



The **DROVER REVIEW**

A JOURNAL OF STUDENT WRITING AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND ARTS OF OKLAHOMA

VOLUME 4 | 2021



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**SCIENCE
& ARTS**
of Oklahoma

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Editor's Introduction

NO ONE DESIGNS liberal arts education with a global pandemic in mind. The last year has been an ordeal for students, staff, and faculty at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, as we, like our friends and colleagues nation- and worldwide, have committed to an ad-libbed marathon of an experiment: How do we engage the liberal arts in a socially distanced, face-masked, medically dangerous world? How do we carry on with rug of human interaction ripped from under our feet? When nearly 600,000 Americans have died of COVID-19 (to say nothing of those merely hospitalized, let alone the George Floyd protests, the 2020 election, the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol, and so on), what good are Kant, Sophocles, Wollstonecraft and other canonical figureheads of the liberal arts curriculum? How do we make such a vision of higher education matter in a traumatized world? At a time like this, well, *who cares?*

While the constellation of names and issues we should care about surely evolves, I'm glad to say that students do definitively care. Having taught (planned, improvised, experimented with, blundered through) COVID-19-era classes for over a year, I have only

fragmentary answers about new “best practices,” if such a phrase even applies anymore. I also certainly miss the energy and intimacy of in-person, unmasked classroom discussion. And yet, the enduring intelligence, curiosity, and goodwill of the students has made teaching during the COVID era—at least for me—not only tolerable but enjoyable.

Twenty-twenty and 2021 have been hard, and students especially have encountered plenty they didn’t sign up for. Despite limited COVID cases on campus, students, staff, and faculty at Science and Arts suffered stress, alienation, burn-out, and precipitous dips in mental health. None of this has been easy, but the instances of and causes for togetherness in 2020-21 made things tolerable and often downright joyous. Among other things, I’m thinking of the Black Lives Matter event organized by Science and Arts students at the oval in June 2020, the long conversations with students and mentees on Zoom, and the delight of reconvening for an in-person commencement (distanced, outdoors, masked, but in-person) in April 2021 of this year. And of course, I’m also thinking of this journal.

In the intro to last year’s volume, I offered *The Drover Review* as a gesture of hope and stability in unhappy times. The present volume—which illustrates, if nothing else, the continuation of sophisticated thought and writing among the University’s student body, even amid the pandemic—ought to invite similarly welcome emotions. I’m very happy, further, to note the increased student presence on the journal’s Editorial Board this year: Megan Hay, Wendell Hixson, Korbyn Peebles, Rhiannon Quillin, and Claire Smith join returning student Board member Genevieve Gordon. I’m deeply grateful to all of you for your insight and hard work.

THIS VOLUME INCLUDES fifteen essays derived from University coursework, split between the First-Year Writing section (covering work from Writing I and II, the core Interdisciplinary Studies writing courses) and the Writing across the Disciplines section (covering

a range of work across the majors and the IDS core). Finally, the volume also includes the winner of the annual Jernigan Scholarship.

The first of four works from Writing I, Abigail Dulle's personal essay "Blessings through Pandemics and Pollution" represents a powerfully fitting introduction to First-Year Writing section and the volume as a whole, as Dulle meditates on her renewed appreciation for simple joys amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, Eriyon Tecson's "The Story behind 'Raconteur'" offers an innovative, heavily researched, and in-depth look at the varying definitions and connotations surrounding an unusual and colorful word. Jensen Link then provides a close rhetorical analysis of Thomas Paine's renowned pamphlet *Common Sense*, and Anastasia Dulle's "From Glory to Governments" perceptively recounts a formative childhood encounter with the maddening complexity of real-world politics. Next, Destinee Asbill's "Molest the Dead" initiates a series of four Writing II essays, reading Seamus Heaney's poem "Punishment" as an inventive commentary on the scapegoat archetype. Isaiah Young then offers a probing look at the ethical commitments of the reader in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's landmark short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," and Mike Hixson charts the surprising, morbid uses of narrative humor and duplicity in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and Margaret Atwood's short poem "[You Fit into Me]." Rounding out the First-Year section, Kalep Glandon's researched synthesis "Breaking the Dice" configures the table-top role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons* as an invaluable aid to individual and social betterment.

Two commentaries on Immanuel Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" essay initiate the Writing across the Disciplines section: Eden McIntosh, first, argues that Kant's pronouncements compel critical thought via individual criticize of oppressive power structures in the present, after which Danielle Stevens contends that the Enlightenment lodestar of "reason" alone isn't enough when a healthy society requires educated trust in others. Claire Smith's "The Sublime and the Divine," next, offers a panoramic comparison of

numinous experience across philosophical, theological, and literary traditions in diverse cultures. In a detailed piece of science writing, Abigail Davis then reports on experimental data on concentrations of bacteria in face masks, suggesting timely hygiene precautions for folks navigating the COVID-19 era. Two textual analyses follow from there. First, Shawn McDaniel provides rhetorical commentary on lyrics and visuals associated with hard rock music, noting the primacy of constructive and empathetic messaging within a genre wrongly pigeonholed as violent and depraved. Wendell Hixson then surveys the manifold connotations of the serpent as a symbol in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and in biblical literature, offering an image of power, virility, and complexity irreducible to the snake's simple associations with evil and conniving. Logan Nitzel, finally, guides readers through the fascinating curiosities of Soviet consumer technology, which drew strange inspiration from the works of those capitalists across the ocean.

This volume concludes with Erin McCaslin's essay "America Will Persevere!" which contends that the COVID-19 pandemic has also given way to quintessentially American efforts of problem-solving and activism, giving us all welcome cause for hope. McCaslin's essay is this year's winner of the Betty Baker Jernigan Endowed Scholarship Fund, which, each year, offers \$1,000 to the winner of a contest open to qualified continuing and incoming USAO students. *The Drover Review*, in order to publicize the contest and celebrates its winners, also offers to publish winning essays like McCaslin's.

THIS VOLUME OWES MUCH to many. In addition to the aforementioned student Editorial Board members, I thank my colleagues Tonnia Anderson, John Bruce, and Shelley Rees for their continual hard work and support of the journal as Board members. Congratulations, too, are in order for graduating Board members Genevieve Gordon and Korbyn Peebles, each of whom exit USAO as winners of the Outstanding Graduate Awards in their academic divisions, among other

accolades aplenty—including multiple publications each in this journal.

This journal, too, persists as a reflection of the intellectually rich and diverse writing practices that occur across Science and Arts' majors and Interdisciplinary Studies program. In addition to Board members, faculty whose coursework yielded submissions to the 2021 volume include Alex Coleman, James Finck, Nicholas Boyde, Zachary Simpson, Misty Steele, Jason Shaw, and David Reed. Thanks, too, go to those in administration, the Communications and Marketing office, and elsewhere across campus who have aided *The Drover Review*.

Last and most important, thank you to the students who submitted work to *The Drover Review* in 2020-21, in the midst of a pandemic and everything else, for giving us all the chance to read, engage with, and learn from your wisdom, wit, intelligence, and hard work. We're all better for it. And 2021 is a brighter year for it, too.

Happy reading! As always, thank *you* for your interest in this journal and in supporting the vital intellectual work of student writers. ►►

Ben Wetherbee, PhD
May 2021

FIRST-YEAR WRITING



Blessings through Pandemics and Pollution

ABIGAIL DULLE

In this brief but vivid reflection, Abigail Dulle recalls how the COVID-19 affected her senior year while living in Kyrgyzstan, renewing her appreciation for life's simple and fundamental joys. This essay was written for Writing I with Dr. John Bruce.

THE PANDEMIC OF 2020, COVID-19, has had a tremendous effect on the lives of many people throughout the world. Upon its discovery, some countries took immediate precautions—canceling events, closing parks, and quarantining citizens—while others waited, hoping the virus would not reach their borders. “Social distancing” entered daily vocabulary as it enhanced isolation and feelings of depression for many, and people worldwide griped about being kept inside or forced to wear masks. Meanwhile, I was in the small country of Kyrgyzstan, trying my hardest to graduate high school and not get bogged down by increasing case numbers.

