killed in Somali Attack; Two Army Helicopters Shot Down During U.N. Operation Against Warlord Aideed" (Kenworthy). Again, the headline infers that the incident was an unprovoked attack, not part of an extended conflict. The first line of the article emphasizes that this occurred during an operation "by U.N. peace-keeping forces that Pentagon officials said resulted in the capture of a top lieutenant of warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed," focusing on the peaceful and moral nature of the mission and emphasizing the success of the soldiers in obtaining one of the "bad guys". A brief sentence describing the "background" of the "attack" says that "the United States intervened there in December to halt famine and anarchy," supporting the idea of the soldiers as "saviors" of the Somali people. Clinton's condolences are also mentioned in this article, as he praises the "brave Americans...engaged in a vital humanitarian mission," failing to mention that the objective of the U.S. in Somalia had shifted from humanitarian action to building an unwanted government modeled after the United States. The article closes by listing all of the other instances in which American troops were killed in Somalia, neglecting to mention anything about the horrifying Somali death toll. Once again, the U.S. soldiers are depicted as heroic victims who should be mourned, while the Somalis remain ungrateful aggressors who attack U.S. troops without reason.

As demonstrated by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the attitude of the mainstream media toward the Battle of Mogadishu is one of extreme bias. Both sources casually omit important facts and use selective quotes from the President to

make the lost battle an unwarranted "attack" by the Somalis. In reality, the finger of blame for the American casualties points toward Washington and the Pentagon for sending a group of inexperienced soldiers into an extremely hostile and dangerous environment to achieve goals superfluous to the U.N.'s humanitarian plight. However, the U.S. government would lose legitimacy and authority if this were to be reported by the press. So, taking advantage of their strong influence and close ties to mass media, it was easy for the U.S. government to make a scapegoat of the Somali militia. In doing this, they not only saved face, but they made U.S. troops look like heroes to gain support for whatever further military action they chose to take. If they wanted to keep the troops in Somalia, the public would applaud the government for going after the "barbarians" who killed their soldiers. If they wanted to pull the troops out of Somalia, the public would understand, since the lives of the remaining troops were obviously at stake with such brutal aggressors. Thus, by taking advantage of the media, the government effectively limited the public's range of ideological discourse in a way similar to the "hawk-dove" phenomenon that existed during the Vietnam War: the government and the media allowed the public to decide whether they favored leaving troops in Somalia because of Somali aggression or taking them out because of Somali aggression, but they did not provide the option to view the Somalis as anything other than vicious, ungrateful animals. The focus of the government and the media on a dichotomized "hero/villain" characterization where American soldiers were always the "good guys" and the Somalis were always the "bad guys" is no different than the portrayal of the U.S. soldiers and Somali militia in *Black Hawk Down*, indicating that propaganda surrounding the Battle of Mogadishu is all-pervasive and an example of systemic bias. This connection, however, should not be too much of a surprise, as the U.S. government played a significant part in the production of the film.

### **The Role of the Government in the Making of the Film**

From the film's conception, the U.S. Department of Defense was involved in the production of *Black Hawk Down*. Producer Jerry Bruckheimer approached General John M. Keane, Army vice chief of staff, when he was in the planning stages of the movie. Keane recalls, "He came into my office and said, 'General, I'm going to make a movie that you and your Army will be proud of.' He did that, so we thank him for it" (Kozaryn). The filmmakers clearly had government approval from the very beginning, and the movie was produced with the Pentagon's opinion in mind. George Cahlink, writer for *Government Executive Magazine*, reports, "The Army...had a hand in the film, allowing the movie makers to borrow actual Army Black Hawks, permitting the actors to go through Ranger training and sending dozens of soldiers to provide support and act as extras when the movie was shot in Morocco. (The filmmakers reimbursed the Army several million dollars for the use of the helicopters and the Ranger training)." The Pentagon did not stop there. According to Heike Hasenauer, writer for the Army publication *Soldiers*, "To ensure accuracy, [the Army's liaison to the film industry Major Andres] Ortegon monitored filming daily. He also reported to the Army staff

regularly on the status of filming, the production company's requirements and use of military vehicles and personnel, and reimbursable expenses" (43). Hasenauer also notes, "Units that were actually involved in the 1993 battle provided technical advisors to the production crew through a U.S. Special Operations Command task force, the first task force ever established to support the making of a movie," further connecting the film with government influence (43). Additionally, Bruckheimer has demonstrated that his own ideologies are in line with those who monitored the filming. When asked if he thought it was a mistake for the U.S. to intervene in Somalia, he replies, "No. To lead people to save 200,000 lives was the right mission" (USAToday.com). This statement sounds remarkably similar to the aforementioned quotes of President Clinton dealing with the humanitarian heroism of the soldiers. It only seems fitting that a man producing a government-endorsed film would have a point of view on the conflict that matches the government's to a "T". Given all of these close connections between the film and the Department of Defense, it is difficult to imagine how the government's point of view on the Battle of Mogadishu could *not* be included in the subtext of *Black Hawk Down*.

Not surprisingly, the response of the military and the government to *Black Hawk Down* has been overwhelmingly positive. Army Secretary Tom White "played movie critic and, in true Roger Ebert-style, gave the picture a 'thumbs up'" (Cahlink). In an interview on USAToday.com, Jerry Bruckheimer revealed that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld "expressed to us how much he enjoyed the movie" (USAToday.com). The film premiered in Washington, D.C. to an audience that largely consisted of uniformed men and women, many of whom had participated in the U.S. intervention in Somalia. At this premier, General Keane confirmed that he believed the movie was "authentic". All of this positive feedback has given the filmmakers an ultimate nod from the U.S. government. By commending the work of Bruckheimer and Scott, the government is, in effect, recognizing the successful dissemination of Washington's "us versus them" propaganda through the medium of film. *Black Hawk Down* thus joins the ranks of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as an avenue through which government propaganda can reach the masses.

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NOTE—We used the following site to clarify names of characters and key quotes:

"Black Hawk Down." Internet Movie Database. <<http://imdb.com/title/tt0265086/>>.



*Emily Shutt*



## For the Nonphilosopher's Perusal

BY JUDY LI

Before taking this course, I had speculated; why devote an entire course to one philosopher? What was the attraction that Spinoza held that no other philosopher has held since Socrates? After reading Deleuze's Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, I immediately found my answer. Spinoza, like his ancient counterpart Socrates, was a *practical* philosopher. Both men submerged their lives in their philosophies. But that is where the similarities end. Where Socrates searched for good in truth and knowledge, Spinoza found good in *blessedness* and love of God.

Is it any surprise, then, if those who are inexperienced in the truth have unsound opinions about lots of other things as well, or that they are so disposed to pleasure, pain, and the intermediate state that, when they descend to the painful, they believe truly and are really in pain, but that, when they ascend from the painful to the intermediate state, they firmly believe that they have reached fulfillment and pleasure? They are inexperienced in pleasure and so are deceived when they compare pain to painlessness, just as they would be if they compared black to grey without having experienced white. (Plato 584e6)

Socrates' scale of pleasure found in the Republic may seem to include gradations of black, white, and grey, but upon closer inspection, there are only two colors. The states of pain and painlessness are both black and true pleasure is white. Only the just person can experience the highest pleasure: knowledge, the intrinsic good (Plato 508d9). For Spinoza, such an explanation would be too simplified and even Socrates asks, "Aren't even they [who define good as pleasure] forced to admit that there are bad pleasures?" (Plato 505c6). This is congruent to Spinoza's concept of desire: "We neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it ... The good is when a body directly compounds its relation with ours, and, with all or part of its power, increases ours ... For us, the bad is when a body decomposes our body's relation ..." (Deleuze "Practical" 22)



Essentially, there is no intrinsic good, but then there is also nothing intrinsically bad. Everything is relatively good for one as long as doing "X" will increase one's power, whether it is increasing the power of the body with food or the power of the mind with knowledge. And how does one know then what is good and what is bad? Anything that decreases one's power corresponds to the feeling of *sadness* and everything that increases one's power leads to the feeling of *joy*; the active, intense joys being the ones that are dependent on ourselves. Living at full voltage, Spinoza believes the external world cannot touch him, not even death. This concept is drastically different from Socrates' belief where good equals just and evil equals unjust. Spinoza completely overthrows good-evil and replaces it with good-bad because moral law makes nothing known. We do not have to be just because it is good, but because in some way it increases our power. We can be unjust too, because it increases our power. However, Spinoza would say we could not possibly plan to be unjust all the time because it would lead to more bad situations rather than good ones. Therefore, Deleuze defines Reason as "an effort of select and organize good encounters ..." (Deleuze "Practical" 55-56) Socrates had a finite scale for all that is good and all that is bad in an infinite world; Spinoza, on the other hand, held firm that there is infinite good and bad for an infinite number of situations. (Deleuze "Practical" 24, 27-28, 41)

And what underlies the thinking of these two philosophers? We are all too well acquainted with the idea of Socrates' soul; the vivid image of his chimera: head of a human, lion, and beast (Plato 588d) still stays with me. A just and good person will let his soul be ruled by his reason and essentially human parts rather than his appetitive parts, the beastly and bodily needs. Because of this, Socrates leads us to believe that we can sometimes do things that are good for our body, but not good for our souls. Spinoza believes the body can do no such thing. This leads us to Spinoza's theory of parallelism: the body is in essence an extension of the mind. "The order of actions and passions of our body is, by nature, at one with the order of actions and passions of the mind." (Deleuze "Practical" 88) Spinoza shatters the idea of superiority of the mind or the soul over the body because he does not believe in Socrates' morality or anyone else's morality for that matter. Deleuze points out that Spinoza uses the *body* only as an example, but *thought* can also surpass the consciousness that we have of it. Likewise, our bodies exceed the knowledge that we have of it. Spinoza devalues the importance of consciousness because we do not even know where thoughts come from (consciousness being only an illusion of will); we only know that they become ideas, the affects of our thoughts. Thus, Socrates' picture of the soul in civil war (Plato 444b1) is ridiculous; we simply choose between the conflicting ideas by seeing which one will produce the good encounters, the most power. (Deleuze "Practical" 18-19, 60, 86)

Spinoza spoke of pleasure as duration of joy. When the affect of joy comes back to the idea, it becomes love; similarly, sadness becomes hatred. However, when the passive feeling of joy becomes an active feeling of joy, a self-affection, and our power is complete and fully in our possession, then Spinoza defines this as blessedness. This is something Socrates did not explore at all in the Republic. Instead, he thought eternal

happiness came from justice, but we are only just in relation to our acts on others, not from within. Only when we practice being *externally* just (thus, he derived justice from the city first), can the soul evolve into something *internally* just, but even then, Spinoza would say the mind was suffering from an imaginary idea with no indication of cause. (Plato IV,V) Spinoza's happiness is realized by the individual alone. The idea of God is not a common notion, where two or more bodies come into agreement and consequently increase each other's power, but common notions do shift us to a third kind of knowledge in the consciousness; approaching the idea of God as quickly as possible in this manner. (Deleuze "Ethics" 147) (Deleuze "Practical" 50-1, 75)

And so, what is this idea that we approach with rapidity? "If a triangle could speak, it would say that God is eminently triangular." (Letter LVI, to Boxel [Deleuze "Practical" 63]) Similarly, a human would say that God is eminently human and proceed to give Him superhuman attributes. Spinoza says we are confusing eminence with essence, or the absolute power of God. Instead, our idea of God should be immanence. He exists on the same plane as everything else that exists as an infinite number of attributes. God is truly free because He is the cause of Himself. If we can understand that God produces and understands what He produces as He understands Himself and all things, then our idea of Him is adequate (containing ourselves, God, and all other things). In this sense, we too are infinite, we do not yet know of what affections we are capable of and what we are capable of affecting. Therefore, our immanent plane of existence is always changing; what is good today may be bad tomorrow, what is good to one maybe bad to another, and so on and so forth. (Deleuze "Practical" 64, 70, 74, 79, 125)

Our philosophers were different, even in death. Socrates died of hemlock poisoning and Spinoza died of consumption many years past. But whose philosophy remains unscathed even today? If we look at Socrates' ideas of morality and the perfect society, the aristocratic society run by the philosopher-king that he described in the Republic, we can only see that it has fallen short of existing. There have been no philosopher-kings ruling by the hand of justice. Only the less perfect societies he discussed later on, the tyranny and the democracy, have evolved. And what society would Spinoza's ideas have produced? In his society, the social state is the state of reason. Since every individual alone is bound to encounter a force stronger than himself, the societal law restrains the individual's power because the power of the whole surpasses that of the individual. (Deleuze "Practical" 107) "Men agree to let themselves be 'determined' by common affections of hope and fear;" (Deleuze "Practical" 108) fear and hope that comes from our state of nature or expression of power. Spinoza believes such a society can exist in any kind of government, except perhaps the tyranny where ultimate power lies in the hands of one. Many of these societies have risen and fallen even before Spinoza's time. Yet, even these societies are not perfect; to be controlled by hope and fear does make us weak.

If we cannot see Spinoza or Socrates in society, can we see them in groups of individuals? In describing those who can never know real pleasure, Socrates says, "they

always look down at the ground like cattle, and, with their heads bent over the dinner table, they feed, they fatten, and fornicate ... killing each other because their desires are insatiable." (Plato 586a5) In describing those who can never know real joy, Spinoza says they are, "The slave, the tyrant, and the priest ..., the moral trinity." (Deleuze "Practical" 25) Ruled by hatred, the tyrant doles out hatred, the slave takes in all the suffering, and the priest tells the slave to internalize the suffering and reinterpret it as salvation. (Nietzsche 35) Yes, both sorts of these people still exist today, but where are the just men or the men who live only with vision in their eyes and joy in their hearts? These men remain few and far between. We will never find Socrates' just person because Spinoza would say if we are capable of injustice, then we will do that. But there is still hope for Spinoza's mode of blessedness because this idea of God is reached simply when one realizes that God exists in everything and He is the absolute cause. "[Spinoza] teaches the philosopher how to become a nonphilosopher." (Deleuze 130) This is the true beauty of his ethics. As long as we illuminate ourselves and burn brightly for as long as we possibly can, then we are what God intended us to become.

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## Singing the Song of Love, and Understanding the Words

CARA PITTERMAN

*"He is married to a woman who speaks mainly to her birds. One of whom answers back, 'I love you.'" ~Jazz*

When I was six years old, my family had a pet parakeet named Muffy. Of all of the wonders of Muffy, the greatest was his ability to speak. My mother, in all her patience, somehow taught our little Muffy phrases such as "Hello there!" and "What a good boy!" so when my sister and I would come home from school, we received the warmest greetings from our faithful parakeet. Often, he would enthusiastically screech, "Good morning, Cara!" when I pranced into the room where we kept his cage. Good morning, Cara. My Muffy knew me by name! At the age of six, I proudly thought that my parakeet was so smart, that he loved me so much that he learned how to say my name (and I should point out that Muffy never learned how to say "Hallee," my sister's name). But now I look back, and I realize that he was merely imitating sounds – and my name happened to be one that he picked up on. Muffy was a smart parakeet, but I know that any bird, no matter how smart, does not actually grasp the understanding of the words he mimics.