When COVID-19 first came to Kyrgyzstan in March, the immediate effects were school being closed, everyone quarantining in their apartments, and the city entering martial law. Instead of physically going to school and learning how to analyze *Hamlet*, I learned how impactful and significant a single trip to the store could be. Our parents would rotate my three siblings and me, letting us take turns

to get a breath of fresh air to last us for the next two weeks before it would be our turn again. I learned to count my steps joyfully and stare up at a polluted sky in reverence, being thankful for trips that had previously been nothing more than a chore.

Being closed in the apartment gave me a lot of time. I heard stories over the internet of the virus negatively impacting families, driving them to abhor one another, but I was given time to sit and build forts with my sisters. We played endless games of UNO. We made art together. Instead of hanging out with my school friends, I grew closer to my family. And while it seems very cheesy and clichéd (it should be noted that arguments still ensued), we were able to build memories of laughing around the dinner table, dancing to KPOP, and having nonsensical conversations in the few months before I left for college.

The final effect of the virus was the cancellation of spring. We went into quarantine wearing heavy coats and pollution masks to keep coal dust out of our lungs and came out wearing sunscreen, shorts, and medical masks. We did not get to watch the flowers grow. We did not see any newborn kittens. We did not get to pull hoodies on and wade through tall grass. There were no quiet walks under trees—no making pictures out of clouds. By the time we were free, summer was in heat, drying up the grass and throwing sweat on our attempts at peaceful walks.

This past year has made its mark through the challenges brought about by COVID, but it was still a year in my life nonetheless and I therefore refuse to look back on it through darkened glasses. Yes, vacations were canceled, graduation was online, and I was inside instead of exploring. I lost the chance to participate in typical senior activities. There were no more coffee-shop talks with friends. But I learned to cherish simplicity: walks along broken pavement, card games under bed sheets, and spring. The virus may have brought hardships, but it scattered some blessings along the way. ▶▶



The Story behind “Raconteur”

ERIYON TECSON

Drawing lexical information from various dictionaries, Eriyon Tecson narrates her research process to sketch a comprehensive image of the unusual word “raconteur,” as well as its adjacent synonyms and antonyms. This innovative research essay was written for Writing I with Dr. John Bruce.

WHEN SEARCHING FOR the word “raconteur” on different dictionaries’ websites, I noticed little differences and similarities. On the *Oxford English Dictionary* website, I received the definition, “The narrator of an anecdote or story, *esp.* a person particularly skilled in this role.” On the *Merriam-Webster* website, the definition was, “a person who excels in telling anecdotes.” Lastly, when I explored the *American Heritage Dictionary* website, I was given the meaning of “One who tells stories and anecdotes with skill and wit.” Each website has a similar definition of the word but in a different language and wording.

When further researching the *American Heritage* and *OED* websites, I noticed how they do not address the definition of being a personal skill until the end of each entry. The *Merriam-Webster* website draws attention to “raconteur” being a skill first through the verb “excel.” I was also able to differentiate which definition was

meant for what level of reader. The origin is the key feature in why they are all diverge from each other. The word is derived from “French, from raconter, to relate, from Old French: re-, re- + ac-onter, to count up, reckon” (“Raconteur,” *Oxford*). I also looked at the *OED* for the origin and etymology of the word, and here is what I found: “Origin: A borrowing from French. Etymon: French *raconteur*. Etymology: < French *raconteur* (1355 in Middle French; compare Old French *racontier* (1st half of 13th cent.), *reconteor* (c1200)) < *raconter* to relate . . . + *-eur -eur suffix*.” I find the word’s French origin fascinating and unique. A word and its place of beginning, I feel, always convey a story to how the word came to be. Learning about where something came from through time can be quite a journey, like going back in the past without actually having a time machine.

While doing deeper and more observant research, I came across three useful examples of the word “raconteur.” There were many examples to choose from that came from different time periods, dating all the way back to the early 1800s. Although there were many to choose from, I chose three examples from a time period closer to mine. I based this choice on a desire to better understand the examples that was given. I found one from Lawrence George Durrell’s 1958 *Mountolive: A Novel*: “. . . the inevitable anecdote of a famous raconteur to round off the letter” (qtd. in “Raconteur,” *Oxford*). I already like how this one uses a synonym of the word “raconteur” in the example. My second example is from 1972 John Mosedale’s 1972 book *Football*: “Jimmy Conzelman functioned as quarterback, coach, raconteur, songwriter and promoter” (qtd. in “Raconteur,” *Oxford*). My last example was from the year 2001. It is by J. Hamilton-Paterson’s *Loving Monsters*: “Surely all these would constitute a raconteur’s dream of endless episodes and reminiscence?” (qtd. in “Raconteur,” *Oxford*). By doing so much research on the word “raconteur,” I was able to understand each example clearly.

When researching synonyms, I found the words “storyteller” and “narrator” as ones closely related to “raconteur’s” meaning. I

did some digging around the first synonym I found, which was “storyteller.” When discovering more about this word, I realized there was a lot more information on the matter than the original word “raconteur.” This synonym is a very common word that is used for younger audiences to understand meaning. This word also has multiple meanings, like a liar or someone who literally tells stories like legends or myths. While researching the word on different dictionary sites, I noticed they all came with more than three definitional meanings. The *Merriam-Webster* website was the only one that did not provide a definition that meant “liar” or “fibber.” I did question why that may be, then came to the conclusion that the website might just be for a quick word lookup. I did like how the *OED* gave at least five definitions of the word and had a variety of ways they patterned the meaning. Some seemed easier to understand and others appeared as college-level definitions. Another synonym I chose that is similar to the word raconteur is “narrator.” When I was doing background research on this synonym for “raconteur,” I got different results from the first synonym. When skimming the dictionary sites, I found only three definitions or less each of the word “narrator.” Despite the sites not offering more meanings for the word, they did, however, all connect in defining someone speaking a plot to a story. All the definitions of this word connect to some type of literature where the narration is happening. They use example synonyms for the word such as “commentary,” “record,” and “report” to help one understand what a narrator is. While a raconteur is someone who tells stories in a skilled way, a narrator can be anyone depending on the story and who one wants to deliver the message to.

My search for antonyms on the word “Raconteur” was a lot more difficult than I expected. No antonyms occurred when researching the dictionary websites, so I had to use my head and come up with antonyms that would match. I came up with only two good ones, but I believe both antonyms convey enough information to get the point across. My first antonym was “fibber,” which I got from *Merriam-Webster* and derives from “fib,” or “a trivial or childish lie.” When I

checked the *OED*, the definition was, “One who fibs or tells fibs; a petty liar.” Lastly, in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, its meaning reads, “An insignificant or childish lie.” The other antonym chosen was “deceitful.” On the *American Heritage Dictionary* website, the meanings listed were “Given to cheating or deceiving” and “Deliberately misleading; deceptive.” The word “deceitful” on the *OED* website had a meaning of being “Full of deceit; given to deceiving or cheating; misleading, false, fallacious.” Lastly, *Merriam-Webster*, which had a somewhat different wording compared to the other two definitions, reads, “having a tendency or disposition to deceive or give false impressions.”

The inference to be drawn from this is that these words all correlate to one another. One can make the conclusion that the word “raconteur” has developed over time into the other synonyms to best fit our language today. The word “raconteur” is not used as commonly as a “storyteller” or “narrator.” Considering each dimension of the word also showcases different levels of sophistication in the definitions as well. Some meanings evoke scholarly interpretations of what the word has meant, and others are easier for a kid to understand. They all share similar synonyms and antonyms. One can make out that these do in fact come from the same family of words. ►►

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Rhetorical Analysis of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*

JENSEN LINK

In this sharp and detailed rhetorical analysis, Jensen Link stresses Founding Father Thomas Paine's appeals to timeliness, credibility, foresight, emotion, and audience identity in his pathbreaking pamphlet *Common Sense*. This essay was written for Writing I with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

IN THE MOMENTOUS pamphlet known as *Common Sense*, the clocklike language ticks down to the very seconds, as Americans disputed among themselves on how the revolution would proceed, with many turning to the topic of the British. The author, Thomas Paine, shows why it will be detrimental to be ever so loyal and content with the British, for it will lead to the Americans' demise. In the chapter of *Common Sense* titled "Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs," Paine uses rhetoric in the forms of effective timing to encourage a befuddled country, credibility behind his writing, planning for the future, enthymemes that show the audience's identity, and fiery passion that evoked a need for justice and independence.

First and foremost, Paine knew that while America was struggling with which side to be on; it would be the perfect time to write about what is happening to persuade people to join the movement and

fight against the British. This form of *kairos* could not have been better, because it gave a troubled nation an answer pertaining to the present, the past, and most importantly the future of the colonies. This timing brought in a warm welcome to some feelings that he had wanted to get out to the public for quite some time.

Paine's emotions speak for himself as accents his argument with feelings of passion. He discusses key information, like how "men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives, and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and the period of debate is closed." He shows the multiple failures that others have had in debating the subject because of the diverse motives they had. He also shows that he is willing to offer his opinions but remains able to back up his information as factual instead of fictional. For instance, his own personal perspective: "I make the sufferers case my own, and I protest, that were I driven from house and home, my property destroyed, and my circumstances ruined, that as a man, sensible of injuries, I could never relish the doctrine of reconciliation, or consider myself bound thereby." The historical condition that Paine describes, property being destroyed and being driven from one's home, shows that he has understood the level of barbarity from the British, which shows the credibility one would have if they experienced it firsthand.

Another example Paine uses to persuade the audience to believe in him emerges when he rebuts the argument that the British are helping the colonists because of how much colonists have flourished under British rule. Paine immediately provides an example to counter this argument by discussing how "We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat." This example shows that America can only grow and become independent by being self-sustaining. This also reveals to the audience that the reliance the Americans have had on the British. It makes the average British citizen appear as some sort of pawn for the King's personal gain, which colonists can conceptualize and relate

too, which can sway the audience into viewing Paine's appeal to independence as credible.

After proving his side of the story, Paine shows the logical steps he is willing to take to rule out a monarchy once and for all. Paine understood the importance of having a structure of law and order, so he informed the public on how he plans to rebuild the country in a way that promotes justice over absolute authority. He first discusses how people need to throw away the idea of having one absolute ruler. Instead, he offers "a committee of twenty-six members of Congress, viz. Two for each colony." This shows his capacity for inductive reasoning, as he shows hypothetical examples of a democracy that challenged traditional norms while assisting to bring in multiple opinions in the lawmaking process, emphasizing democracy over monarchy. The most important point that Paine proposes is the Continental Charter, or "securing freedom and property to all men, and above all things, the free exercise of religion." This is a form of enthymeme that directs the audience to a prenotation of the Magna Carta of England, which only gave a vague sense of freedom that was signed by a king. Paine wants to distance the Colonies from the Magna Carta and instead create something better, which will give the average person the freedom ordained by God. With the account of the previous laws the British forced onto the colonies, Paine shows the colonist experience and what it takes to fight for liberty.

The most important part of *Common Sense* was the rush of feelings infused into the pamphlet. The encouragement that Paine brings on is astonishing when he discusses the thousands that have sacrificed their lives to be at battle with the British, such that "All they *now* possess is liberty, what they before enjoyed is sacrificed to its service, and having nothing more to lose, they disdain submission." Paine's language shows the level of action that the colonists are taking to push what they believe and what they enjoy. This is also relevant to the audience, as it makes them feel a sense of duty to help those who are struggling for the freedom they deserve. Paine's passion gets to shine when countering an argument that,

since the British is powerful, they would protect the colonists from attackers. Yet again, Paine dismisses this blasphemy and expresses his emotions clearly, claiming that Britain’s “motive was INTEREST not ATTACHMENT; and that she did not protect us from OUR ENEMIES on OUR ACCOUNT; but from HER EMEMIES on HER OWN ACCOUNT, from those who had no quarrel with us on any OTHER ACCOUNT, and who will always be our enemies on the SAME ACCOUNT.” This reflective attitude warns that if British rule continues, the colonists will lose the reason why people fled the British in the first place—their freedom.

Thomas Paine did not know if his words would reach the public, but they did, and by storm, with over 120,000 pamphlets in circulation three months after publication. His work helped organize and inspired the colonial army, which may have changed the outlook for the whole war and contribute to why we have freedom to this day. Paine’s pamphlet was welcomed by the community because of its perfect timing, the use of experience, vision of the future, and the love put into it. In this pamphlet, Paine wanted to reveal this in the most basic of terms to show what everyone was missing, some common sense. ►►

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From Glory to Governments

A Disenchanting Journey

ANASTASIA DULLE

In this vivid, introspective coming-of-age narrative, Anastasia Dulle recounts the turmoil of reconciling the fantasy novels of her childhood—tales of clear-cut good and evil like *The Hobbit*—with the moral uncertainties of real-world politics that gradually came to occupy her attention. This essay was written for Writing I with Alex Coleman, MFA.

“**T**HEN SOMETHING TOOKISH woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick,” Tolkien wrote (15). My eyes flitted across the page, my smile widening and heart burning as the story continued. Something “Tookish” was awake in me, too—I longed to be in Bilbo’s place, to arm myself with a backpack, sword, and quest for glory, to adventure across the world with a company of dwarves, to outwit trolls and run from a dragon. As my exhilarating journey through *The Hobbit* continued, and later took me through the entirety of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* series, my thirst for adventure only grew. By the time I was nine years old, I had looked up from where I inhaled these books—hunched over on the worn carpeted floor in my bedroom, a sloppily written “keep out”

sign on the door warning the world not to disturb me—and determined that when I grew up, I was going to do something as exciting and wondrous as the characters in these stories.

But “keep out” signs could only do so much. Around the same time as this merry decision, reality started invading my mind, and my hazy awareness of the realm of politics began to grow sharper. Up until then, I had been a kid, gap-toothed and uncaring, with tangled hair, skinned knees, and big dreams. To me, “politics” was a strange and elusive construct that stayed in history books, and “government” was likewise something that revolved solely around the monarchs, dictators, and presidents of the gilded past. I had sat through enough history lessons to know, on a certain level, that the events in my history textbooks were real, but that was a difficult fact for my mind to fully grasp, especially since the illustrious deeds of fallen historical figures more often read like fiction than reality. That suited me just fine, however—I loved reading fiction, and lived for tales of armies, dragons, glory, and sarcastic heroines. I was happy to think of history and all the political issues within it as nothing more than another story.

The political subplots of my cherished adventure books were always very clear-cut: in *The Lord of the Rings*, it was good vs. evil; it was light vs. darkness; it was kingdoms joining together to fight against the giant, looming threat of Sauron and all his forces. I never had any question as to who were the good guys and who were the bad. Even in times when good characters succumbed to evil forces and villains disguised themselves as heroes, I always had a clear understanding of what, and who, were good and right. Inevitably, these plots fed my assumptions of how reality worked. I was excited to grow up and take my place in the world—my nine-year-old limbs were aching to pick up a sword and charge into battle, to be swept away on breathtaking journeys, or to join a ragged band of misfits on a mission to infiltrate an evil tyrant’s lair. But as I continued to grow and learn more, what I began to discover around me was not a

world full of excitement and wonder, but one full of tension and confusion, the weight of which I had not expected to have to learn to bear.