The first time I really thought about all this, since Muffy flew away from us when I was in second grade, was when I read *Jazz* this semester. The very first page – the end of the very first paragraph – the reader is made aware of Violet's cruel emancipation of her birds out to the winter snow, "including the parrot that said, "I love you" (Morrison 3). Not only did Morrison write an attention-grabbing opening to her story, I was also struck with a nostalgic yearning for my long-lost parakeet. I kept waiting for that "I love you" parrot to resurface – and in all of *Jazz*, the scenes with Violet and her bird are still the ones I hold in my heart as my favorites. But more important than either the value of Morrison's introduction or my own soft-spot for birds is the significance of the words Morrison chose for her fictional parrot to repeat over and over: "I love you." Why? These three little words strung together to make a declarative statement are perhaps held with more regard than any other three in the entire English language. A person can obsess over those words, waiting to hear them from someone else, and worrying about saying them to others. "I love you" – it draws reaction, if said at the

right time and at the right moment. Morrison, with her knowledge of the importance of words, should know this. And yet, in her novel filled with obsessive love, she bestows the words upon a little parrot – a creature that probably does not understand all the emotions that come along with the words “I love you.”

When recalling some of the other memorable, *human* characters of this semester – Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty of On the Road; Felix Volkbein, Nora Flood, Jenny Pletherbridge, and Robin Vote of Nightwood; Violet and Joe Trace of Morrison’s own Jazz – I have to wonder if any of these literary figures really understand the meaning of love. Do they actually experience love in their respective, albeit fanatical quests, or are they so caught up in the romantic notion of finding love that they lose sight of what love means in their wanderings?

Admittedly, love is a complicated subject to tackle, as every individual could very well have separate, unique ideas of what love means, or the emotions that spring from love. One might believe love to be the physical attraction without anything emotional at all; another could believe love is making an emotional connection with his soul mate, and physical contact is not necessary. And to others, countless combinations of variables could factor into the equation of love. I think that, at least in the case of certain characters in On the Road, Nightwood, and Jazz, the desire to be loved, or to love another can be so strong that the idea of what love is may be forgotten in the restlessness to find that true love. Even if each of the characters has a different definition of love, or a different idea of what love is, that meaning seems to be lost when he so badly wants love to come to him.

Seeking love, however, is not the priority of Dean Moriarty of On the Road. In contrast to the story’s narrator, Sal Paradise, Dean places more importance on sex rather than love. When Sal meets Dean for the first time, he notes, “to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life” (Kerouac 2), and there is no question that it is indeed sex, and not love, that concerns Dean. Throughout the adventures on the road, though we follow Sal, we are aware of all of Dean’s affairs – he is especially indecisive between two lovers, Marylou and Camille. At the beginning of Kerouac’s novel he is married to Marylou, but by the time Sal takes to the road and arrives in Denver, Dean has begun a relationship with Camille as well. Dean manages to juggle both women – “he rushes from Marylou to Camille – of course neither one of them knows what’s going on” (Kerouac 42) – and at the same time sparks an incredibly communicative connection with Carlo Marx. Carlo describes his relationship with Dean to Sal:

*“Dean and I are embarked on a tremendous season together. We’re trying to communicate with absolute honesty and absolute completeness everything on our minds... We sit on the bed, crosslegged, facing each other. I have finally taught Dean that he can do anything he wants...”* (Kerouac 42)

Thus, at that point, Carlo is the only one out of Dean’s three conquests who knows what is going on in Dean’s mind. However, Carlo disappears from the novel and for

the rest of the narrative, the reader only has an explicit sense of Dean's indecisiveness between Marylou and Camille. When Sal resumes his narrative, after returning home, he has not spoken to Dean in over a year when Dean shows up at his doorstep with Marylou. Though Dean had since divorced her and married Camille, he deserts Camille and their baby to hit the road again. Sal learns that Dean "ran and found Marylou in a hotel. They had ten hours of wild lovemaking. Everything was decided again: they were going to stick. Marylou was the only girl Dean ever really loved" (Kerouac 111). But a short while later, when they get back on the road to head out west, "Dean was going to stay with Camille," though he continues his affair with Marylou the entire ride back to San Francisco (Kerouac 125). This flip-flopping between the two women is consistent throughout the novel, and Dean even adds a third woman, Inez, to the complicated equation.

Though Sal is in constant awe of Dean in their travels across America, he can finally see Dean's true colors when they ride through Mexico so Dean can quickly divorce Camille and admits, "I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes" (Kerouac 302). Though I already felt that Dean's treatment of women was utterly disrespectful, Sal reinforces this notion in my mind with his final summation of Dean's conduct:

*When he arrived in New York with divorce papers in his hands, he and Inez immediately went to Newark and got married; and that night, telling her everything was all right and not to worry, and making logics where there was nothing but inestimable sorrowful sweats, he jumped on a bus and roared off again across the awful continent to San Francisco to rejoin Camille and the two baby girls. So now he was three times married, twice divorced, and living with his second wife...* (Kerouac 303)

While I was reading this and pitying the women in Dean Moriarty's life, I wondered what happened to Carlo Marx. There is obviously no love in Dean's relationships with Marylou, Camille, and Inez; he certainly manages physical relationships with the three women, but there is never any hint of the deepness present in his relationship with Carlo. Sal even comments on the beginning of Carlo and Dean's bond, when he "didn't see them for about two-weeks, during which time they cemented their relationship to fiendish all-day-all-night proportions" (Kerouac 6). Even when the two men first met, Sal acknowledges a special connection:

*A tremendous thing happened when Dean met Carlo Marx. Two keen minds that they are, they took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes – the holy con-man with the shining mind, and the sorrowful poetic con-man with the dark mind that is Carlo Marx...* (Kerouac 5)

Nowhere else do we witness Dean reacting to another person with such emotional passion, rather than just physical fervor. Since he switches from Marylou to Camille back to Marylou and so on, we must infer that Dean does not actually have a deep connection with either. Perhaps Dean, who places sex above everything else in life, cannot understand that what he and Carlo share has the potential to be love – and so he participates excessively in his trysts with all the women on the road, never finding a satisfying relationship.

While Sal observes Dean's sexual escapades, we observe Sal's longings for love. In contrast to Dean, Sal genuinely seems to want to find one woman to marry. In a way, he has romanticized what he wants to experience as love. "Oh, where is the girl I love?" he internally wonders (Kerouac 78), and tries his hardest to find her, whoever she may be, while on his continental journeys. When he encounters a Mexican girl on a bus to Los Angeles, he broods, "A pain stabbed my heart, as it did every time I saw a girl I loved who was going in a different direction in this too-big world" (Kerouac 81). When he finally talks to her, their relationship launches quickly, before he even mentions her name:

*I ached all over for her; I leaned my head in her beautiful hair. Her little shoulders drove me mad; I hugged her and hugged her. And she loved it.*

*"I love love," she said, closing her eyes. I promised her beautiful love... It was as simple as that. You could have all your Peaches and Bettys and Marylous and Ritas and Camilles and Inezes in the world; this was my girl and my kind of girlsoul, and I told her that... (Kerouac 82-83)*

In this scene, much is revealed about Sal – he obviously wants to find love so badly that he will jump at the first chance that it might occur. Earlier in his narrative, we learn that he is very aware that he is "the only guy without a girl" (Kerouac 41) in his group of friends, and so while he is desperately searching for a woman to fall in love with, he will settle in the first signs of attraction before he can really determine whether his is actually in a relationship that could truly be love. And as his relationship with the Mexican girl (we finally discover her name is Terry) dissolves, Sal walks alone with his thoughts:

*My mind was filled with that great song "Lover Man" as Billie Holiday sings it; I had my own concert in the bushes. "Someday we'll meet, and you'll dry all my tears, and whisper sweet, little things in my ear, hugging and a-kissing, oh what we've been missing, Lover Man, oh where can you be..." It's not the words so much as the great harmonic tune and the way Billie sings it, like a woman stroking her man's hair in soft lamplight... (Kerouac 98-99)*

Within this moment, I believe Sal realizes that he cannot pretend what he has with Terry is love. Though he still wants to find love, Sal recognizes that he cannot

just say a relationship is love – just as “it’s not the words” of Billie Holiday’s song, he must find a woman with whom he can connect in that magical rhythm of love, in a relationship where the words he says have meaning. Sal continues to wander on the road, searching for this love – and though he does not appear to find it by the end of Kerouac’s narrative, there is more hope for him than for Dean, since Sal has grasped the meaning of what he wishes to find.

While *On the Road* depicts both Dean and Sal in pursuit of their respective relationships with many different women, *Nightwood* revolves around the one Robin Vote and the love Felix Volkbein, Jenny Pletherbridge, and Nora Flood all claim to have for her. But do any of these characters really love Robin? Or do they misunderstand their own passions for Robin, and simply label the emotions they each feel for her as love? Are their motives for pursuing her too selfish to actually be love?

Before Felix is even formally introduced to Robin, the reader is conscious of his obsession with the past, with history, and therefore it is no surprise as to how Barnes writes the “emotion that came over Felix” when he first stares into her eyes:

*Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person’s every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience...*

*Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past: before her the structure of our head and jaws ache – we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers...*

(Barnes 37)

Because of his respect for the “great past,” as he calls it, and because Robin stirs within him an emotion he can link to that respect, he immediately feels a pull towards her. Doctor O’Connor senses this and asks Felix his opinion on women and marriage – had he ever thought about those aspects of life? Felix confesses “he had; he wished a son who would feel as he felt about the ‘great past’” (Barnes 38). Already, it is clear that Felix has motives for Robin that are not entirely about finding love; rather, his main concern is finding a woman to be the mother of his future son. Still, he pursues a relationship with Robin – “he felt he could talk to her, tell her anything, though she herself was so silent” (Barnes 41) – though Robin seems to hardly feel anything towards Felix, except resentment of what is to come of their courtship: “When she smiled the smile was only in the mouth and a little bitter” (Barnes 41). Furthermore, Felix does not show any interest in Robin as anything besides her role as the carrier of his future, and becomes frustrated that that her attention wanders from him:

*Felix, with tightly held monocle, walked beside Robin, talking to her, drawing her attention to this and that, wrecking himself and his peace of mind in an effort to acquaint her with the destiny he had chosen for her – that she might bear his sons who would recognize and honour the past. For without such love, the past as he understood it, would die away from the world... (Barnes 45)*



What Felix truly loves, then, is the past, and the prospect to be part of the past as he passes on his legacy to the sons Robin would bear for him. Later, after Robin leaves him, Felix admits to Doctor O' Connor:

*"If I should try to put into words, I mean how I did see her, it would be incomprehensible, for the simple reason that I find that I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time. I had an image of her, but that is not the same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties... The more we learn of a person, the less we know..."* (Barnes 111)

Perhaps the truth is that Felix never did know Robin, and therefore he could not have loved her. If this is true, it strengthens the idea that his feelings are simply misplaced, and he failed to recognize the passion he felt was not actually for Robin, but for the great past. Similarly, Jenny Pletherbridge's relationship with Robin has to be examined for authenticity, as Barnes introduces Jenny as a "squatter":

*When she fell in love it was with the perfect fury of accumulated dishonesty; she became instantly a dealer of second-hand and therefore incalculable emotions. As, from the solid archives of usage, she had stolen or appropriated the dignity of speech, so she appropriated the most passionate love she knew, Nora's for Robin. She was a "squatter" by instinct...* (Barnes 68)

Immediately, the reader is wary of Jenny's intentions – Jenny "fell in love" with Robin; does she understand the meaning of love if she is merely copying another woman's emotions for Robin? How could her own love for Robin be real? Jenny is described as "nervous about her future" (Barnes 67); she is a widow and it is quite possible is anxious about finding another love and therefore "squats" on a love that seems deep and true to her, overcompensating for what she does not have. When Nora, grief-stricken about her loss of Robin, asks Doctor O'Connor about Jenny, he replies:

*"She has a longing for other people's property, but the moment she possesses it the property loses some of its value, for the owner's estimate is it's worth. Therefore it was she took your Robin..."*

*"She sets about collecting a destiny – and for her, the sole destiny is love, anyone's love and so her own. So own someone else's love is her love..."* (Barnes 98)

In reading we can see that Jenny cannot love Robin in the sense that her only feelings towards Robin are not actually her own, though she claims, "my love is sacred and my love is great" (Barnes 75). In response, Robin swiftly tells Jenny to shut up – perhaps she is perceptive to the hollowness of what Jenny calls "love." And in the end, Jenny's conquest of Robin fails as Robin leaves her to wander. The question remaining then, is whether Nora's love for Robin is real.

Nora is introduced as having “the face of all people who love people – a face that would be evil when she found out that to love without criticism is to be betrayed” (Barnes 51), which almost generalizes Nora to the point that it is hard to believe that she could have an understanding of love. As Barnes takes us through the course of Nora and Robin’s relationship, we see the strong devotion Nora has for Robin; to Nora, Robin even becomes a part of her – “In Nora’s heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity” (Barnes 56) – but after their bond crumbles, Nora herself questions the meaning of love:

*“Oh G-d,’ she cried. ‘What is love? Man seeking his own head? The human head, so rented by misery... Everything we can’t bear in this world, someday we find in another person, and love it all at once. A strong sense of identity gives man an idea he can do no wrong; too little accomplishes the same...”* (Barnes 135)

Without certainty of her own identity, without certainty of her own understanding of love, perhaps Nora had latched to Robin because she wanted to find herself. Nora asks Doctor O’Connor, “Have you ever loved someone and it became yourself?” (Barnes 152) – and if her relationship with Robin gave her a sense of self, the cause of her fanatical heartache might not have been the loss of Robin. Doctor O’Connor, sensitive to this possibility, tells her, “We swoon with the thickness of our own tongue when we say *I love you*” (Barnes 83); with this he indicates that when a person is so consumed with the idea of love, that individual does not have a true sense of what she means with the words “I love you.” Though Nora cries on and on about her love for Robin, could it be love if she does not understand what it means?

To me, it seems as though Barnes filled *Nightwood* with characters so addicted to Robin that the only way each character could explain his or her frenzied attraction to Robin was with the word “love.” But as it is revealed, it is hard to imagine that either Felix or Jenny loved Robin, for they barely knew her. With Nora it may be more difficult to judge, because little of Robin’s identity is shown to the reader. We never get a sense if Nora’s obsession is over the woman within Robin’s skin and bones – that is, the spirit that encompasses the fossil that lies in Nora’s heart – or the idea of whom she believes Robin to be. In the end we are left confused, uncertain as to what will happen to Felix, Jenny, Nora, and Robin; all the characters are left wandering, alone – perhaps because none of them understand love, they must literally search until they find its meaning.