First came the growing awareness that the concept of politics was not a distant historical construct after all. I would overhear snippets of political news and commentary from neighbors or my parents' colleagues. My other source of political input was car radios. On car rides, I would buckle my seatbelt and wait a moment before the lilt of my patchwork British-American accent would rise above the car seats.

“Can we listen to music?”

Sometimes the adult driving would oblige, especially if they happened to be my mom. But inevitably, one or another adult would deny my request.

“No,” they would reply. “Music stations these days only play the same trashy songs over and over. We’re going to listen to something more important.” And they would proceed to fiddle with the buttons on the radio until they had landed on a news station.

I would groan, settle back into my seat, and look out the window at the landscape passing by, attempting to daydream over the buzz of the speakers. Eventually, however, instead of hearing a meaningless drone of information, I began to comprehend the implications of what the reporters and talk show hosts on the radio were saying. News about various politicians and political parties still didn’t matter to me at all—I was far more interested in the overplayed pop music—but I began to realize that political issues were ongoing conversations and problems that hadn’t ended with my history textbook. Still, though, matters of government were far away from me, and I assumed they would stay that way.

Contrary to my innocent expectations, I was eventually forced to come to terms with the unsettling realization that politics was actually a topic many adults—including my parents—considered to be extremely important. Up until this point, the only hint I had gotten that my parents cared about anything political was seeing my mom

vote in the 2012 U.S. presidential election. We were living in England at the time, and I walked in on my mom sitting at her desk, sealing an envelope.

“What are you doing?” I questioned, leaning over to see if I recognized the person it was addressed to.

“I’m mailing my vote to the U.S. It’s a paper that says who I want to be the president,” my mom answered patiently.

Looking back on it, she was probably expecting me to question her further. But I just shrugged and moved on with my day, likely going on to ask whether or not I could have a snack, and that was the end of my introduction to the U.S. voting system. Eventually, however, issues of government evolved into a topic my parents would discuss around the dinner table. And over time, I began to join in on the conversations.

After dinner one night, once the sun had lowered, the clatter of cutlery had ceased, and the final remnants of food had been scraped off our plates, my dad somehow managed to bring up the topic of economic and governmental models in what retrospectively can only be described as a talent. At this point, the rest of my siblings wisely left the room under the guise of helping clear the table, but I, eleven years old and determined to understand this yet-confusing topic, stayed. I started asking questions, the answers to which were never satisfying. What began as a relatively simple question-and-answer process stretched into a two-hour-long discussion that largely centered around the concept of communism. I propped my chin up with my fists, trying in vain to understand why the answers to my questions had to be so complicated.

“Sometimes ideas seem great on paper, but they just don’t work in real life,” my dad tried to explain. I shook my head, not understanding how that was possible. When I eventually left the table, I did so more confused than ever, my mind swamped and confidence shattered with the realization of how complex some topics were.

As I continued to grow more aware of politics, I experienced a growing disillusionment with the outside world. I still loved my fantasy novels, but I began to understand why their plots had been labeled “fantastical” in the first place. The enchanting characters, heroic quests, and simplistic black-and-white conflicts just didn’t translate to most real-life scenarios. As a kid, there’s a kind of innocent arrogance that comes with not knowing how staggeringly big and complex the world and all of its issues are. The biggest problems I was aware of at nine years old were my math homework, or the mean boys next door, or the fact that, to my mom’s chagrin, I kept getting grass stains on my jeans. The realization that the things that made up my life—adventure books, grass stains, bike rides, and scraped knees—were so small in the face of global, sociopolitical issues was a harsh and almost overwhelming one. And it was a realization I wasn’t sure what to do with.

Eventually, I came to the internal conclusion that political matters were issues best left ignored. The realm of politics was too vast, too heavy, and too complicated for my young and fragile self to bear for very long, and it frustrated me; it frustrated me that, contrary to the easily identifiable good vs. evil dichotomy built into the problems and conflicts of fictional worlds, in the real-world issues tended to be far more complex and morally gray. It frustrated me that the world was so complicated that perfect systems seemed impossible to achieve. It frustrated me that, in blatant opposition to the plots and messages of the adventure stories I loved so dearly, the selfishness and cruelty of a lot of powerful leaders went unchecked. And most of all, it frustrated and discouraged me that the optimistic mindset I had learned from my books was a perspective the rest of the world called unrealistic and naïve. I had become aware by this point that the real world wasn’t and never could be perfect, but that was a truth that felt like bitter poison to a heart that had learned to hope in heroes that saved the day and villains who were always vanquished by the end of the story. So I pushed that truth away. I decided that politics was a topic I would do best to stay away from and

try to ignore. And though I had always loved fiction, for the first time in my almost lifelong career of reading I started truly using it as a form of escapism from the world and all of its weight and problems.

Unfortunately, that resolution couldn't change the fact that I *had* become aware of politics and the enormity of the world, at least to a small extent. As I was still young, I didn't have the self-awareness or vocabulary to even begin to process or describe what I was dealing with, but the effects remained, nonetheless. Feelings of confusion, betrayal, and uncertainty—as if halfway down the road toward optimism, reality had stuck out a leg and tripped me, knocking me to the ground—festered within me and put added strain on my already wavering mental health. My life appeared to continue to go on as normal—I still had homework, I still rode bikes and climbed trees, I still devoured fantasy novels at a terrifying rate, and my jeans were still grass-stained—but I carried within my small frame a heavy awareness of the outside world and an accompanying sense of unease that would come and go. ▶▶

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Molest the Dead

DESTINEE ASBILL

In this innovative literary analysis, Destinee Asbill describes how Seamus Heaney's poem "Punishment" transforms the figure of the "bog woman"—a corpse exhumed by archaeologists in Northern Europe—into a scapegoat figure sacrificed for the good of humanity, but at deep moral cost. This essay was written for Writing II with Dr. Shelley Rees.

“NOTICE! ARCHAEOLOGISTS stumbled upon an Egyptian burial chamber! It is unknown who or what originates in the chamber but the scientists on the scene are excited to start excavation!” Despite every superstition and laws laid down by the deceased hundreds of years ago, scientists have overstepped boundaries by digging up our resting predecessors. Scientists and archaeologists have been removing the dead from their resting places for years and have justified their actions by saying it was for science. But, at what point does graverobbing become archaeology? When does it become all right to remove past lives from their tombs? A couple hundred years? A thousand? Nobody truly knows the answer. But, in all reality, archaeology is another form of graverobbing. While knowing who we were as humans thousands of

years ago is important, such knowledge does not justify our breaking in and entering. It defiles us. Archaeology itself defiles not only the dead but also the living.

For years, scientists have unearthed sleeping ancestors and performed autopsies to learn everything there is to know of where and who the body was. A widely known discovery grew popular when bodies were discovered in Northern Europe. This discovery prompted studies and even inspired authors to write highbrow and fact-filled books and papers. While many reveled in the wonders of the unknown, Seamus Heaney, an Ireland native, wrote a poem riddled with negative passages about the treatment of the bog people: “Punishment.” He describes the bog woman, the deceased, in multiple ways. Heaney relates her to a tree ripped from its roots:

Under which at first
she was barked sapling
that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin[.] (13-16)

The body has been ripped from its peaceful and tranquil resting place just because a man stumbled upon her and discovered her usefulness to academic knowledge. Heaney also describes her as a ship:

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs. (9-12)

Her body has been excavated, ripped from its roots for her usefulness. She is now being perceived as a vessel: a tool humanity has known to use, abuse, crash, and burn. Her delicate body, “the frail rigging / of her ribs” (7-8), has been defiled. The eyes of scientists were not supposed to look upon “her shaved head” (17). She is no longer human, despite her old life, she is now an experiment, a time capsule that a curious human decided to open without permission.

Heaney describes the female carcass as if she no longer were worthy of a shred of empathy. Heaney uses bitter language to describe how she is being punished:

Little adulteress,
 before they punished you . . .

 My poor scapegoat . . .