Just as Robin Vote is the central object of passion in *Nightwood*, Dorcas haunts both Joe Trace and Violet in Morrison’s *Jazz*. Though Joe and Violet are married, we wonder, from the beginning, if they were ever really in love. If they were indeed in love, why does Joe Trace begin an affair with Dorcas? As Morrison shows us, Joe’s emotions for Dorcas are so strong “that he shot her just to keep the feeling going” (Morrison 3) – he obsesses over the memory of her after she dies:

*Now he lies in bed remembering every detail of that October afternoon when he first met her, from start to finish, and over and over. Not just because it is tasty, but because he is trying to sear her into his mind, brand her there against future wear. So that neither she nor the alive love of her will fade or scab over the way it had with Violet... (Morrison 28-29)*

Joe does not say here that he loved Dorcas, simply that he loves the way he remembers her, replaying her over and over in his mind. Later, he admits, addressing Dorcas in a monologue, “Don’t ever think I fell for you, or fell over you. I didn’t fall in love, I rose in it. I saw you and made up my mind” (Morrison 135) – thus, he rose in the passion, of having the affair and breaking his faithfulness to Violet. In fact, the selection of Dorcas seems to emerge from his frustration with Violet’s distance from him after her growing desire to have children – “he feels sorry for himself for being faithful in the first place... Because he has never messed with another woman, because he selected that young girl to love, he thinks he’s free... free to do something wild” (Morrison 120). The emotions he links to his image of Dorcas, then, are not actually emotions of love. Rather, when he remembers Dorcas, he remembers the exhilaration of recreating the feelings he had for Violet, which have faded from his memory. Joe must redirect his energy to another woman, instead of resurrecting love with Violet, since Violet has grown so distant. The result for Joe is the thrill of passion when he selects Dorcas – but she is merely a replacement. Even if Joe does not understand that difference, we learn that Dorcas knows that Joe cannot truly love her:

*“He didn’t even care what I looked like. I could be anything, do anything – and it pleased him. Something about that made me mad...”*

*...And I play with my food now. Joe liked me to eat it all up and want more. Acton gives me a quiet look when I ask for seconds. He worries about me that way. Joe never did. Joe didn’t care what kind of woman I was. He should have. I cared. I wanted a have a personality and with Acton I’m getting one...” (Morrison 190)*

The point of view Dorcas gives us is crucial insight to her relationship with Joe. First of all, there is mention of Violet’s cooking habits earlier on, and when Dorcas exposes that Joe likes her to eat all of her food, it eerily echoes the way he used to feel about the portion sizes Violet serves him – “Once upon a time, he bragged about her cooking. Couldn’t wait to get back to the house to devour it” (Morrison 69). Joe’s behavior with Dorcas follows in the shadow of what his marriage to Violet used to be. If he does not care what kind of woman Dorcas is, as she suspects, he wants to recreate his feelings for Violet with her.

The deterioration of Joe and Violet’s relationship may be proof of the weakness of their feelings for each other, but nevertheless, I believe that – more so than any other characters – they share a relationship with an understanding of the love between them.

Because of Violet's regret of never having children, she becomes "still as well as silent. Over time her silences annoy her husband, then puzzle him and finally depress him" (Morrison 24), and this sparks the plan of Joe's affair. When he rents the room in order to sneak around, he does so because he wants somebody to talk to; he tells Malvonne, "Maybe that's the way it goes with people been married as long as we have. But the quiet. I can't take the quiet. She don't hardly talk anymore, and I ain't allowed near her" (Morrison 49).

Perhaps their love has faded, or perhaps it never existed in the first place, but Violet gives reason to think that they were once in love. "He was my Joe Trace," she tells us (Morrison 96), and the description of their past life together makes me believe that they were in love, but never said the words to communicate the feelings they had between them. Unlike the other characters of *On the Road* and *Nightwood*, all of whom tossed the words "I love you" around without care or consequence of the meaning it held, Joe and Violet simply never said it, though it did exist between them:

*They weren't even there yet and already the City was speaking to them. They were dancing. And like a million others, chests pounding, controlling their feet, they stared out the windows for the first sight of the City that danced with them, proving already how much it loved them. Like a million more they could hardly wait to get there and love it back...*

*... There is nothing to beat what the city can make of a night sky. It can empty itself of surface, and more like the ocean than the ocean itself go deep, starless. Close up on the tops of buildings, near, nearer than the cap you are wearing, such a city sky presses and retreats, presses and retreats, making me think of free but illegal love of sweethearts before they are discovered... if it wanted to, it could show me stars cut from the lame gowns of chorus girls, or mirrored in the eyes of sweethearts furtive and happy under the pressure of a deep, touchable sky...*

*Twenty years after Joe and Violet train-danced into the City, they were still a couple but barely speaking to each other, let alone laughing together or acting like the ground was a dance-hall floor. Convinced that he alone remembers those days, and wants them back, aware of what it looked like but not at all what it felt like, he coupled himself elsewhere. He rented a room from a neighbor who knows the exact cost of her discretion. Six hours a week he purchased. Time for the city sky to move from a thin ice blue to purple with a heart of gold. And time enough, when the sun sinks, to tell his new love things he never told his wife... (Morrison 32, 35-36)*

In the end, we get to see Joe and Violet redeem lost time – though they may have forgotten for a moment what their love was, the understanding returns, as Felice watches them dance again, after all those years:

*"Music floated in to us through an open window. Mr. Trace moved his head to the rhythm and his wife snapped her fingers in time. She did a little step in front of him and he smiled. By and by they were dancing..."* (Morrison 214)

When we come to the final page of *Jazz*, the narrator gives us a concluding commentary, from which we confidently accept Joe and Violet's rediscovery of their love; the words they should have said in the beginning, and the words they no longer need to say because they understand what lies between them:

*That I have loved only you, surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else. That I want you to love me back and show it to me. That I love the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you. I like your fingers on and on, lifting, turning. I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you went away from me. Talking to you and hearing your answer – that's the kick...*  
(Morrison 229)

Love, as we can see, is a tricky thing. Love is hard to define and harder to understand – the words can flow from our lips effortlessly; just as it takes little effort to teach a parrot to say, "I love you" or to teach a parakeet a name, these words can be said, haphazardly, excessively, unjustifiably. And as easy as it is to say "I love you," it is just as easy to fly away from a relationship – like Dean and Sal, like Felix, Jenny, Nora, and Robin – like a bird, once it becomes complicated. And declarations of love can swiftly become complicated, as these characters demonstrate; by sex, by revelations of meaning, by expectation of the future, by pretending, by personal confusion, by past memories, by a tragic past, by the allure of something new. The true test then, is if one can persevere against the temptation of wandering away, to think about what "I love you" means, if it is really true. And if there is meaning behind the words, like there is for Joe and Violet Trace, then and only then should the words be said; then "I love you" should be sung like music, danced to and celebrated, because it is rare to understand the meaning in those words.

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*Emily Shutt*

THE LEHIGH REVIEW



*Howard Ward*



# China's Three Gorges Dam Project

BY RONNIE CRAIG GABRIEL ANI

## Introduction

Like an unforeseen deluge, the People's Republic of China is making waves in the international scene, tossing aside those not willing to make way and satisfying others cunning enough to accommodate it. Not since the arousal of the American industrial machine during World War II has the world seen such a surge in productivity, development; and overall economic drive by one nation. While it is true that many states have arisen from the ashes to claim staggering growth figures, none can compare to China's potential in affecting the world market. China has become a Mecca for investment; hundreds of multinational corporations have rushed to its growing cities. At the helm of this ship is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Struggling to redefine itself versus the misery of disintegration, China's neo-communist leadership has no doubt liberalized since the days of Mao, and has allowed Western influence back into its borders. Unlike the Mao era, when the country struggled with feeding its people, today's China readies itself for more comfortable times of iron rice bowls and golden chopsticks. The CCP is relentless in pursuing reforms and modernization projects, turning mud roads into superhighways and magnetic levitation trains. What used to be farmlands are now bustling financial districts, like Shanghai's Pudong. But how far will Chinese leadership go? Though the answer may only lie in the future, when hindsight is the only accurate yardstick, components leading to the answers now pop up in the form of high-rise complexes and enormous public works projects.

One such project to be explored by this study is the controversial Three Gorges Dam which, when finished in less than a decade, will be the largest dam and single most expensive structure in the history of the world. Hailed by the CCP and abhorred by environmentalists and human rights groups, the project has widely aroused commentary from both sides. The Chinese government believes that it is the answer to chronic flooding and an over-reliance on polluting power sources. But will the finished product be worthy of its acclaim? Is the dam going to be worth the millions it has already displaced, and the millions it has yet to affect? Will the culture of thousands of years ago vanish without a trace, under a lake the size of Superior?



## Background

Known to the Chinese as Ch'ang-chiang, or, Long River, The Yangtze is the third longest river in the world (3,900 miles) and mothers more than 350 million people along its banks (Van Slyke 15-16). Most of the river is a thousand or more feet above sea level, as its source is found deep within the Tibetan Plateau. The Yangtze has more than 700 tributaries and a watershed area of more than 700,000 square miles (20% of China's total land area) (Van Slyke 16). The most spectacular part of the river occurs at the Three Gorges. Majestic cliffs and thin passes characterize the 150-mile stretch of the Three Gorges area. At some points, the river gap is only 350 feet, and dramatic changes in water level are common (Van Slyke 16). It is an area rich in fable and history; there have been many to write accounts of danger and adventure in the Gorges. The majority of those whose accounts can be considered credible wrote of the breathtaking scenery. An early observation made by an American, Isabella Bird, remarks on this beauty during the 1890s:

"... what looked like a cleft in the rock appeared, and making an abrupt turn round a high rocky point in all the thrill of novelty and expectation, we were in the Ichang Gorge, the first and one of the grandest of those gigantic clefts through which the Great River, at times a mile in breadth, there compressed into a limit of from 400 to 150 yards, has carved a passage through the mountains... The change from a lake-like stretch, with its light and movement, to a dark and narrow gorge black with the shadows of nearly perpendicular limestone cliffs broken up into buttresses and fantastic towers of curiously splintered and weathered rock, culminating in the 'Pillar of Heaven,' a limestone pinnacle rising sheer from the water to a height of 1800 feet, is so rapid as to bewilder the sense. The expression 'lost in admiration' is a literally correct one" (Bird 132).

Since the days of Liu Bei and the Three Kingdoms era, the Gorges Area has encouraged the development of art and literature.

The Three Gorges is (not surprisingly) composed of three main gorges: the Ch'u-r'ang Gorge, the Wu (or Witches) Gorge, and His-ling Gorge, and lies on a west-to-east line between the cities of Wanhsien and Ich'ang (Van Slyke 20). The Three Gorges Dam Project, located in the His-ling Gorge, is an offspring of past generations' ambitions for a developed China. First envisioned by Dr. Sun Yat-Sen in 1919, the dam was proposed to harness the power of the mighty Yangtze and generate much-needed power for the young state. Due to an unfavorable political climate for such a project to be accomplished, the idea was shelved and was not picked up until 1954 by Communist Mao Zedong, when floods severely threatened Sichuan Province. Chairman Mao, who loved to write poetry, subliminally promoted the idea for a dam in the Three

Gorges in a poem he wrote called "Swimming," after taking a habitual swim across his beloved Yangtze: "Sails move with the wind. Tortoise and snake are still. Great plans are afoot: a bridge will fly to span the north and south, turning a deep chasm into a thoroughfare; walls of stone will stand upstream to the west to hold back Wushan's clouds and rain, till a smooth lake rises in the narrow gorges" (Imperial Tours). Plans were scrapped until the 1970s, however, as Mao's Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution ravaged the land of resources and manpower. Economic reforms in 1978 underlined the need for more electricity to supply the growing industrial base, and construction was approved in 1979 (China Online).

### **Dam Problems: Past and Present**

Before pressing on with arguments about the dam's many implications, one should first consider China's past in dam building and the planning (or lack thereof) that has gone along with them. China has a long history of building dams. One of the earliest was built in the Sichuan Province by Li Bing of the Qin Dynasty (227-207) (Qing 22). Between then and 1949, however, dam building activity was minimal. The knowledge gained through centuries of dam construction was not passed down because of the collapse of the imperial autocracy. Technological secrets that kept China well ahead of the Western world for a long stretch of history disappeared. Since the declaration of the People's Republic, dam building has been on a soaring rebound. Despite the delay in constructing the Three Gorges Dam, there was a boom in dam building after the Great Leap forward. More than 80,000 dams and reservoirs have been built over the last forty years alone (Qing 22). These dams, designed for flood control, electricity generation, irrigation, and water provisions to urban areas, served its purpose only to an extent. Dai Qing, Chinese environmentalist and author and a vocal opponent of the Three Gorges Dam project, claims that by 1973, "40 percent or 4,501 of the 10,000 Chinese reservoirs with capacities between ten thousand and one million cubic meters were found to have been built below project specifications and were unable to control floods effectively" (Qing 22). By 1981, roughly 3.7% of all dams had collapsed.

The worse of the collapses occurred in August of 1975. A massive typhoon that dumped more than a thousand millimeters of rain in just three days was more than the Banqiao and Shimantan Dams of Henan Province could bear. After overflowing by several centimeters, both dams/reservoirs collapsed, sending 720 million cubic meters of water rushing into the Zhumadia Prefecture (Human Rights Watch). 85,600 people initially died from drowning, an estimated 230,000 died from health epidemics and famine, and 11 million people were displaced from their homes.

Certain experts claim that this catastrophe could have been avoided (barring the argument that the zeal in which these dams and reservoirs were built was completely counterproductive). The Banqiao Reservoir was hit by a strong typhoon earlier in the month, causing it to fill almost to capacity. To ameliorate the danger of overflowing, sluice gates were opened to help drain the reservoir. Drainage, however, was partially

impeded due to a silt accumulation. When the next system of torrential rain hit the area several days later, maximum holding capacity for the dam was not restored, and Banqiao overflowed and collapsed (Qing 32). When confronted with the issue of the Three Gorges Dam project, certain questions that were asked of the Chinese leadership back in 1975 resurface in the minds of today's dam nay-sayers: has the Chinese government fully considered the feasibility of building a dam of this size on the Yangtze? Will past problems such as silt accumulation be encountered again, and if so, how are they to be addressed?

### **Environmental Implications**

Critics of the Three Gorges Dam project have time and again petitioned the government to examine more closely the environmental implications of building the dam. Regardless of the imprisonment of dam opponents in the past, activists such as Dai Qing have not ceased their efforts. Many intellectuals from the Western world have added to the opposition, saying that the Three Gorges Dam could be a "toxic time bomb." According to Telegraph UK, the dam will promote pollution in the reservoir, holding 155 billion cubic feet of wastewater, which currently reaches the sea (Telegraph). The wastewater will contain toxins such as arsenic, mercury, lead, cyanide, and other cancer-causing metals.

On the other hand, the government has argued that the dam's environmental benefits will outweigh its negatives. They claim that the 300,000 tourists who've visited the area this past year were impressed with the cleanliness of the site. Sun Weiquan, director of Yicheng's environmental protection bureau, claims that environmental experts check air and water quality of the site on a monthly basis, and that they meet national standards. Great efforts have been made to reduce the negative impacts of the project on the environment. For instance, Sun claims that all the sand used for making concrete, which is in great demand for the project, is made of granite dug up by the builders at the construction site. This is said to be both cost-effective and environment-friendly.

Another environmental advantage to the dam is the resulting reduction of sulfur dioxide and carbon dioxide emissions. China's growing coal consumption poses a huge threat to the environment. Coal burning emits several harmful air pollutants including carbon dioxide, a major contributor to global warming. Currently, three quarters of the country's energy come from coal power plants. Sulfur dioxide emissions, which cause acid rain, are expected to rise from 15.5 million tons in 1991 to 1.4 billion (Telegraph). The government backs the project on the basis that the dam could potentially generate electricity equal to about 40 million tons of coal, further reducing the nation's coal dependency.

### **The Human Resettlement Dilemma**

Then, of course, there is a human factor to consider. Critics fear that although the effort by the government to resettle displaced people has been genuine, it will

nonetheless fail and leave the people of the Yangtze in an even more fragile situation. Chinese resettlement expert Dr. Wei Yi has warned that new regulations governing the relocation of more than one million people whose homes will be flooded by the Three Gorges dam are likely to fail. He believes that while the government aims to improve the lives of displaced citizens, the eventuality will more likely be poverty. Like the six million Chinese who have been displaced by the dam projects of the past, Dr. Wei believes that the "victims" of the Three Gorges project will end up with even lower living standards in refugee-like conditions. The government has promised the displaced people of the Gorges monetary compensation for their troubles. However, the project has long been marred by corruption scandals, with government officials swindling the money intended for compensation (Human Rights Watch). In 2000, the government admitted that \$58 million of resettlement money, out of \$2.1 billion then allocated, had been misappropriated (Economist 2002). Relocates of the project also complain of being deceived with false offers of compensation and land distribution.

"Resettlement is not simply a function of compensation and planning. It is a matter of adaptation by the rehabilitation of relocatees. The people from Sandouping refused to move to Yichang because officials would do nothing to help them adapt to their new situation" (Qing 70). There seem to be no guarantees that the resettlement projects will be a success. Of course, economic considerations and government planning can help people adapt, but the characteristics of the resettlement sites (i.e. type of land and the social make up of the area) are larger considerations than economic compensation. In the future, the success or failure of the Three Gorges Dam project can be measured by how well the people of the area have resettled. One can pray that their fate not be the same as their compatriots only a few decades back.

### **Closing Remarks**

An additional concern in the Three Gorges Dam debate is how China will sell its energy once the dam is completed. In a May 13, 2000 issue of the *Economist*, an article concerning the dam claimed that at this point, China has all the power it needs, and will have trouble trying to sell power generated by the Three Gorges Dam when it is completed (Economist 2000).

The project on the Long River has become a classic example of the new overcoming the old. The China of today has truly taken on a new face. Sweeping changes in the Middle Kingdom that have occurred in the past hundred years are uncharacteristic of the other three millennia of often calm stasis. The Chinese people are being forced by the shrinking world to conform, lest they be left behind. The Chinese Communist Party has thus far complied wonderfully well with Western requests and taken on a vision for rapid modernization, one that would shock traditional members of the Party (such as Mao).

The majority of the information presented in this study has been critical of the project. Many sources are major opponents to the Three Gorges Dam, and have been heard and silenced by the Chinese government. This is not to say that the exploration

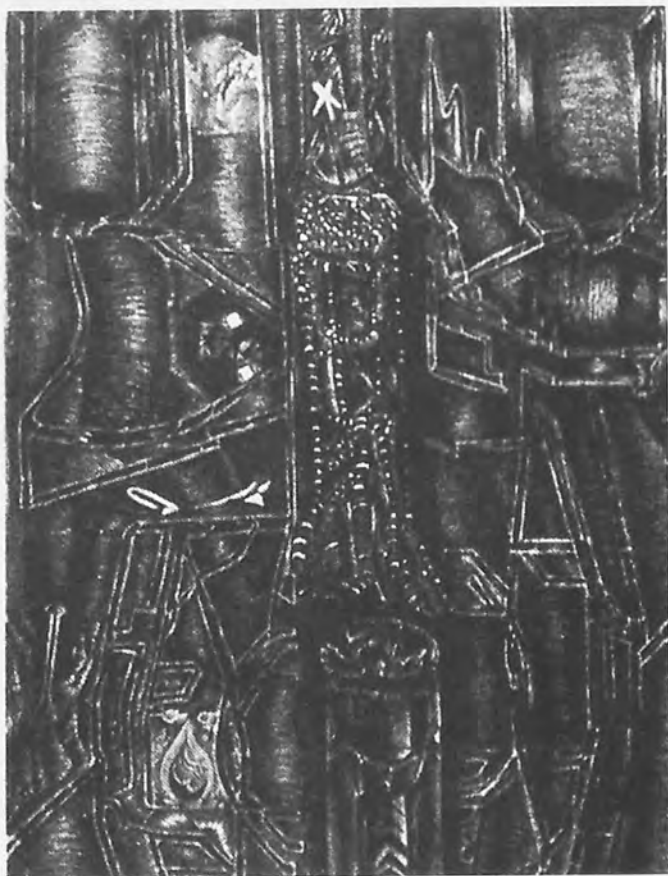
as a whole has been biased. It is to say, though, that the overwhelming majority of positive effects associated with the dam have yet to be felt. The Chinese authorities hope to reap the bountiful harvest of their strenuous efforts in 2009, when the dam is scheduled to be completed.

Will China have to answer to a catastrophe because of shoddy construction in the next decade? Critics who believe so have been negated by other scientific claims and the Chinese government. Articles have disappeared and resurfaced in the past several years regarding the fragile state that the dam is presently in. Opponents of the dam have said that there are now cracks in it, and they continue to grow. Sources from the government have released, on the other hand, information to the free press of the Western world that cracks in large concrete structures are normal, and are no cause for alarm (Economist 2000).

The Three Gorges Dam, an endeavor of colossal proportions, in many ways symbolizes the pride that the Chinese people would like to be associated with once more. Engineers of the Great Wall and the Grand Canal, the Chinese are historically linked with mighty construction projects. Along with its equally controversial space program, the Chinese want to push ahead into modernity, surpassing the most industrialized and developed states on earth. Again, what remains in question is how well the Chinese will do this. Will the Three Gorges Dam become a monument to future Chinese achievements, a promise of greatness to come? Or will the dam break, cracking the structure as well as the nation? In either way, the People's Republic has captivated the world's attention and its careful, watchful eyes.

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*Howard Ward*



## The “Monstrous” Feminist Message of *The Mists of Avalon*

BY KYM MURPHY

Women have long been neglected in Arthurian literature and film. It is rare for a woman to ever play a role in Camelot larger than a beautiful prize to be won or a mysterious old hag who wreaks havoc upon the kingdom. As Arthurian scholar Jeannette Smith notes, “Traditional heroic versions of the Matter of Britain ... minimized and idealized the role of women, depicting them as property to be stolen and retrieved. Or women were depicted as male-defined stereotypes: the virgin, the wife, the witch” (131). They certainly have never been considered worthy enough to be named the protagonist of an Arthurian text or film – at least not until recently: “In the last fifteen years, parallel to and undoubtedly influenced by the rise of the Women’s movement, women’s values have finally been evidenced in many contemporary fantasy versions of the Arthurian legend” (Smith 132). The most notable of these texts is Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *The Mists of Avalon*.

Bradley’s 1982 novel seemed to revolutionize how the world saw Arthurian women. For the first time, Morgaine, a Priestess who is often negatively portrayed by traditional Arthurian texts, is given a voice to tell her side of the Arthurian tale. Instead of revolving around the Knights of the Roundtable and King Arthur’s chivalric adventures on the battlefield, the book presents a female point-of-view that emphasizes the sorority of the Priestesses of Avalon and their continuing quest to preserve the sacred traditions of Goddess-worship. The film *The Mists of Avalon*, made in 2001 by director Uli Edel, upholds the female focus of Zimmer’s book and has delivered it to a new, cinematic audience. Many view this movie as a feminist retelling of the medieval King Arthur story because of its positive portrayal of the Priestesses, female domination over influential male figures, opposition to the patriarchal church, and promotion of female communities. However, there are many complications with a feminist interpretation of *The Mists of Avalon*. The New Arthurian Encyclopedia comments, “From the first Arthurian fictions to the most recent transformations of the legend, the role of women at Arthur’s court and in the lands beyond has been both centrally important and highly problematic” (Lacy 524). This statement rings true for the film *The Mists of Avalon* since upon closer examination, the narrative is “monstrously” feminist in its persuasion by enforcing an exclusive female collectivism



instead of a gender-accepting society. Ultimately, the women whom Bradley intended to be empowering become the "monsters" of the film, thus refuting the original, positive feminist intentions of the story.

It is not difficult to see how some may view *The Mists of Avalon* as an affirmative feminist film. First and foremost, the audience is intended to sympathize with the Priestesses, specifically through Morgaine, the narrator. The director's decision to have Morgaine narrate the film as she does the novel is certainly liberating, allowing this woman to tell the Arthur story from her point-of-view, which had previously been unheard of. In other Arthurian films and literature, the Priestesses have been portrayed as manipulative enchantresses who use sorcery to get their way. This could not be further from the truth in *The Mists of Avalon*. For the most part, the Priestesses are only seen using magic for good – to help Arthur ascend to the throne of England, to communicate with one another, and to warn their allies of threats from enemies, as Igraine warned Uther that Gorlois would attack at the beginning of the film. Since so many past interpretations of the Camelot story have the Priestesses pegged as the cause of turmoil in Arthur's kingdom, many viewers have welcomed a supposed positive and light-hearted depiction of the ladies of Avalon, seeing it as useful in helping Arthurian women move themselves from the shadows of their past characterizations.

Viewers who interpret *The Mists of Avalon* as spreading affirmative feminist morals also note that behind essentially every powerful man in this film, there is a woman. Critic Lee Ann Tobin writes, "The power behind the throne is female, not male" and the viewpoint is "on women's magic, and Morgaine's role as a heroine, rather than men's battles" (150). The movie shows the women of Avalon, especially the Priestesses, having extraordinary amounts of power and influence over men. After seeing the state of war Britain was in, Vivienne, the Lady of the Lake and High Priestess of the Goddess, says, "We have to bring this fighting to an end." She obviously believes that the Priestesses have the power to end the conflict and, thus, are responsible for doing so. Vivienne also gives Uther Pendragon, Arthur's father, the throne – a move that ultimately affects the entire nation. Furthermore, Excalibur, the traditional symbol of phallic masculinity, is only bestowed upon Arthur after he swears himself to the Goddess – a considerable sign of female domination over the masculine realm.

It is significant that the two most respected males of Arthurian tradition, King Arthur himself and Merlin, appear to be under the influence of women. Young Morgaine proves herself to be a pillar of strength for her brother Arthur, asking him to be brave when they are forced to be separated as children. Morgaine continues to stand behind Arthur throughout his reign as king, giving him courage until the very end. When he is distraught over the loss of Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot, Arthur looks to Morgaine for answers on what to do next. Morgaine replies, "I've done my duty, now you must do yours ... You must bring one last note of glory to Avalon." With this statement, Morgaine asserts that she has already made a substantial contribution to the protection of Avalon and she convinces Arthur to take action against the invasion of the Saxons, demonstrating her remarkable influence over Arthur and a certain power in her own right.

Merlin, also a traditionally dominant figure in the Arthurian legend, is always in the company of women in *The Mists of Avalon*. While he has powers of his own, he is submissive to both the Goddess and Vivienne, who are both strong female figures. At Arthur's coronation, he is surrounded only by women – Vivienne, Morgaine, Morgause, etc. – and he is the only male the audience recognizes as an inhabitant of Avalon, the sacred island of the Goddess where the Priestesses live. As one of the most recognizable names in Arthurian film and literature, it is commendable that in *The Mists of Avalon*, a male figure of Merlin's caliber chooses to align himself with a group of women and worship a female supreme being.

An important aspect of any feminist argument is establishing an element of society that is in opposition to women in order to show that women are oppressed and must take action against male domination. Referring to the novel, Marion Wynne-Davies writes, "While championing women's freedom, both in her own period and in some mythic timeless realm, Bradley has to create a hostile male otherness" (182). This "hostile male otherness" happens to be in the form of the Church, a patriarchal institution that worships God as the "Father," openly establishing an opposition to the female-oriented "Old Religion" of the Priestesses who worship the Goddess as the "Mother" of the earth. The Church, as depicted by the film, is a close-minded and misogynistic institution. During a heated conversation at the King's Feast, Lady Igraine confronts the Bishop about the church's misogynistic teachings, "Do you not say that women are the means by which evil came into the world?" The Bishop retorts, "The bible merely recounts the truth." Although "the idea that women carry sin and are to man as flesh is to spirit is ... a common early Christian viewpoint which served during the Middle Ages to oppress women," this cinematic dialogue ultimately reveals a side of the Church which is meant to offend the audience into sympathizing with the Priestesses and supporting their matriarchal religion – a move which feminists would surely approve of (Tobin 148).

Perhaps the most blatant display of feminism in this movie is the community of Priestesses itself: "Communal women's sanctuaries ... demonstrate an independent woman's life-style" (Smith 137). This "circle of the Goddess" is set up in contrast to the Knights of the Round Table. While Arthur's knights gather in a circle to either get drunk or discuss battle strategies in the film, we see the Priestesses forming circles in peaceful worship of the Goddess or retreating to the Ring of Avalon for quiet contemplation. "Goddess worship is depicted as inclusive, accepting of diverse groups, including men, and accepting of multiple philosophies, including Christianity" (Smith 139). *The Mists of Avalon* therefore depicts a union under matriarchy much more favorably than the union under a patriarchal monarchy.

Femininity in the film is also portrayed as a uniter, not a divider, for some viewers. It can be asserted that the main characters define their identities with respect to the women of the film, based upon the belief that Morgaine, Vivienne, Merlin, and Igraine all live their lives according to the order of the Goddess and the community of Priestesses. Arthur finds solace in his relationships with Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar, as does

Lancelot. Mordred is defined by his being the son of Morgaine, the king's sister, but being brought up by Morgause. Author Marilyn R. Farwell acknowledges that "real closure comes not with the death of Arthur but with Morgaine's return to a woman's religious community, a community that reminds her of the priestesses of Avalon ... Female bonding is, then, always on the verge of breaking up the male bonding on which the Christian world and its stories depend" (154-5). In other words, Farwell alleges that because Morgaine joins the convent of Glastonbury at the end of the film, the ways of the Goddess (matriarchy, peace, and compassion) have not died with Avalon and they will never die as long as there is some form of sorority in the world. Women, then, will forever be an influential force on men.

When all of the above information is taken into consideration, the feminist categorization that some viewers bestow upon *The Mists of Avalon* certainly seems valid. At the very least, it is a film narrated by a woman about women. The women of the film cannot be easily defined as "good" or "evil," which is definitely an invigorating change of pace from other Medieval movies that classify women in strictly dichotomized fashions. In Cecil B. DeMille's *The Crusades* (1935), for example, the two main female characters are easily marked as good and evil. Berengaria, Richard the Lion-hearted's love interest, is blonde-haired and fair-skinned, always dressed in white with a kind disposition and a strong desire for peace. While Berengaria never gives into male domination too easily and is ultimately influential over Richard, she is the epitome of the "pure, virginal" female and is responsible for establishing peace between the Crusaders and the Saracens. Alice, on the other hand, is dressed in dark colors to match her dark hair and exotic look. She is vindictive and conniving, always wanting to have her way. Alice will do anything to have Richard for herself – she even tries to kill Berengaria. Thus, she is the "dark, evil" female of this medieval story.