I almost love you
 but would have cast, I know,
 the stones of silence. (23-24; 28-31)

Heaney describes the moment as the deceased's last shred of dignity is ripped away from her, defiling her body and tarnishing our empathy.

Heaney presents the world another, more perplexing, point of view on the archaeological exhumation of the bog people. He uses negative connotation to draw our attention and uses multiple archetypes to make the reading more intense. The most significant archetype Heaney used is that of the scapegoat: "My poor scapegoat . . ." The scapegoat archetype refers to a person who is blamed for wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others. This archetype comes from an old technique religious communities would use to rid themselves of sin. Those communities would choose an animal, usually a goat, and ritually burden that animal with the sins of others before driving it away, where it would most likely be eaten by predators in the wild. It was a technique of sacrificing one for the good of many. Like this goat, the bog woman detailed in Heaney's poem is being defiled/sacrificed for the knowledge that could potentially contribute to society. The bog woman is detailed in intricate words to humanize her, and then she is practically babied. Heaney slowly introduces language to describe how useful she was to the world. She is no longer human, but a tool, a slave to our future. The poem describes her human attributes and then distracts away from these

human traits, showing her alternate identity as scapegoat. She has become a tool for humanity, used for the living's own personal gain, and defiled by her own species. The bog woman is no longer human but a specimen.

Heaney discreetly uses this negative wording and archetypal definition to detach himself as a scientist but also to demonstrate his own uneasiness about using this body as a test subject. He speaks of her as a human:

Little adulteress,
before they punished you

you were flaxen-hair,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful. (23-27)

Here, she is still human. A person who lived, laughed, loved, and died. Then Heaney switches back to his scientific side:

I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all of your numbered bones[.] (32-36)

The body has already been under the knife. Her bones have been counted and analyzed. No small detail will go unnoticed by his voyeuristic gaze; however, he struggles with his comparative nature. Heaney can't see past the fact that she is still human; while no longer living, laughing, and loving, she is still human. Heaney struggles to detach himself from his emotions to become the best scientist he truly could be. Why? Why not sacrifice this dead woman for the good of society? Well, would you sacrifice your daughter if it meant saving your wife/husband? Many would say no. You wouldn't

choose between either. You wouldn't be able to cast away your emotion to shove you daughter into the black void hiding behind every kitchen knife. Heaney struggles with this part of himself. He struggles in this archetypal journey: the journey in search of knowledge. We find ourselves asking these questions. Do we cast away a ritually burdened goat or keep what shred of dignity and humanity we have left to give? Do we defile the body or lay her back to rest?

Humans have been using scapegoats since before we can remember. We started off by running away burdened animals. Slowly we have started to burden our own species, our own kind. So, why not defile this one woman who has been dead of years? Why not use her discovery to help the rest of humanity? The bog woman is being used as a scapegoat for future generations. Her sacrifice is helping today's society understand our past in order to change our future for the better. Using an already dead society member is better than sacrificing a current member of society. It is the safest option that humans have found to prepare ourselves for the future; however, by cutting open our ancestors and looking at their deteriorated organs, we find ourselves in a sticky situation. We stare at the corpse of a past life and defile ourselves by not seeing just how human that corpse still is. The way scientists and archaeologists have learned to excavate and examine has defiled both of these parties. Archaeology is tearing away the edges of our empathy towards others and making our corners rough. We are no longer polished, and neither are our newly discovered ancestors. ►►

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Reader-Response Analysis of “The Yellow Wallpaper”

ISAIAH YOUNG

Isaiah Young emphasizes the importance of the reader’s experience in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s landmark short story “The Yellow Wallpaper,” stressing how the story forces readers to make an ethical choice between believing the story’s narrator or dismissing her pronouncements as the ramblings of an insane woman. This essay was written for Writing II with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

“THE YELLOW WALLPAPER” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is about a woman who is suffering from what seems to be some sort of hallucinogenic mental condition, though there are myriad elements throughout the work that hint at a larger message than the one simply written down. If one were to analyze this story from a limited, formalist point of view, they would miss the message of censorship and dismissal that Gilman is trying to communicate. Of course, as far as critiquing the finesse with which this story is written, the author’s effective use of symbolism and imagery are worthy of praise. However, this story is so much more than its literary style, since all the literary and rhetorical elements that were used are put in place deliberately to communicate an underlying theme that is not directly present within the text. The

text is a vessel for transmitting this message about the feminine experience at the time, and it was written in order to incite a response from its audience. Ergo, a reader-response analysis of this work proves more practical and effective.

To better understand what this story is trying to say, one must take a look at the intentional contradictions that are present within the text. Towards the beginning, the main character, Jane, who is writing to herself in a diary, claims that she personally disagrees with the ideas of her husband and his brother. They claim that she mustn't dwell on thoughts about her condition and that she must stay inside and abide by the medical regulations that they have in place if she desires to get better. She believes that "congenial work, with excitement and change" would do her good (80). But within the time span of a sentence, something interesting happens: she dismisses herself, saying, "but what is one to do?" This is the first time that the story's implicit message becomes apparent. During the 1890s when "The Yellow Wallpaper" was published, women's opinions and concerns were subjugated to those of their male counterparts, and that was the default practice of society. The speed and nonchalance with which Jane dismisses her intuition seems to hint at the way society's beliefs have seeped into the subconscious of the people, causing it to seem almost second nature to just trust what a man says, even his ideas are less than factual. She does this again two weeks later, when she is trying to ask John, her husband, if they could change the wallpaper because its grotesque appearance is eating away at her sanity. He says that it would be unwise to renovate the house for a three month's rental, and, in response, she asks him if she can go downstairs instead. He proceeds to flirtatiously distract her from her concerns, and she ends up saying that John is "right enough about the beds and windows and things" and moves back to her room (82). It becomes apparent to the reader that repeated instances such as these are in place to illustrate the ordinary and microaggressive nature of men placing their influence over women at the time.

In contrast with the more realistic and relatable aspects of Jane's mind are her hallucinations and apparent misconceptions. She believes that she is in a normal house, when it seems that she is in some sort of mental facility, as evidenced by the bars on the windows, her bed being nailed down, and the scheduled medical visitations. One might go as far as to suggest that her entire perception of the setting is fabricated, and she is in fact in a hospital and John is simply a doctor that she has imagined a relationship with. She believes that there is a woman in the walls and a great deal of other, very eerie occurrences that center on the anathema of the atrocious wallpaper in her room. One must be reminded of the fact that she is writing these things in a diary, with no intention of anyone reading this. (In fact, we have reason to believe that the only reason we are aware of Jane's experience is because a nosy passerby picked up her writings.) Since we are her unintended audience, it is logical to conclude that Jane is writing all of this with conviction; she has no need to entertain since she is honestly charting her experience within this maddening room. So, with this in mind, a question can be posed: Is this story's message delivered more efficiently if we, as her unintended audience, accept that the things that she says are true, or are we supposed to dismiss her work as the ramblings of a mentally ill patient? One could even argue that this very dilemma is the exact commentary that Gilman was trying to show in writing the story. Women's ideas and beliefs and opinions were being dismissed, and Gilman's audience is forced to make the decision between improving or treating Jane just as society treated the women that she was a stand-in for in the real world.

Had one taken this story at face value and only analyzed the way that Gilman wrote and constructed her story, they would miss the point entirely. This story has too much to say for one to muzzle it by simply looking at its use of formalist literary devices. "The Yellow Wallpaper," when approached through the lens of a reader-response critic, becomes a morbid commentary on society and its treatment of women. ►►

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A Reader's Morbid Digest of Being Misled

MIKE HIXSON

In this wry commentary on Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and Margaret Atwood's poem "[You Fit into Me]," Mike Hixson likens the narrative structure of each work to a set-up and punchline, revealing how the authors satirically subvert reader's expectations of the love story and love poem. This essay was written for Writing II with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

TODAY'S READER HAS an interesting sense of humor. Sometimes I think we are more morbid than older generations until I read works like "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin and "[You Fit into Me]" by Margaret Atwood. This short story and poem offer parallel styles in which the author misleads the reader. Once misled, the reader receives the punch line. I say *punchline* because, even though the topics are dark, I'm pretty sure you're supposed to be laughing. Of course, what completes the irony is that both the poem and short story revolve around love. The authors controvert the readers' expectations, creating surprise and in this case humor.