In contrast to *The Crusades*, *The Mists of Avalon* has female characters that are more than two-dimensional. They all have backgrounds, convictions, and associations with other characters that are visible to the audience. Even Morgause, the woman who can most easily be labeled "villainess" for her manipulation of Mordred and lust for power over Camelot, is not entirely repulsive to the audience – her ties to the Goddess and her status as Priestess make us want to believe that she has some redeeming qualities, or at least that she is not inherently evil.

The same multi-dimensional characterizations that liberalize the women of Avalon from their traditional Arthurian counterparts also complicate a positive feminist reading of the film, however. Marion Wynne-Davies puts this position best in her book *Women and Arthurian Literature*:

Although [the story] appears to promote a fairly bland political message, it also persistently repudiates the very message it pretends to champion. Bradley is caught within the chronotope of the novel's gendered message, wishing to present a timeless continuity of female power, but at the same time endowing the narratorial self with a succinctly twentieth-century feminist sensibility. The

diachronic and synchronic elements of the text stretch apart and snap together at key points ... forcing the central discourses into increasingly contradictory positions. Indeed, if Bradley and her main protagonist, Morgaine, are the future and past of feminist Arthurianism, it is possible to wonder if women will ever 'seize the sword.' (177)

The same criticism with which Wynne-Davies describes the novel *The Mists of Avalon* applies to the film as well. The movie is so dedicated to cinematically interpreting Bradley's modern feminist message that it fails to recognize that the modern bent toward female liberation does not work within the Arthurian narrative. Due to the patriarchal, misogynistic society of the Middle Ages from which the legend emerged, there is no liberating role for women in the traditional Arthurian tale. Both the written and cinematic versions of Bradley's story have tried to squeeze a feminist message into a medieval legend where there is no place for a feminist message. What results is a skewed view of Arthurian women as women who dominate over men but never sacrifice their expected feminine roles, are morally ambiguous, limit "positive" feminism to an exclusive group of people, are ultimately responsible for the destruction of Camelot and Avalon, are part of an futile sisterhood, and are associated with the negative aspects of the maternal.

As much as the Priestesses seem to represent independent, influential women on the exterior, "increased attention to the Arthurian ladies has not, for the most part, liberated fictional women from their traditional feminine roles" (Lacy 526). All of the women who were previously mentioned as having some amount of power over men also allow men to have a great amount of power over them. In Morgaine's introductory narration, she says, "Unless one great leader could unite Christians and followers of the old religion, Britain was doomed to barbarism and Avalon would vanish." This "one great leader" is supposed to be Arthur. Although, as Vivienne mentions, the Priestesses are responsible for guiding the leader and assuring peace in Britain, the fate of the nation really depends on the actions of a man. The placement of this statement at the very beginning of the movie sets the film's tone as somewhat anti-feminist from the get go.

Lady Igraine, mother of Morgaine and Arthur as well as sister to the Lady of the Lake, could potentially have been one of the most influential women in the narrative. She is wife of one king, mother to another king, and the sibling of the highest-ranking Priestess in Avalon. Igraine chooses to conform to conventional domestic roles, however. The first time the audience is introduced to Igraine, she is spinning – a domestic task traditionally associated with female housework. She lets herself become entirely dependent on men. At the King's Feast, she does stand up to her first husband, Gorlois, when he is ready to hit her: "Think before you strike me, Gorlois, or I will teach you that a daughter of the holy Goddess is servant of no man." Judging by the rest of the film, however, this confident stand may have been a fluke, as Igraine laments over Gorlois' death and her infidelity to him. It is obvious to the audience, through

Gorlois' jealous comments and possessiveness over Igraine, that he was a cold-hearted man, but Igraine seems to have been attached to him anyway, perhaps indicating a character flaw of hers. The only time we see Igraine use the powers of the Goddess in a significant way is when she sends her spirit to warn Uther of her husband's invasion. She wants to save Uther, the man she loves, and in order to do this, she puts herself on the verge of death. After Gorlois' death, she marries Uther, but he is killed in battle as well and Igraine goes to pieces, swearing off the Goddess and moving to a convent. Her beauty has faded and she appears tragically unhappy after Uther's death. She no longer has a man to rely on, so instead she embraces the patriarchy of the Church. Although she joins a sisterhood of nuns, it is important to remember that it was (and still is, to a large extent) men who dominate the Church.

While Igraine sacrifices her feminine liberalism for men in the most obvious manner, Morgaine certainly lets men have a significant power over her as well. She finds herself falling for Lancelot and breaks her oath to the Goddess by using magic for recreational purposes, opening the mist of Avalon because Lancelot questions her ability to do so. She is constantly thinking about the Hunter she had sex with (who turns out to have been Arthur), and she lets thoughts of both the Hunter and Arthur dominate her visions and distract her from her Priestess duties throughout the film. Morgaine, like her mother, is happiest when filling conventional domestic roles: "In marrying King Uriens and moving with him to Wales, I won myself some of the few years of happiness my life was to give me." Indeed, the idea that the "epitome" of liberal feminists in *The Mists of Avalon* finds her only contentment while with a man is more than a little contradictory to a positive feminist reading.

Vivienne, who is supposed to be the holiest and most pure of the Priestesses, has the most ambiguous portrayal of all. While her characterization does not deal with gender domination as much as Igraine and Morgaine's, Vivienne's depiction is convoluted with both astoundingly positive and startlingly negative qualities. The Lady of the Lake is often shown as heartless. She admits throughout the movie that she is willing to sacrifice anything for the Goddess, even at the expense of her loved ones. She causes Igraine great distress over her loyalties to Gorlois and Uther, and Vivienne is the person directly responsible for the heart-wrenching scene where Morgaine and Arthur are separated as children. The High Priestess calls her manipulation of others her "sacred charge" and she ultimately alienates herself from all of her loved ones, especially Morgaine, who says to her, "You move us around like pieces on a game board." When Morgaine declares that she does not respect Vivienne as the Lady of the Lake any longer, Vivienne replies with hostility, "You will obey!" After Morgaine is tricked into marrying Uriens, Vivienne blames Merlin for the inevitable downfall of Camelot and Avalon: "How could you let this happen?" Where she had once taken responsibility for restoring Avalon to its glory, she now uses Merlin as a scapegoat for her own failures. She also calls Gwenhwyfar a "Christian nunny," disproving the aforementioned comment that Goddess worship is truly accepting of Christianity.

Vivienne does have the redeeming traits of always thinking toward the future and doing what is best for the whole. While Morgaine is at Avalon, Vivienne cares for her as a mother would. Most admirably, she realizes the error of her misguided devotion to the Goddess. She admits to Morgaine: "I was proud and unforgiving ... I have destroyed something between us in the name of the Goddess." However, the positive aspects of Vivienne's character cannot undo her negative qualities. Her temper, aggression, and her lack of compassion (at times) are not fitting for the head of a female community who is supposed to be upholding the ideals of peace and sisterhood.

Another complication to a positive feminist interpretation of *The Mists of Avalon* is the representation of women outside of the circle of Priestesses. In a truly empowering feminist film, it would make sense for all of the female characters to be represented in a favorable light. Having influential female characters from different backgrounds in the film would show that inspiring women could have diverse experiences and upbringings, thus conveying that strong women do not come from one single place. This message never gets across in *The Mists of Avalon*, however. In its place, there is the implication that in order to have an even remotely positive feminist characterization, a woman must have a virtuous relationship with the Goddess and come from Avalon. Since only a select few have "the sight," many women are never exposed to the sort of liberalism, however artificial, that exists in *The Mists of Avalon*. A feminist characterization, although limited, is a gift bestowed upon only the loyal Priestesses of Avalon, and even then it is not always granted. In the end, while the women who are associated with the Goddess have a controversial feminism, those who do not have a "healthy" relationship with the Goddess have no positive feminist aspects whatsoever, suggesting that "genuine" feminism may only be attained by a particular group of people.

Gwenhwyfar is established in opposition to the Priestesses of Avalon throughout the film, due to her ties with the Church: "As women have done throughout history, Arthur's wife, Gwenhwyfar, becomes the patriarchal enforcer of Christianity's negative view of women" (Farwell 151). She is ignorant of the ways of the Goddess, and is therefore frowned upon by the film's narrative. Gwenhwyfar inconsiderately calls Morgaine "one of the fairy-people" upon meeting her, painting her as childish and uneducated in the audience's eyes, since at this point, we are familiar with the "true" and very unfairy-like practices of the Priestesses. Gwenhwyfar lacks convictions as well. Although she is a Christian, she is willing to sacrifice her religious morals if it will benefit her in the end; during the Feast of Beltane, she says of the followers of the Old Religion, "Let them practice their pagan magic if the Goddess will give me a child." However, when Morgaine's charm does not help to bring Gwenhwyfar a child, the queen blames Morgaine's "black magic" for her barrenness. She complains every time she gets "the causes" because it means she is not pregnant – she feels as if she is not a good enough wife for Arthur since she cannot fit into a traditional feminine role by giving him a child. Farwell notes, "What is most painful about Gwenhwyfar's upbringing is the way she has internalized the Christian church's antifeminism so that she despised herself and feels guilty, especially about not being able to have children"

(152). With that in mind, perhaps it is not entirely Gwenhwyfar's fault that she allows herself to be molded into a patriarchal society – it is the result of the influence of a misogynistic society, the outside of which she has never been introduced to. In fact, Gwenhwyfar seems to exert more power over a man than any other woman in *The Mists of Avalon*. Through her urging, Arthur denies the Goddess altogether in his kingdom. Gwenhwyfar convinces Arthur that God will not give them a child or help Britain defeat the Saxons as long as he worships the Goddess: "You say you are a good man, but you condemn your wife to barrenness for the sake of an oath to painted savages." When Lancelot and Elaine are married in the next scene, it is under Christian banners, making it known that Gwenhwyfar has gotten her way. Gwenhwyfar therefore has an astounding amount of control over Arthur, and as a result, the narrative.

Gwenhwyfar's feminism, however, is not depicted in *The Mists of Avalon* as a positive feminism since she defies the Goddess in her domination over her husband. In the scores of representations of Gwenhwyfar throughout history, she has been portrayed anywhere from a cheating, deceiving woman to a beautiful, benevolent queen who follows her heart. *The Mists of Avalon* could have depicted her otherwise, but the choice to portray Gwenhwyfar, who discounts the power of the Goddess and Avalon, in a negative way enforces a feminism that is confined to a limited number of women.

Similarly, Morgause, who is nearly the villainess of the story, has chosen to ignore the will of the Goddess. She is assertive and knows what she wants – traits that are both necessary to a feminist portrayal. But, instead of using these characteristics to represent Morgause in an affirmative manner, *The Mists of Avalon* turns them into damaging aspects of her character. She is greedy for power and will stop at nothing to punish those whom she does not like. Morgause curses Gwenhwyfar to barrenness, tries to kill Morgaine's baby, encourages Mordred to take advantage of an unpleasant family situation to manipulate King Arthur, and kills her own sister, the Lady of the Lake. From the beginning, it is evident that Morgaine does not want to adhere to the strict expectations of the Goddess. She promises to always stay "a step ahead" of the High Priestess, and she is punished by the narrative for her ambitions to rebel against the order of the Goddess through a characterization as the perpetrator of evil in the story. Once again, with her inherently feminist qualities, she could have been portrayed more positively, but because she did not conform to the sorority of Priestesses, she is denied this representation.

A plot where women are the root of destruction for the main characters would appear to be in contradiction to the narrative of a feminist film that is supposed to be reaffirming the respectable powers of women. Nevertheless, the women in *The Mists of Avalon* are responsible for the undoing of the Kingdom of Camelot as well as the disappearance of Avalon into the mists, challenging its positive feminist categorization. Morgaine apparently holds her mother responsible for the tragedies that have been brought upon Arthur's kingdom. When looking back on Igraine's decision to save Uther at the expense of Gorlois, Morgaine comments: "She did not see the terrible price we would all have to pay." Morgause may be held most accountable for the

downfall of Camelot, since she is the one that curses Gwenhwyfar's womb, causing a chain of events that leads to Arthur's misery and the deterioration of Camelot under Mordred's rule. Although Mordred may appear to be directly responsible for Arthur's personal destruction, it is Morgause that puts him up to everything he does by urging him to confront Arthur, knowing that it could never end in happiness as she has brainwashed him to distrust his mother and his father. As the killer of the Lady of the Lake, the last strong human tie to the Goddess, Morgause effectively kills Avalon and the Old Religion. When all of these events are traced back to the beginning of the film, it is Vivienne's desire to intervene in the affairs of the kingdom that is the fundamental cause of turmoil in *The Mists of Avalon*. So, while the women of Avalon do have an incredible amount of influence over the plot of the film, the fact that the movie concludes with the destruction of two beloved places and marks the end of a religious era does not favor a world where women are in control, thus refuting the idea that *The Mists of Avalon* is an affirmative feminist movie.

The sorority of the Priestesses of Avalon was previously cited as a positive feminist aspect of the film, advocating a community of women who are liberal in their unwillingness to conform to patriarchal society. It has been established that these women are not as anti-patriarchal as they may seem through their dependence on men, but there are also problems with the stringent communal lifestyle of the Order of the Goddess in itself. When Vivienne and Morgaine arrive at Avalon, the Priestesses are all on the shore, as if they have nothing to do but stand around and wait for the Lady of the Lake to return from whatever she had previously been doing. The Priestesses all dress alike and often have blank stares on their faces, seeming to lack emotion. Outside of Morgaine's family, the only Priestess we come to know is Raven, who has taken a vow of silence that counters the feminist "voice" that these women were perceived to have. Whether praying to the Goddess or doing domestic, feminine tasks such as preparing food or drying flowers, the Priestesses lead a mundane life. In addition, the "liberalism" of these women is defeated by their predisposition to be in the service of the Goddess. As we see through Morgaine's story, Priestesses have no choice but to serve the Goddess. If they have "the sight," they must go to Avalon, eliminating the ever-important element of choice from the lives of these supposedly "liberal" women.

As if being forced to live a strict, rigorous lifestyle is not bad enough, the Priestesses all meet horrible fates as a result of their ties to the Goddess. At a young age, Morgaine sees the ways of the Goddess restored at the expense of her father's life. She also witnesses her mother's emotional deterioration, sees her brother's inner conflict over his religious loyalties, and experiences her own distress over having a bastard child from an incestuous sexual act who eventually kills her beloved brother – all because of her role in the Goddess' "mission." Morgaine buries just about all of her loved ones, including the devout Vivienne, after she dedicated her life to the Goddess. She says of her return to Avalon, "I was stranded on the outside, like a child locked out." Through Gwenhwyfar and Morgause, we see that those who do not follow the Goddess are depicted negatively in the film. But through Morgaine and Vivienne, it



is apparent that those who do follow the Goddess are also punished, giving women a no-win situation in *The Mists of Avalon*.