To begin, the author misleads the reader to set the stage for some classic irony. In "The Story of an Hour," a woman is being informed of her husband's untimely death. The woman has heart

problems, so they try to tell her in a slow and gentle way. She responds by going to her room and weeping “with sudden, wild abandonment” (93). In “[You fit into Me],” a short would-be love poem, Atwood begins:

you fit into me
like a hook into an eye

When someone is sewing, they must place thread through the eye of the needle, so this seems to be very affectionate. Both the short story and poem have supplied what the reader expects. A woman loses her husband and she's sad, and a love poem has said some affectionate words about the speaker's beloved. It's because of these standard plot conventions that the audience thinks they know what will happen next.

But does the audience actually know what is going to happen next? Probably not, since both works do a one-eighty. In “The Story of an Hour” the main character goes from grieving to essentially rejoicing. She sits in her room thinking about her life and what the rest of it will be like. She starts to repeat, “free, free, free!” because she enjoys the idea of living as a widow (94). This is ironic because you wouldn't expect the grieving wife with heart problems to be happy her husband is dead. Meanwhile, Atwood's poem parallels with,

a fish hook
an open eye

Similarly, this poem is not what it seemed. It can no longer be called a love poem when the speaker talks about a barbed hook going into an exposed eyeball. Both works have such a stark contrast to what the reader expected that the reader can only laugh. This comedic irony allows the authors to humorously approach the twisted nature of love that (in my opinion) most relationships have.

To continue, the short story actually offers a more profound example of this comedic irony. The wife has pictured her life without her husband, and she begins to look forward to life when “it was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long” (95). She is ready to start life and then her husband walks through the door, and *bam!* She dies. When she is autopsied by doctors, they think that she was so overjoyed at seeing her husband alive that her weak heart gave out. This time the audience does know. We know she was beginning to think very fondly of her future and that when she saw her husband she didn’t die of joy. She saw Brentley Mallard and died of sorrow. Writing it out definitely isn’t as funny as reading it. The truth we know, which contradicts the other characters’ assumptions, makes ending humorous and effectively gets the audience to laugh at death.

Finally, people love stories, especially love stories. Western literature has centrally featured love stories since Ancient Greece, and these stories have become clichéd to some extent. Here, Chopin and Atwood know as much and have used this information to mislead the reader. We might think this poem or short story is about love, but neither are. They both contradict the reader’s innocent outlook on love to make us laugh at the morbid nature of these two relationships. I used to think this newer generation was more into dark humor than any other, but I can see Kate Chopin has been making people laugh at death since the late 1800s, so I guess we’re all the same.

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Breaking the Dice

The Nuances of Dungeons & Dragons, (Self) Discovery, and (Social) Development

KALEP GLANDON

In this in-depth synthesis of scholarly research and popular discussion, Kalep Glandon draws on diverse scholarship in game studies, pop-cultural studies, and psychology to configure the table-top role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons* (*D&D*) as a valuable tool for knowing oneself and cultivating vital social skills in a welcoming environment. This essay was written for Writing II with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, the versatile, conceptual, and experiential tabletop role-playing game (RPG), may provide a bit more to its players than just fun. A common theme in the realm of *D&D* and the scholarly research done on the game is the idea that *D&D* is much more than just entertainment. Gaming scholar Aubrie Adams, for example, highlights the idea that cooperation meets “real-world needs”: “[T]he emotions, camaraderie, and accomplishments experienced in the game are real; thus suggesting that real-world needs are met through communication in socially constructed RPG scenarios” (70). Continuing her argument, Adams suggests the notion that “needs are met through RPGs is evidenced by the multitude of play-time hours accrued by groups as well as the ways that players bond, construct inside jokes, and revel in retelling

specific adventures.” Further explaining the usefulness of *D&D*, psychiatrist Wayne D. Blackmon writes about a 19-year-old patient who made a “methodical attempt at suicide” but was later introduced to the game (624). Blackmon details the rehabilitation of his patient through *D&D*: “By introducing fantasy and play, Dungeons and Dragons appears to have been the vehicle that allowed the patient described in this paper to enhance ego development” (630-31). Further, Nathan Shank’s article “Productive Violence and Poststructural Play in the Dungeons and Dragons Narrative” posits that violence in a productive setting like an RPG can help separate the player from their player character (PC) to further the narrative of a campaign, thus furthering camaraderie between its players: “The best part of adventures for many PCs is not in playing out the plotline of its script but instead is found in the individualized choices made during the adventure, those which give it unique shape and identity” (192-3). In sum, *D&D* can be used beneficially for self-improvement and developing social skills: “Some of the cognitive benefits of RPGs include the ability to experience other perspectives, practice visualization, escape social pressure, increase personal control, improve social skills . . . , and release unconscious fantasies” (Adams 70). Various studies all seem to settle in a similar vicinity and indicate the prospect of self-betterment through *D&D*.

Separation from yourself to improve lacking or weak qualities is a recurring subject among studies of *D&D*. Filling a fictional character’s shoes detaches your real abilities from your characters abilities and allows you become comfortable in your own skin and mind: “For the patient, the game served as an organized vehicle to become familiar with his own unconscious. The use of this material in therapy, the questioning of motives and emotions allowed these underlying unconscious thoughts to come to awareness and be worked through” (Blackmon 628). Blackmon used this to help his patient to feel safe so their problems could surface, and they could work to address them: “The vehicle to reach these feelings quickly and safely

was through the use of projections and displacements of the fantasies onto the Dungeons and Dragons game” (628). Of course, you can’t have an RPG games or games in general without stigmas, since “movies and television demonstrate that RPG-players are stereotyped as socially inept and often suffering from psychiatric disorders” (Lis et al. 381-82). Eric Lis, Carl Chiniara, Robert Biskin, and Richard Monotero tackle these stigmas to determine the belief among psychiatrists: “This study represents the first data collected on psychiatrists’ perceptions of RPGs, a significant cultural phenomenon associated with stereotypes related to mental health. Our results suggest that psychiatrists do not assume that RPG-players are at higher risk of psychopathology” (383). These stigmas contrast with the truth that games do help cognitive functions and have positive effects for their players” “Research on digital games has shown that they contribute to higher levels of well-being, less depression, and less negative affect. . . . On the whole, game-play may contribute to a variety of positive effects that researchers have only recently begun to understand” (Adams 70). Games, and tabletop RPGs in particular, have positive effects and can help develop social skills during play. Learning to strengthen a lacking skill through a character you made, and then acting through that character, frees you from current responsibility and allows open play and a training space for these skills.

Extending past traditional games, role-playing can fulfill the social needs of its players, allowing them to express themselves and complete their motivations: “[T]hrough observation of the talk and interaction, we can identify the needs and motivations of players; we can understand why they play and what fulfillment it creates for them” (Adams 83). In fulfilling one’s own goals, a player also achieves a common goal with the other players in the party. In the rule sets provided, the restraints of character creation help you bond with your character and help you identify with them furthering your development: “Play is only achieved when, under the flexibility but restrictiveness of the rules, characters do violence to their own

storylines in favor of the communal storyline” (Shank 195). Carrying on with the idea of “Productive Violence” Shank views violence in roleplay as a way of advancing the narrative. Violence in this light is paradoxical according to Shank: “Violence as an act of destruction, breaking, disequilibrium, or negation intuitively functions opposite to and along with acts of creation or production. But there is a paradox here, since violence produces even while negating” (192). The productiveness of violence enhances the narrative for the player, furthering their sense of self from their character while also engrossing more of themselves into the characters: “Violence as play provides us with a new approach to analyzing narrative and perhaps even informs the wide spectrum of human experience itself” (Shank 195). And in fact, it does so socially, growing your character and qualities to better form them and nourish your own. As John Arcadian says, “The most important aspect of these games, it’s that social one, the putting on the character and acting it out for your friends. It’s actually something that behavioral psychologists call social play, and they study it in kids is one of the primary ways we develop social skills.” You can evolve along with your character. As the party’s goals changes, the campaign’s narrative shifts and social growth is reinforced.

D&D allows its players to grow specific traits they want so they can embrace those traits in a free and social environment: “Kids who struggle to react appropriately in “regular” social situations often feel more at ease when interacting in a roleplaying setting because they are responding to others under the guise of their character rather than themselves” (Ashley). This freedom from consequence allows the player to express themselves freely and discover their desires. Blackmon’s patient, for instance, “first expressed them in a displaced way and got used to them in fantasy, he could feel safe with his feelings and begin to direct them more directly to another person” (628). The separation from the character, when coupled with the connection to who the character is and the ideals they hold, helps the players reach new aspects of themselves: “[T]his idea of

playing out a character to improve a personality trait actually comes from the work of a psychologist Alfred Adler. He has a role-playing therapy. . . . [Y]ou act as if you were somebody who you find more confident for a little bit each day. You put on that persona and bring that personality trait a little closer to the surface in yourself” (Arcadian). *D&D* catapults this idea into a full-fledged character, where you are not only acting as if you are this person, but you decide where this character goes and what they morally believe. Being socially developed is important in everyday life, and many people who aren’t developed socially in certain areas have nowhere to enhance these areas. According to Arcadian, “Now, we don't have many spaces for practicing social skills in adult life, and that’s odd because practice is one of the ways we improve our skills” (Arcadian). RPGs, and more specifically *D&D*, can train these weak areas in an environment safe to explore morality scour up admirable qualities. Through little more than pretending and with others participating around you, you can escape and become who you want to be in an accepting environment.

D&D is a tool to develop and discover one’s lacking abilities can build confidence, inspire positivity, and craft your character: “Speculation here may suggest a psychological correlation between adolescence, social awkwardness, escapist fantasy, and a dubiously close bond with a non-human entity that forms this archetypical personality” (Adams 71-72). Much like choosing a spell or class in your character creation you can choose traits you want and mature them through play. *D&D* can become a creative outlet for many to develop themselves, to explore “their mental dungeons and slay their psychic dragons” (Blackmon 631).

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WRITING ACROSS
THE DISCIPLINES



Modern Enlightenment

EDEN MCINTOSH

In this pithy examination of philosophy and culture, Eden McIntosh contends that Emmanuel Kant's pronouncements on Enlightenment compel a critical departure from the historical context of the Kant's own era and toward individual critique of oppressive structures in the service of equality. This essay was written for World Thought and Culture III with Drs. Shelley Rees and Nicholas Boyde.

WHAT IS MODERN Enlightenment? Modern Enlightenment cannot be defined without first addressing its origins. Between the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Enlightenment was a philosophical, humanist movement that passionately preached the importance of unrestrained, individual thought. Immanuel Kant, in his aptly named work "What is Enlightenment?" stated that the motto of the enlightenment was "*Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding" (1). That slogan encapsulated the philosophical attitude in the past and has been expanded upon in the modern-day Enlightenment movement through criticisms of its forerunner and pursuits to rectify former exclusions.

In the old Enlightenment, the core belief that man must be able to utilize uninhibited understanding inspired by revolutionary ideas. Enlightenment philosophers challenged how the church had

encroached and established itself as an authority beyond its jurisdiction. They aimed to protect independent reason as an immutable human right. In the preface for his *Treatise on Theology and Politics*, Spinoza argued that “to fill each man’s judgements with prejudices, or to restrain it in any way, is flatly contrary to common freedom” (2). The modern thought emerged that man was not only entitled to physical freedom, but intellectual freedom as well.

However, advancement in the 1700s was stifled in Europe. Many popular Enlightenment figures who are praised for their humanitarian views on man’s rights rejected the notion that women and people of color are entitled to the same liberties. The Enlightenment is as inseparable from humanism as it is from prejudice. Should the Enlightenment then be discarded because of its shortcomings? No, but it must be reinterpreted through the lens of progress. The Enlightenment started important conversations about freedom of speech, the authority of institutions, and the natural rights of individuals. We must acutely survey what to keep and what to leave behind from the movement.

In response to its flawed genesis, the present-day Enlightenment has branched off from the past. Those who were denied autonomy and equal opportunity are now protected by law in most modern countries. In first-world countries, education is relatively accessible and, in many cases, mandatory. The U.S. government has taken measures to ensure citizens are given equal opportunities. Federal laws such as the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (1974) prohibit racial segregation and discrimination of faculty and students in schools. Additionally, an extension of voting rights has given a voice to those who were traditionally denied speech and sovereignty. Contemporary Enlightenment has reached beyond its defective origins. Progression is now found through inclusion.

Race and gender equality is an almost exclusively modern expression of the Enlightenment. European 18th-century philosophy was strangled by unfounded discrimination; ideas were unable to be fully realized because reason was weaponized to uphold personal

judgements. Mary Wollstonecraft, who eloquently advocated for women’s rights, addressed this in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* when she wrote that “such deeply rooted prejudices have clouded reason” (3). Mankind will likely always struggle with bigotry, but it seems that modern thinkers have placed an emphasis on identifying individual biases and questioning the validity of their predispositions.

Propelled by the reinvention of the Black Lives Matter movement in the past year, there has been a call to listen to the voices of the oppressed and to critically examine support for discriminatory organizations. This is *sapere aude* (Kant 1). Present-day protestors questioning the authority of the police parallels Enlightenment philosophers who questioned the authority of the church. This is a continuation of Enlightenment ideas that implore human beings to think for themselves rather than blindly follow those in power, and to challenge establishments that infringe on their rights.

Immanuel Kant believed that enlightenment was a gradual work. In “What is Enlightenment?” Kant observed that he did not believe he lived in an enlightened age, but rather “an age of enlightenment” (1). Perhaps it is an optimistic bias, but I believe that in 2021 we are living in an enlightened age. Enlightenment is displayed in our opportunities to pursue education, in our scrutiny of oppressive institutions, in our protests for equal rights, and in our recognition that the previous enlightenment had defects. This is what Enlightenment should look like: a development grown from the groundwork laid by its predecessors. ►►

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Kantian Enlightenment in the 21st Century

DANIELLE STEVENS

Extending the insights of Immanuel Kant’s “What Is Enlightenment?” essay into modern times, Danielle Stevens addresses issues including racism, capitalism, and conspiracy thinking to argue that the Enlightenment lodestar of individualist “reason” is not enough to guide modern thought. Rather, she contends, we must also place educated trust in each other and communal decision-making. This essay was written for World Thought and Culture III with Drs. Shelley Rees and Nicholas Boyde.

IN HIS ESSAY “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” German philosopher Immanuel Kant described what he believed was necessary for an Enlightened Age and what such an age would entail. His work was a response to the questions and growing excitement around the societal and scientific advancements of his day. When viewed through a modern lens, Kant’s essay does spark the question: What would an Enlightenment be today? What would that even look like? If we were to live within a second Enlightenment, we would need to consider the first Enlightenment and its values, such as reason, freedom, and individualism, and in applying those values today, we will need to examine the pitfalls of

Enlightened thinkers to avoid making them ourselves. By approaching philosophy and society so critically, we may hope to be apply the title of “Enlightened” to ourselves.