The female community of Priestesses is reminiscent of another community of women— that of the Cat People in Jacques Torneur's 1942 film of the same name. In this movie, a contemporary Serbian woman, Irena, discovers that she is a member of a sisterhood that dates back to the Middle Ages, made up of women who turn into panthers and kill any man who attempts to become intimate with them. Irena does not want to be a member of this sorority, but she can do nothing about her heritage and is destined to unhappiness because of it. Irena is unable to display her love for her husband and is emotionally distraught over the idea that she is a potential killer. While the order of the Goddess is destructive in a less violent way than the sisterhood of the Cat People, both female communities have negative effects on their respective societies and cause distress for the women who are involved in them; both *Cat People* and *The Mists of Avalon* therefore seem to contend that communities of women should be avoided in the best interests of society as a whole.

This negative view of female communities is upheld by *The Mists of Avalon's* ending, where Morgaine retreats to the convent at Glastonbury and notes that Christianity and the Old Religion are very much alike – the nuns worship Mary as the Priestesses worshipped the Goddess: "I'd realized the Goddess had survived. She had not been destroyed, but had simply adopted another incarnation. And perhaps one day, future generations will be able to bring her back as we knew her in the glory of Avalon." After the awful events that the Priestesses experienced in their lives as a result of their ties to the Goddess and their feminine community, is this supposed to be an optimistic ending? Morgaine has lived through "such sadness in her life," as she says to her mother, because she was a part of the sorority of Priestesses, so why, then, would she choose to join a convent and align herself with a similar female community? Since *The Mists of Avalon* emphasizes the negative aspects of sisterhood and the problematic effects female communities have on society, this ending does not provide much hope for a feminist future.

Within any feminist reading of a film or piece of literature, there lies a difficulty in avoiding a depiction of women as "abject." In Barbara Creed's article "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," the author references Julia Kristeva's theory that the monstrous-feminine is inextricably tied to the maternal figure through abjection, defined as "that which does not 'respect borders, positions, rules' and "that which disturbs identity, system, order" (36). As feminism in itself does not respect the "borders, positions, and rules" of traditional patriarchal society and disturbs the "identity" of female roles as defined by male-dominated culture, any kind of feminist interpretation is bound to find itself connected to the abject maternal figure. This abject mother is often based on an archaic portrayal of women, which is centered on the bodily functions reminiscent of the womb. Women cannot escape these ties; as long as the female gender is associated with the womb, it will be associated with the grotesqueness of fluids, excrement, and other unpleasant images. The monstrous-

feminine as abject is most evident in James Cameron's 1986 film *Aliens*, where the monstrous "Other" is a slimy alien mother who hatches eggs covered in goo, making her monstrous not only because she is in opposition to the protagonist, but because she is associated with the archaic mother who people subconsciously consider disgusting. Although Ripley, the heroine of the film, is defined by a more positive maternal characterization as a nurturing and compassionate "modern" mother, the cuts between her and this disgusting creature remind the viewer that all women are connected to the archaic mother, whether they choose to be or not.

This connection is evident in *The Mists of Avalon* as well, although is not as clear in this movie as it is in *Aliens*. Morgaine is associated with all that is negative about motherhood. She conceived a child in a manner that was completely focused on the carnal aspects of sex, only to find that her child was the result of incestuous intercourse. We see a tattoo, the "sacred mark" of the Priestess, being bloodily carved into Morgaine's head, which (according to Creed and Kristeva) should remind the audience of the "disgusting" aspects of the feminine, namely menstruation and childbirth. The most compelling correlation between the abject and the maternal is when Mordred is dying and he utters his last word - "Mother" - in disdain as if to say that he is leaving this world the same way he came in, covered in the blood and filth that reflect the sins of his mother. In a film where females are the focal point, these ties of women to the "abject mother" suggest a reading of *The Mists of Avalon* which further emphasizes a negative view of Arthurian women instead of a positive, feminist one.

The surface feminism of *The Mists of Avalon* does not hold up upon closer examination. A key question remains: Why are these women so unsuccessful in their attempts to bring peace to Britain and restore the ways of the Goddess? A world where women have great power is ultimately negative for the main characters. However, as was noted before, these women do not rely solely on their feminine community - they depend on men and traditional female roles to a certain extent, which may be the real reason for their ultimate failure in saving the Old Religion and ending war. As we have seen throughout history, women are not granted much power in a traditional patriarchal society; in *The Mists of Avalon*, it is apparent that a combination of dependence on a female community as well as male-dominated society is not the key to success for women's power either. So, the film ultimately implies that gaining significant and lasting feminine power is only attainable through an all-female community. However, this message encourages the superiority of one gender over another - the exact argument that *The Mists of Avalon* appears to be contesting on the exterior. As Marion Wynne-Davies notes about the story: "[Marion Zimmer Bradley] wishes to claim for women a triumphant unity and universalism, but is able to do so only by setting up the defeat of a patriarchal system; a position which inevitably predicates the duality she claims to rise above" (183). Instead of a wholly patriarchal society that restricts female power, *The Mists of Avalon* advocates a matriarchal society that limits male influence, committing the same act that feminists would condemn the medieval, male-dominated society for carrying out. Perhaps this final message of the film is feminist

after all, since it determines the means of success for female power in the future. But, as a way of achieving feminism at the expense of others, it is a "monstrous" feminism that the Arthurian women of Avalon who preached peace and tolerance surely would not want to be associated with.

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# Death Perceptions: The Romantic Appeal of Aztec Sacrifice

BY PAUL ALUNNI

## Introduction

It is intriguing that Aztec sacrificial rituals are viewed in a more positive light than other historical instances of human slaughter, such as the Holocaust and Gulag camps of World War II, and even the Spanish conquest that ended the Aztec practices. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how several factors have created a relatively sympathetic sentiment regarding the atrocities of the Aztecs.

Aztec sacrifices were neither pleasant nor subtle, and they were certainly not rare occurrences. It is estimated that 20,000 victims (though this figure is argued) were sacrificed each year (Harner, 1977). Given this astonishing figure, Aztec sacrifice is perhaps more thoroughly documented than sacrifice in any other culture, making its perceived appeal even more surprising.

The sacrifices were performed at many of the temples throughout the empire, most extensively and most importantly at the Templo Mayor in the capital city of Tenochtitlan (Harner, 1977). At the Templo Mayor, priests made nightly autosacrifices of bloodletting. This was merely considered a symbolic ritual, however. Human sacrifices were more important than autosacrifices (Smith, 1996, pp. 221-2). Battle captives were frequent subjects of human sacrifice, although slaves, women, children, and even commoners were sometimes offered (Smith, 1996, p. 227).

## The Ritual

According to the ritual, the captive would be dressed in the clothing and insignia of the god to whom the offer was being made. The offering of this victim thus commemorated the original sacrifice of the represented god, which allowed for human existence. He was led up the stairs of the temple and held over the sacrificial stone by four priests. The main priest would then cut open the victim's chest and pull out the heart, which was still beating. The heart was dedicated to the sun, and the victim's body was thrown down the steps of the pyramid, where he would be decapitated by a priest so that his head could be displayed on the skull rack. The man who captured the victim would then take parts of the body which were to be eaten during a ceremonial feast (Smith, 1996, pp. 222-5).

The heart sacrifice was the most common human sacrificial ritual, but other rituals were performed as well. For instance, the Xipe Totec cult also practiced the gladiator sacrifice and the arrow sacrifice. In the gladiator ritual, the captive was tied to a large stone, given a sword with a mock blade made of feathers, and forced to fight a fully equipped opponent. The arrow sacrifice consisted of tying a victim to a wooden frame with his arms and legs spread, and then filling him with arrows, letting blood onto the ground. After these ceremonies, the victim's skin was removed so that it could be worn by the Xipe Totec priests (Smith, 1996, p. 225).

Human sacrifices were performed, first, because the Aztecs owed a debt of blood to the gods. Common Aztec creation myths state that the gods sacrificed themselves to ensure the continuity of the solar cycle, and they had to be repaid with regular offerings of blood. Sacrifice also carried out a second, political function. Rulers and priests used sacrificial rituals as a way of publicly demonstrating and strengthening their connection to the gods. Additionally, sacrifice was a form of "propaganda by terror" – conscious displays of intimidation aimed at external rulers and common subjects – discouraging any ideas of violence, resistance, or other non-cooperation (Smith, 1996, pp. 226-7).

As we can see, the Aztecs did some cruel things to other people (and their own), especially on such a large scale. I will not attempt to entertain philosophical questions of right and wrong in this paper, nor will I make any arguments of why circumstances may have justified or explained mass killings in the past. I will, however, offer some compelling reasons that show why Aztec sacrifice is popularly conceived as something less terrible than the Holocaust or the Spanish conquest. The killings by all three examined groups, Aztecs, Nazis, and conquistadors, are fundamentally similar, providing an adequate base for comparison. The fundamental similarities in all cases are that victims are aware of their painful, unnatural deaths at the hands of someone else. So what distinguishes the Aztecs?

### **Distance from the Event and Those Involved**

The extent of the hatred for the killer and sympathy for the victim that we feel depends on our ability to imagine a connection to the people involved in the event we are examining. Our ability to connect depends on our spatial, temporal, cultural and ideological distance from the involved individuals or groups. Although "some awareness of the past is common to all humans save infants, the senile, and the brain-damaged," writes David Lowenthal, "fuller awareness of the past involves familiarity with processes conceived and completed, recollections of things said and done, stories about people and events – the common stuff of memory and history" (1985, p. 186).

In other words, familiarity increases awareness of the past. Beyond being familiar with past events, however, it is necessary to perceive similarities or differences between ourselves and the actors of the past if we are to either sympathize with them or denounce them.

It is necessary to first establish a base from which to measure our distance from the events and actors that will be discussed. In this paper, distance is judged, from my own perspective – that of a 21st century U.S. citizen.

First, judging our familiarity with the atrocities committed by each of the three groups, we can logically say that we are most familiar with the Nazi crimes of WWII, we are less familiar with the Spanish conquest, and we are least familiar with the Aztec sacrifices. Our familiarity increases as our distance from the events and those involved decreases.

Because we are focusing on only appalling actions of these groups, which we perceive as differences between us and them, we can say that as we become more familiar and less distanced from the events and perpetrators, we also become more disgusted with them. The opposite would be true if we were focusing on positive aspects of these groups, which we would probably perceive as similarities between us and them. Perhaps equally important is our distance from the counter-actors (or victims, in these three cases) in each of the events, which in this study only applies to the Holocaust, because, in the case of the Aztec sacrifice, the actors and counter-actors are part of the same group, and in the case of the Spanish conquest, the counter-actors are the Aztecs, to whom we are already comparing the Spanish.

As I have previously stated, distance can be measured spatially, temporally, ideologically, and culturally (see Table). We are most familiar with, least distanced from, and most disgusted by the Nazi crimes against humanity during WWII for several reasons. Lowenthal (p. 187) suggests that history is real to us because we have either experienced it or we believe accounts of it; the Holocaust is real to us (collectively) for both of these reasons: there are survivors, living today, that have first-hand experience of the events; and for those of us without experience, we believe the accounts of the survivors and the photographs taken of the events. Just as the short distance between us and the Nazis intensifies our disgust for their actions, the feeling is compounded by our closeness to the victims. Mark Osiel also shows how special events, like the Nuremberg trials, also served to increase the collective memory of the Holocaust (1997, pp. 62, 65-6). So the realness of the Holocaust makes its distance very short from our everyday reality.

We are more distanced from the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs than we are from the Holocaust mainly because none of us have personally experienced the event. Our knowledge of the conquest is restricted to written history; our knowledge excludes any memories of the event. This creates a sentiment that is inherently weaker than we have for the Holocaust because we have both memory and history of the latter (Lowenthal, chapter 5). And even the histories that we do have of the conquest are not as strong as those for the Holocaust. We cannot be sure of the reliability of accounts written by Hernando Cortés; although they may be helpful they are also quite possibly exaggerated. There are also several codices, but, again, the reliability of these documents is uncertain.

### Relative Measures of Distance

	Actor	Counter-Actor	Actor	Actor
	Nazis	Jews	Spanish	Aztecs
<b>Temporal Distance</b>	Close	Close	Distant	Distant
<b>Spatial Distance</b>	Distant	Distant	Distant	Distant
<b>Cultural Distance</b>	Close	Close	Distant	Most Distant
<b>Ideological Distance</b>	Distant	Close	Distant	Distant

*This table is by no means definitive. I chose to add it simply to demonstrate a possible method of analyzing Distance. The variables are not really defined and the values are not quantified, but this shows that a more thorough and rigid study could benefit from such a table. It would also be possible to create an index from a table similar to this.*

We are also distanced from the Spanish in culture more so than we are from the Nazi atrocities. If nothing else, we are more closely aligned technologically with the WWII superpower than with the Spanish conquistadors of the 16th century. It is harder to imagine ourselves in a culture without the modern touches, like cars or machine guns.

We are most distanced from the Aztec sacrifices, for all the reasons that we are distanced from the Spanish conquest, and furthermore because the histories available are not as concrete – they are mostly gathered from artistic depictions and from Spanish documents, and they are not individual accounts (people did not survive sacrifice, and only elite scribes recorded) – and because we view the Aztecs as more ancient because of their primitiveness. Their culture is something completely foreign to the Western world. Although they may have been just as advanced as most civilizations of the time, their culture, and most of their people, did not survive in their natural form. So whereas the Nazis and the Spanish colonials can be placed within a smooth evolution of their societies, the fall of the Aztec empire was the end of a culture as it existed. These circumstances have effectually led us to view the Aztecs, and the other Mesoamerican Indians, as “ideal Others” (Wertheimer, 1999, p. 13).

#### Overshadowing

Our general attitude seems to be that, when looking at the Aztec/Spanish encounters, we unequivocally consider the Spanish to be the “bad guys,” even though, as Stephen Greenblatt suggests, the Spanish may not have been as cruel as either the Aztec or, interestingly, the native enemies of the Aztec, in battle (1993, pp. 40-1). It is understandable that we would blame the Spanish for all cruelty toward the Aztecs, however, because although the cruelty of the natives that fought with the Spanish may have been worse than the Spanish, the Spanish were the ones who ordered and organized the attacks.

There are several reasons why we perceive the Spanish as worse than the Aztecs. First, the Spanish did not just kill some people; they destroyed the greatest city in the

New World at the time, and nearly its entire population. In light of the emphasis we currently give to the preservation of the past, it makes sense that we are disgusted by an act that destroyed a civilization that existed in its natural form, and much of its magnificent art and architecture as well.

Another possibility is that histories of the initial encounter portray Montezuma as a welcoming and naïve host that was deceptively captured and later killed by the ruthless Cortès. Most literary accounts of the conquest describe the meeting of the two leaders this way (e.g. Smith, 1996; Cooper Alarcón, 1997; Greenblatt, 1997). We generally tend to dislike the sly, deceptive villain, and this is certainly how Cortès has been portrayed. Being a Neil Young fan, I would also like to think that his song, "Cortez the Killer," has been listened to by so many people (except in Spain, where it was banned) and has stirred such strong emotions that Cortès ought to be thought of as a gold-seeking, blood-thirsty, Spaniard that killed indiscriminately, wiping out monuments of a caliber that has yet to be matched. But to be perfectly frank, I cannot say with any accuracy what the effect of the song has been.

Daniel Cooper Alarcón offers a very plausible explanation for why English speaking countries would view the Spanish as the bad guys. He says that the first collection of English-language accounts of Mexico is credited to Richard Hakluyt in 1589. Due to the political environment in Western Europe at the time, says Cooper Alarcón, the Spanish may have intentionally been misrepresented. "Not surprisingly, considering the political and religious rivalry between Spain and England, many of the reports emphasize the abusiveness of the Spanish colonists and encourage England's intervention in Spanish America" (p. 45).

### **Motives for Killing**

Smith (1996) suggests that Aztec sacrifices served a primary religious function: "deities of war, sacrifice, blood, and death required human blood in order to maintain the earth, the sun, and life itself" (217). We find killing for these reasons much more justifiable than we do killing because of hatred or greed, as the Nazis and Spanish killed.

Furthermore, the Aztecs were very religious people and these rituals were accepted by everyone, even the *ixiptla*, or victim, who "went with honor to meet his fate" (Smith, 224). If the Aztecs did not mind dying for religious purposes, they did mind dying at the hands of the Spanish. And while we may not be overly appalled by the Aztec sacrifice, which can almost be looked at as more of a suicide, we are certainly appalled by the Spanish conquest, which we would more closely define with words like murder or slaughter.

The Holocaust is the most extreme example of disgusting human behavior. The victims were not willing, like in the Aztec sacrifice, nor were the killers seeking any concrete treasure, like the Spanish. Rather, the motives of the Holocaust were sheer hatred and prejudice. The Nazis killed with the intention of eliminating an entire group of people.



### **Method of Killing Described**

None of the actors killed in a “nice” fashion. We are appalled by all of the methods used. But we are most appalled by the killing that took place during the Holocaust, because Nazi killing did not just terminate lives, it was meant to be tortuous to both the body and the mind. Individual accounts of the horrific acts that took place during the Holocaust are common and detailed. I shall only include one description of an event at Mauthausen that involved a large pit with a bottom layer of quicklime:

The Gestapo ordered the assembled Jews to strip—first those who were standing near the large pit. Then they ordered the naked people to go down into both pits and jump into the larger pit. I could not describe the wailing and the crying. Some Jews were jumping without an order – even most of them – some were resisting and they were being beaten about and pushed down. Some mothers jumped in holding their children, some were throwing their children in, others were flinging their children aside. Still others threw the children in first and then jumped in.... This lasted until noon and then a lorry came from the road and stopped on the path by the clearing. I noticed four vat-like containers. Then the Germans set up a small motor – it was probably a pump – connected it with hoses to one of the vats and two of them brought the hoses from the motor up to the pit. They started the motor and the two Gestapo men began to pour some liquid, like water, on the Jews. But I am not sure what the liquid was. While pumping, they were connecting hoses to the other containers, one by one. Apparently, because of the slaking of the lime, people in the pit were boiling alive. The cries were so terrible that we who were sitting by the piles of clothing began to tear pieces of stuff to stop our ears. The crying of those boiling in the pit was joined by the wailing and the lamentation of the Jews waiting for their perdition. All this lasted perhaps two hours, perhaps longer. (Langer, pp. 21-2)

This is just one example of many of the cruel methods the Nazis used to kill Jews, and it is no wonder that we find these methods incredibly more objectionable than the methods used by the Aztecs and the Spanish.

### **Romanticism**

Unlike the events or cultures that we associate with the Spanish conquistadors or the German Nazis, the Aztecs conjure feelings of mystery, excitement, and awe in our minds. The creation of the Aztec mystique began in with the Spanish colonial texts and English travelogues of the sixteenth century, which have influenced historical interpretations of precolonial Mexico ever since, such that Mexico is still largely considered an “infernal paradise.” The earliest accounts of indigenous Mexicans, says Cooper Alarcón, have influenced writings by nineteenth-century historians Alexander von Humboldt and W. H. Prescott and twentieth-century Mexican nationalist authors,

especially around the time of the Mexican Civil War (1911-1920). Regarding literature inspired by the Mexican Civil War, Cooper Alarcón says that "Mexican nationalism, in particular its romanticization and celebration of indigenous pre-Columbian culture, proved to be very seductive to the expatriate Anglo writers in Mexico at the time, . . . as the works of Katherine Anne Porter and D. H. Lawrence attest" (pp. 42-3). (See Cooper Alarcón, 1997, chapter 2, for a detailed history of the literary construction of Mexico as the infernal paradise.)

"Novel History," by Marc C. Carnes (2001) is a collection of writings that describe how historical novels have helped shape the way we view historical events. Particularly relevant is Michael E. Smith's contribution, "The Aztec World of Gary Jennings," in which he describes how Jennings's popular novel, *Aztec* (1980), which blends history with fiction, has been taken by many of the million-plus readers as fact, and has made it more difficult even in academia to know what is real history and what is fiction or exaggeration.

Smith begins:

The contradictions of Aztec culture both puzzle and fascinate modern readers. The Aztecs practiced a religion based upon warfare, human sacrifice, and other violent and bloody rituals, but they also created exquisite works of art and beautiful lyric poetry that still speaks to us today. These contrasts have led to a wide variety of interpretations of Aztec culture. (from Carnes, p. 95)

Works like "Aztec," which according to Smith was actually pretty accurate, have helped to create an ideal image in popular culture that may be unsubstantiated. Historical novels particularly affect non-expert readers, which happens to be the largest category of readers. Smith writes, "Since most modern readers have little knowledge of Aztec culture or history, there is great opportunity for invention and fantasy in fiction concerning their society. A novelist can make up all sorts of nonsense, and most readers will not know the difference" (p. 96). Smith then described how the novel has also caused him professional difficulty:

Before I had delved halfway through the novel, I had begun to confuse the two types of information. I was lecturing to a class of undergraduates about Aztec religion and was about to state that commoners were afraid of priests, when I realized I didn't know whether that idea was from the historical sources or whether it was Jennings's invention. To avoid confusing myself further, I stopped reading the book. (p. 97)

In Gary Jennings's "My Indignant Response," which follows Smith's piece in Carnes's book, Jennings states that most negative comments regarding *Aztec* have

come from academians wondering where he got his material or why he did not include a bibliography. Jennings replied, "Shit, I was writing a novel, not a Ph.D. thesis" (p. 107)

It is interesting that literature has focused on the more positive aspects of the Aztecs; because few people are very aware of Aztec history, presumably authors can also get away with offering an overly negative account of the Aztecs. I think we can account for this phenomenon by saying that the romantic imagery created in sixteenth-century literature has been embedded into our collective imagination and has only been supported with literature and other media since that time.

Other modern media that have both resulted from and served to propagate the Aztec mystique include movies and video games. Although I have not extensively researched this area, some of the movies include "Mardi Gras Massacre," "The Living Head," "The Aztec Mummy," "The Robot vs. the Aztec Mummy," "Wrestling Women vs. the Aztec Mummy," "Fire Walker," and "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom." Video games include "Indiana Jones & the Infernal Machine" and "Aztec." I am certain that many other examples of Aztec mystique in modern media may be found, and a more thorough study should include discussion of this topic.

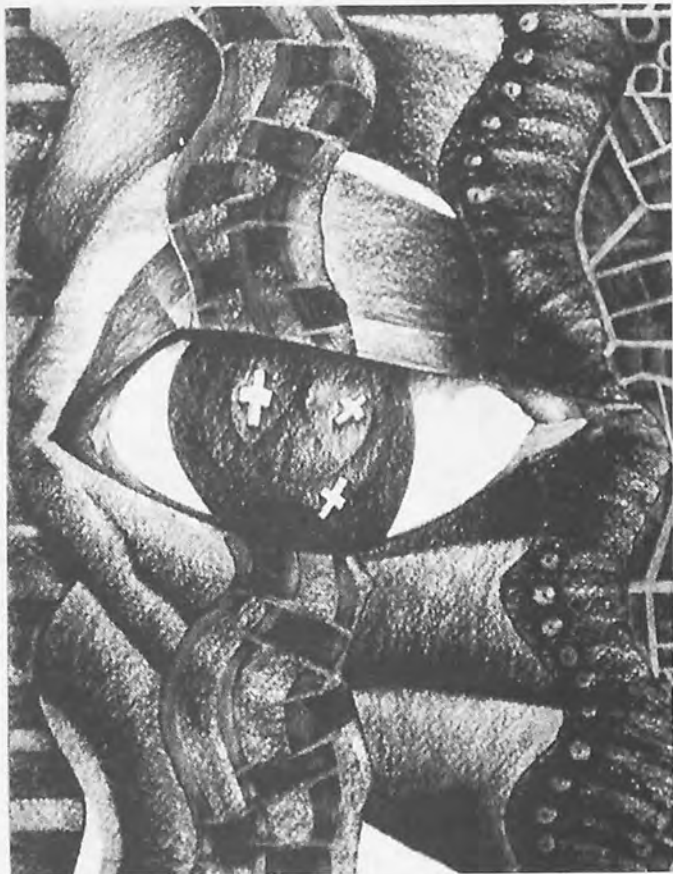
### **Conclusion**

As we can see, there are a variety of reasons for different perceptions of death in different situations. This study compared death in the form of Aztec sacrifice, Spanish conquest, and the Holocaust; and considered factors such as distance from the event, overshadowing, motives and methods of killing, and romanticism through history and media. It is necessary to look at multiple factors in determining reasons for the creations of public perceptions of atrocities and the actors responsible for the atrocities. I have only scratched the surface of this topic and provided somewhat of a framework for further investigation. This topic can and should be pursued further and applied to other events besides the ones I have chosen to study. Although we may not be able to justify these acts of violence, perhaps we can objectively justify our perceptions of them.

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THE LEHIGH REVIEW



*Howard Ward*



# Biochemistry of the Human Orgasm

BY YOSSI BERLOW

## Abstract

*Recent research suggests that there is substantial evidence that specific hormones and neurotransmitters directly influence the various aspects of human orgasm. Clinical and experimental studies have linked a number of hormones and neurotransmitters to specific features of the orgasm, including chemicals of orgasmic excitement, peak, and pleasure, as well as those that inhibit sexual desire. With this knowledge, insights into the origin and solution of sexual problems and disorders may be gained. Unfortunately, a detailed map of the biochemistry of the orgasm is still far away. However, researchers have begun to explain the basic ingredients of the intricate series of hormonal and neuronal events that produce one of the most pleasurable experiences in the world, orgasm.*

The human orgasm is an intricate ballet of hormonal and neuronal chemistry producing what is arguably one of the most pleasurable experiences available to human beings. While people have been fascinated by orgasms for about as long as they have been a species, it is only in recent years that researchers have begun to learn what this phenomenon is all about at a biochemical level. Today, there is substantial evidence that specific hormones and neurotransmitters directly influence the various aspects of orgasm. For example, oxytocin, which has recently been touted by the popular media as the 'love hormone,' is released during orgasm and appears to be an essential factor modifying the intensity experienced. Similarly, endorphins, the endogenous brain opiates, are also thought to contribute to the pleasurable sensations. On the other hand, prolactin, which is released right after orgasm, acts to inhibit the desire for additional sexual engagement. Examples such as these are the beginning of a very crude biochemical map that will add to the understanding of normal sexual performance as well as shed light onto sexual dysfunction.

## What is an Orgasm?

Webster defines an orgasm as 'the climax of sexual excitement that is usually accompanied by the ejaculation of semen in the male and vaginal contractions in the

female.' From that simple definition it would seem that Webster distinguishes orgasm from the physiological processes that often come with it. This distinction is sometimes difficult to take into account when attempting to figure out the complexities of orgasm, because many studies rely solely on the physical characteristics of the phenomenon, not to mention the difficulty in asking a mouse, "Was it good for you?"

However, dividing orgasm into experiential and physiological components precedes an even greater division between orgasm and the general sexual response. According to Masters and Johnson, the typical sexual response includes phases of excitement, plateau, orgasm and resolution, usually in that order (alternative systems use the terms desire, arousal, and orgasm) (Meston & Frohlich, 2000). With the understanding that orgasm, as defined above, rarely exists without the preceding stages of sexual response, dissecting influences of sexual excitement from those of climax becomes very difficult. However, there are times when the sexual response is halted right before orgasm and similarly there are cases of orgasm occurring spontaneously, suggesting that the orgasm is a distinct event. Nonetheless, it is a relatively short event that is complicated to pin point. As a result, this paper focuses on hormones and neurotransmitters influencing the rising action, the climax and the resolution of the orgasm and attempts to focus on the experiential side of the process, but sometimes these are imprecise distinctions.

### **Hormone Specificity**

The other major introductory note that has to be made is that every hormone and neurotransmitter plays a very complex role, which requires the interaction of many other components. Reducing a substance to one characteristic, such as referring to oxytocin as the 'love hormone,' inaccurately simplifies the elaborate situation. Furthermore, many hormones will produce different effects depending on many subtle changes, such that the difference between too little, too much and just right may not be linear. Having said this, it should also be noted that the complex biochemical pathways and interactions of orgasm have not been fully developed and for simplifying purposes, many hormones and neurotransmitters will be referred to as though they each have a separate role.

### **Background Influences: Sex Hormones and Viagra**

Most of the early sex research revolved around the so-called sex hormones, androgens and estrogens. Back then, the primary interest was focused on hormonal influence of sexual desire rather than orgasm. Androgens such as testosterone appear to be influential and important factors in sexual desire, behavior and performance (Bancroft, 1983; Meston & Frohlich, 2000; Sherwin et al., 1985). However, androgen levels do not change dramatically during the various stages of sex and orgasm, indicating they are not the primary factors involved in orgasm (Exton et al., 1998, 1999). In contrast, estrogens and progesterone are thought to have only minor effects on sexual desire and activity (Meston & Frohlich, 2000) and levels of these hormones also do not change much during sex (Exton et al., 1999; Kruger et al., 1998).

Another chemical that is necessary for the earlier stages of sexual response is nitric oxide, which is secreted into the penis (and clitoris) in response to sexual stimulation. Nitric oxide signals the release of the enzyme guanylate cyclase that converts guanosine triphosphate into cyclic guanosine monophosphate (cGMP). cGMP is responsible for the smooth muscle relaxation that allows greater blood flow to the penis producing an erection (a similar pathway has been suggested in the clitoris). Viagra, a medication for erectile dysfunction, works by inhibiting cGMP metabolism (Meston & Frohlich, 2000).

The steroid hormones along with nitric oxide are clearly important ingredients for moving one through the excitement and plateau phases that usually precede orgasm. While these background influences might even be necessary for orgasm, they are not the direct contributors. Other substances, including serotonin, catecholamines, oxytocin, endorphins etc., also influence these early stages, but these chemicals appear to have a direct role in producing orgasm.

### **The Rising Action: Catecholamines, Serotonin and Premature Ejaculation**

At some point in the plateau stage, the heartbeat quickens, blood pressure rises, and the sympathetic nervous system turns up its level of intensity. The peak of orgasm is on its way. This heightening state of arousal might be comparable to the experience of stress or anxiety commonly referred to as the fight or flight response. Not surprisingly, it appears that the same hormones involved during stress, namely the catecholamines epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine, also are involved in the exciting quality of orgasm.

#### **Catecholamines**

Some studies have shown that epinephrine levels increase during the excitement and plateau phases and peak at orgasm and then return to baseline (Exton et al., 1999; Meston & Frohlich, 2000). However these changes in epinephrine are not as great as the changes in norepinephrine levels around the orgasm, which can be up to a 12-fold increase (Exton et al., 1999, 2000; Kruger et al., 1998; Meston & Frohlich, 2000; Wiedeking et al., 1979). One study demonstrated how sympathetic arousal via exercise beforehand would not only increase norepinephrine levels, but also increase vaginal pulse amplitude and vaginal blood volume (Meston & Gorzalka, 1996). Furthermore, drugs that increase norepinephrine activity, such as yohimbine and the antidepressant mirtazapine, have been shown to decrease sexual problems (Meston & Frohlich, 2000). Norepinephrine appears to directly influence the exciting quality of orgasm.

#### **Serotonin**

Serotonin's role in orgasm is much more complicated. Increased serotonin activity has long been known to cause sexual side effects such as reduced desire and inhibited orgasm in people using selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. However, these same



drugs have been used to prevent premature ejaculation. Some researchers suggest that two different serotonin receptors affect sexual function in opposing ways. This indicates that there is a delicate balance of serotonin necessary for normal sexual functioning, too little or too much in the wrong place leads to problems (Meston & Frohlich, 2000).

### **The Climax: Oxytocin, Opiates, Dopamine and Bliss**

As norepinephrine levels continue to rise increasing the intensity of the sexual , experience to a peak, there then comes a blissful release of tension and a rush of pleasure. In men, seminal vessels often begin to contract at orgasm, ejaculating semen from the penis. Women display a similar series of contractions in the uterus. At the same time, oxytocin molecules are released into the blood along with endorphins, creating a distinct feeling of euphoria.

### **Oxytocin**

An orgasm would probably not be very enjoyable if it were not for oxytocin, the so-called love hormone. Oxytocin has been shown to be involved with most positive social interactions such as pair bonding and attachment (Carter, 1998; Uvnas-Moberg, 1998). It is also well known for its role in birth and breastfeeding (Odent, 2000). Loving touches, massage and sexual arousal also raise blood levels of oxytocin above baseline (Turner et al., 1999), but this is nothing compared to the levels reached at orgasm (Blaicher et al., 1999; Carmichael et al., 1987; Odent, 2000; Riley, 1988).

Oxytocin is released from the posterior pituitary into the blood at orgasm where it exerts a sedative, relaxing and positive effect. Catecholamine levels and blood pressure drop in response to it (Uvnas-Mohberg, 1998). The effect of raising excitement and arousal via increased levels of catecholamines and then flooding the system with the anti-stress hormone oxytocin produces a rapid and exaggerated feeling of euphoric contrast, and some researchers have linked oxytocin levels with the perceived intensity of orgasm (Meston & Frohlich, 2000). However, oxytocin does much more than just create exaggerated relaxation; it also affects the endorphin system producing an opiate like high.

### **Endorphins**

Heroin users often compare the opiate high to an orgasm, and it would not be surprising if endogenous opioids were involved. However, the level of involvement is not clear. Some researchers have found no significant increase in endorphin levels in the blood during orgasm (Exton et al., 1999, Kruger et al., 1998), but this does not necessarily mean they are not involved in the central nervous system. Heroin users often experience **serious** sexual side effects including inability to achieve orgasm, while opiate withdrawal has been known to cause spontaneous orgasms (Meston & Frohlich, 2000). This suggests that disruption of the endorphin system clearly affects orgasm, indicating that endorphins are involved.

Evidence suggests that endorphin involvement in orgasm is linked to oxytocin release, but it is uncertain how the two interact. One study demonstrated that naloxone, an endorphin antagonist, prevented oxytocin release at orgasm (Murphy et al., 1990). While other studies have shown oxytocin injections increase endogenous opioid production (Uvnas-Moberg, 1998). Another study has revealed that oxytocin can inhibit tolerance formation to morphine, meaning that the same amount continues to give the same response (Kovacs et al., 1998). Clearly, there is some complex interaction between these two hormones.

### **Dopamine and Reinforcement**

In order to get a better understanding of the probable role of oxytocin and endorphins, it is helpful to consider current models of reinforcement and learning concerning opiate addiction. Ingesting drugs or performing any action that facilitates dopamine secretion from the ventral tegmental nucleus into the nucleus accumbens is said to be a reinforcing act (Carlson, 1998). From a Darwinian perspective it would make sense that orgasm would be such a reinforcing act, because it promotes continuation of the species. (Also, from a behaviorist perspective the fact that orgasms are not always achieved makes them one of the most effective reward systems for increasing sexual behavior.) In animal studies, a place preference experiment is often used to determine reinforcement, the idea being that if the animal moves from his preferred location in order to perform some act, that act is reinforcing. Researchers have shown that ejaculation in rats produces reinforcement in the place preference paradigm. Furthermore, they have shown that naloxone, the endorphin antagonist, blocks the reinforcing properties of ejaculation (Agmo & Berenfeld, 1990). This evidence further demonstrates that endorphins play an important role in orgasm.

### **Resolution: After the Fireworks comes Prolactin**

Right after the release of tension and the pleasure of climax, the heartbeat slows, blood drains from the genitals and a period of relaxation begins. Some people might want to go for another round, but most find it difficult. This is probably because high levels of prolactin have been secreted into their blood. .

### **Prolactin**

If oxytocin is the 'love hormone,' prolactin is the "not now, honey" hormone. Prolactin has been shown to be associated with decreased sexual desire and function (Meston & Frohlich, 2000; Mulvihill, 2000). Prolactin has also been shown to be released in great quantity after orgasm (Exton et al., 1999, 2000; Kruger et al., 1998).

Researcher Michael Exton and colleagues recently made the popular press with the announcement that a prolactin surge released after orgasm diminishes the desire for sex. In multiple studies (Exton et al., 1999, 2000; Kruger et al., 1998), they have found that one of the biggest hormonal changes is the dramatic increase in prolactin after orgasm. One study (Exton, 2000) brought men and women close to orgasm,

but this was not enough to induce the prolactin surge, indicating prolactin release is orgasm dependent. However, as was pointed out in *Psychology Today*, this surge, which is seen in both men and women, does not explain the sexually asymmetrical tendency or ability towards multiple orgasms, especially because women produce more prolactin than men (Pirisi, 2000). Obviously, more research is needed.

### Conclusion

The intricacies of orgasm remain somewhat of a mystery, but science is getting closer to understanding the underlying biochemistry that produces this wonderful phenomenon. The paradoxical excitement/pleasure/relaxation experience is beginning to make some sense when we investigate the hormones and neurotransmitters involved. Exciting adrenaline gives way to pleasurable oxytocin that stimulates endogenous opioids, creating an intense and life-creating event and before the dust settles prolactin comes in to make sure people do not overdo it. Of course, it is not at all that simple, but these basic concepts will eventually lead to a more complete understanding of the orgasm and sexual function.

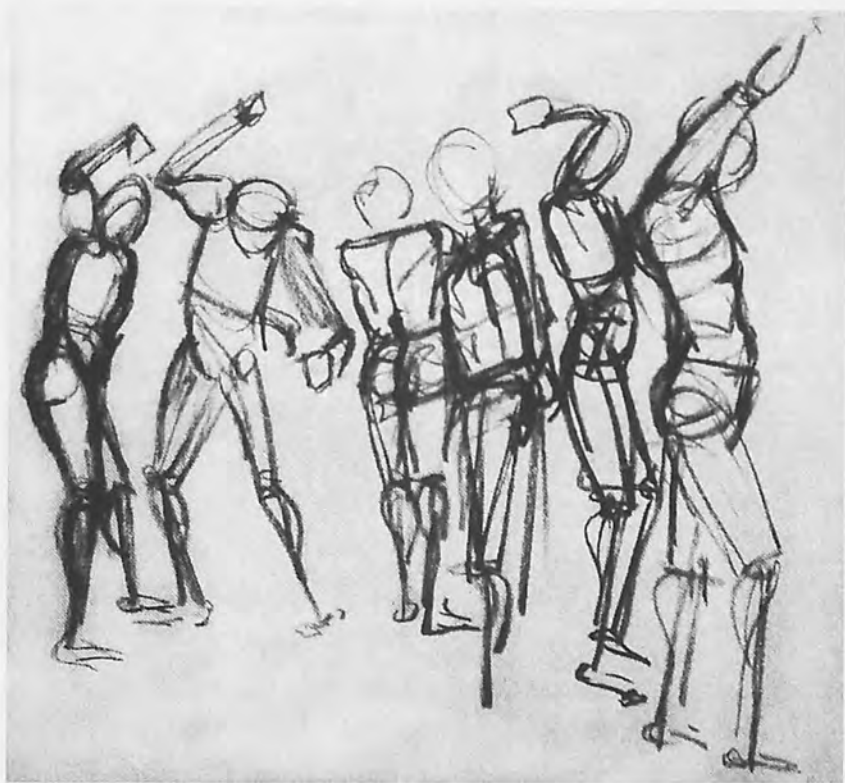
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*Lisa Furusawa*



*Linore Arkin*



*Linore Arkin*



## Contributors

**Paul M. Alunni** will graduate in May 2004 with a BA in Anthropology, but will return to Lehigh for one more year to complete a degree in Accounting. He only hopes that his experiences in the Accounting field are half as exciting as his archaeology experiences in the actual fields.

**Ronnie Craig Ani** is a freshman with big ideas. Don't let the essay fool you; facts and numbers are only side hobbies. Originally from the great Republic of the Philippines, Ronnie and his family relocated to Central New Jersey for the purposes of toiling and succeeding. God has abundantly blessed him with opinion and a zeal for General Tso's Chicken. He is currently an International Relations major and plans to follow in his parents' footsteps at the UN. Ronnie also enjoys large doses of tennis, singing, and Friday night dance parties. He drops it like it's hot (wot wot).

**Yossi Berlow** graduated from Lehigh a few years ago. His paper was found at the bottom of a box when I cleaned my office; I submitted it to the *Lehigh Review*; because I like thinking about him. I miss his voice; although I have still never completed a single book by Ken Wilbur. Grondo Reban.

**Dr. Tom Bierowski** is a cosmic free agent, raconteur, house painter, and instructor of America's youth. His pick-up truck has over a quarter million original miles on it.

**Mehnaz Ara Choudhury** is a Presidential Scholar who graduated in '03 with an English and American Studies degree. She would like to thank Professor Doty for his help and support on her paper about melodramatic men. Mehnaz hopes to be off to graduate school next year with her five rabbits in tow.

**Amy Fantasia** is a senior, majoring in English and double minoring in Writing and Social Psychology. Previously a chubby child, she successfully shifted her interests from baked goods and macaroni and cheese to literature and writing. When she is not winning Williams Prizes and getting published in the *Lehigh Review*, Amy enjoys embarrassing her friends by commenting on taboo topics in public.



## THE LEHIGH REVIEW

**Jackie Gardocki** is the author of "Two Tone Music."

**Tucker Hottes** is a co-author of "Black Hawk Down."

**Judy Li** would like to thank the academy for allowing her to pursue her interest in philosophy and break out of the Asian-American-student-good-at-math-and-science cookie-cutter mold. The Brooklyn-born recent graduate hopes to become an osteopathic physician someday and cure palmar hyperhidrosis. Her favorite moments at Lehigh include philosophizing over apple turnovers, staying up until the wee hours of the night watching a TV evangelist sell holy water, and piling fourteen girls into the back of a minivan.

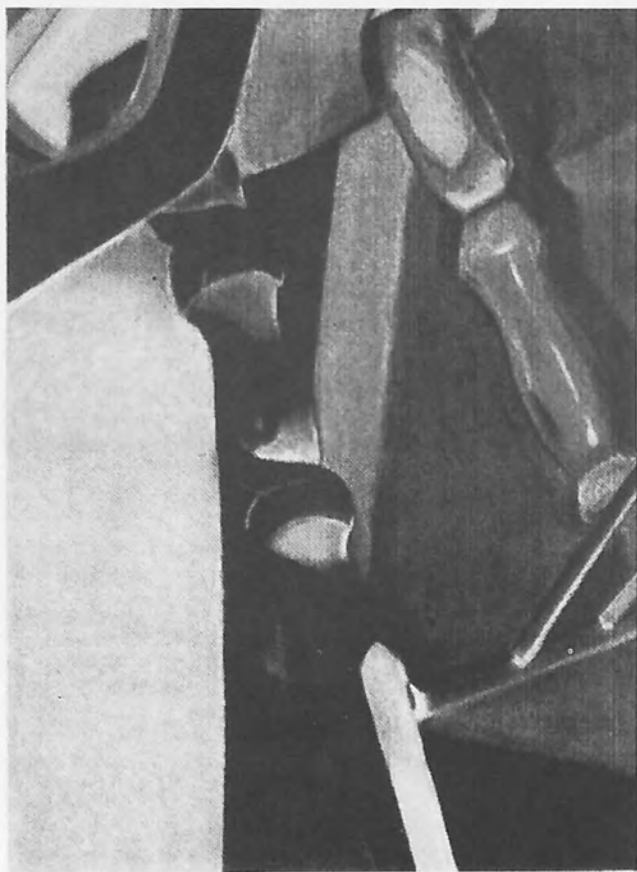
**Lisa Mayernick** is a senior marketing major at Lehigh. She is also pursuing a minor in English, as that is where her true interest lies. Lisa is a self-proclaimed nerd. She has been known to decline invitations to party on a Friday night and to curl up with a good book instead. The wonder of it all is that she is willing to allow this embarrassing little factoid to be printed for all to see.

**Kym Murphy** is a junior English major and Political Science minor who is also working toward her M.A. in Education. She will be pursuing a career in educational publishing after Lehigh. She enjoys being a feminist and a band geek, as Vice President of FORWARD, corresponding secretary of Kappa Kappa Psi (National Honorary Band Fraternity), and a member of the wind ensemble and symphonic band. She is also co-editor of *Origyns*, the literary publication sponsored by the Women's Center. Kym will (hopefully) be studying at the University of Westminster in London this summer.

**Cara Pitterman** is a senior English major who, this past november, finally found Noel—he was in New York, just as she hoped he would be.

**Emily Shutt** is a junior from Marion, Ohio, double majoring in History and Art (with an emphasis in Art History). Her contribution was written after a study abroad trip to Italy in the summer of 2003. She plans on attending graduate school for Art History and Museum Studies and then becoming a curator in an art museum. Of course, this is all just an excuse to look at art all day and sound smart when she takes her friends to museums.

**Sarah Smith** was a co-author of "Black Hawk Down."



*Sabrina Slater*

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