The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, was a philosophical movement focused on humanity’s progress and the generation of new ideas, promoting critical thinking and the relatively new scientific method. It took place during the 1600s and 1700s and coincided with other intellectual movements like the Scientific Revolution, itself inspired by the Renaissance centuries prior. The movement could be considered “profoundly secular,” being concerned with the current wellbeing and potential of humanity rather than its posthumous salvation (Romano 77). Famous thinkers like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke questioned the nature of civilization and human rights within such structures, and others, such as Kant, set about defining the Enlightenment and encouraging others to take up critical thinking, so that they may further the cause of the movement.

Now, it should be noted that the first Enlightenment sprung from a period of prosperity in Europe. France is often considered the site where the Enlightenment reached its “highest development,” in particular because it was one of the wealthiest and most densely populated nations of the time (Romano 78). New ideas were growing evident and plentiful, and, even as the movement was underway, people were already aware of the atmosphere of progress and terming it the “Enlightenment,” though some cautioned this was premature (Kant). Comparing this time with our own reveals a stark difference. Social structures and technology have obviously changed greatly since the 1600s, but the greatest difference lies in the degree of optimism. With the spread of COVID-19, the tumultuous political climate, and growing mental health crises, it is hard to call our modern society a prosperous or stable one. A spectrum of perspectives compete on the matter, but the prevalent attitude regarding the world seems to be one of anxiety. This does not mean that our age is incapable of Enlightenment. A prosperous society,

barreling forward in technology and philosophy, does not necessarily belie stability, and surely, anxiety accompanied excitement. Perhaps, then, Enlightenment occurs not as a byproduct of fortune but as answer to uncertainty.

It was Kant's belief that "Reason" would bring humanity out of its "immaturity," that the cultivation of critical thinking would free people from external control and the pitfalls of lazy thinking (1). Reason was a skill greatly valued by Enlightenment thinkers, its use carrying the hopes of the future. Naturally, this skill is still incredibly important. Logic is our key to navigating the larger world. It is how we solve problems, how we justify our beliefs, and how we stop ourselves from making dumb mistakes. It would be nothing but prudent to venerate the use reason and cultivate it within ourselves.

But is reason alone really enough?

I would say no, not really. As powerful as it can be, reason is only a tool, and inevitably, it will be as faulty as those who use it. Even if we could make flawless use of our logic, avoiding any leaps or fallacies, our conclusions would err off course as a result of our biases and ignorance. The Enlightenment thinkers were hardly immune to this. The Enlightenment corresponded with the rise of colonialism and the slave trade, and the "freedom" of thought and speech advocated for by philosophers proved a per-dominantly Eurocentric one (Bouie). These matters were not merely overlooked by Enlightenment thinkers but justified by them. Kant himself spent much of his later career formulating and explaining a "racial hierarchy," at the pinnacle of which he placed the "white race" as the most advanced and gifted. Such writings justifying slavery paved the road for a legacy of racial injustice, a legacy that has brutal effect on people of color to this day. These are the consequences of faulty or, to use Kant's term, "lazy" reason. It is thus important to always question one's base assumptions simultaneously to reason (1).

Not only is this necessary to ferret our prejudice and bias, but it can prove illuminating to interrogate seemingly simple concepts in this way. For instance, let us consider progress. The Enlightenment

was very preoccupied with the idea of progress, holding that “progress was inevitable” and would naturally lead to a “better society” (Romano 77). Furthermore, it was believed that progress was straightforward, that advancements once made would be held until they were further built upon. It is for this reason Kant argues against absolutist doctrines on the basis that immunity to change is “a crime to human nature, whose original destiny lies precisely in such progress” (2). Our modern conception of progress, based typically in technological and scientific terms, is greatly influenced by these Enlightenment readings, but just because this belief is prevalent does not mean it is entirely true. For instance, it ignores the fact that progress can ebb and flow, knowledge being lost or recanted, and it proposes a linear view of progress rather than a three-dimensional view. Any given advancement could have as many detrimental or neutral qualities as beneficial ones, and simplifying that into terms of mere good or bad erases that nuance.

It should be noted, too, that our view of progress is heavily influenced by capitalism, itself influenced by Enlightenment-era thinking and politics. Under capitalism, the goal of progress, like production, is to eternally increase and never recede. Problems are to be solved with further advancements, generally technological ones, and this kind of thinking blinds us to the potential of different methods of problem solving. Being willing to scale back or return to older, more sustainable methods of living may be regarded as antithetical to progress, regardless of if these methods would prove more beneficial to society.

Another matter worth consideration is the matter of authority. The Enlightenment thinkers like Spinoza were keen to question the authority and workings of the Catholic Church, particularly taking issue with church insistence on blind adherence to scripture and restriction of debate (Spinoza). However, much hope was pinned and authority ceded to so-called Enlightened Despots. These took the form of leaders and monarchs who were willing to endorse Enlightenment values and extend toleration to controversial debates. Kant

avored, in particular, Prussian king Frederick the Great, and his justification for supporting Fredrick's absolute rule lay in Kant's belief that monarchs could make more assertive decisions than republics, granting the state the "lesser degree of civil freedom" conducive to intellectual growth (3). From our modern standpoint, acceptance of this kind of authority seems a bit egregious. It is common in the West to vaunt the questioning of authority, the humbling of the powerful and rich, and it is relatively rare to find anyone who would openly advocate a return to monarchy. Casual disrespect of authority, however, can mask indifference. Such questioning can give a false impression of profundity and can actually discourage deeper thought on the matter. It would perhaps then serve us to question our relationship to authority and power more frequently and more seriously.

This is not to say that questioning can't be taken too far. Just as Kant describes necessary limitations for the use of reason, encouraging individuals to hold their tongues to fulfill the requirements of their jobs, I would say it is necessary restrain oneself from becoming overly suspicious. Questioning one's world is not equivalent to always assuming deception. From all sides of the political sphere, suspicion is a prevalent attitude concerning current events, and groups like QAnon and COVID truthers exemplify how common and dangerous conspiratorial thinking can be. More than anything, such thinking eliminates the possibility to genuinely engage with new ideas. To speak from personal experience, I have noticed a tendency within myself to approach any new idea or reading with wariness. I find myself searching for some hidden trick or malarkey the author is trying to pull on me, and in doing so, I can end up misinterpreting a great deal. In justly trying to more critically engage with the text, I may also sometimes sabotage my ability to intelligently respond to the actual ideas at play. It is thus important to reserve judgment and honestly give the benefit of the doubt when engaging with differing ideas and viewpoints.

To this end, perhaps we should afford a little more trust to others. The Enlightenment advocated for the use of individual reason, this sentiment being exemplified in Kant’s call, “Have courage to use your own understanding!” (1). Naturally, honing one’s own ability to reason is a noble goal, and I agree wholeheartedly with the Enlightenment idea that society would be a better place if everyone was taught to think more critically and exercise that ability. However, I do not think such a purely individualistic approach can work in our modern age. Kant complains that relying on other’s judgment leads to “immaturity” (1), that even the consultation of books and doctors engender this loathsome quality, but relying only on oneself can only get one so far. In a world where one cannot possibly know and manage everything, a reliance on others is inevitable, if not beneficial. It is the cooperation of experts in various fields of study that allows for new advancements, and it is the compiled knowledge of previous generations that founds the wisdom of today. In looking solely to individualistic potential for Enlightenment, we would miss the equal potential within communal lines of thinking.

Kant, when asked if he believed if he lived in an Enlightened age, responded that they “still have a long way go” (3). Maybe we, too, are not truly living within an Enlightenment, but perhaps we are on our way and have been for a very long time. Also, it would be foolish to assume such Enlightenment will emerge only in the West. The next Enlightenment could begin in any place, in any country. If we want to be part of that when it happens, we need to be ready to listen to others, ask questions, and make honest use of our reason. ►►

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The Sublime and the Divine

CLAIRE SMITH

Beginning with Immanuel Kant’s theory of the sublime, Claire Smith charts a fascination with unutterable, numinous experience across diverse strains of Eastern and Western religious, philosophical, and literary writings, suggesting finally that the encounter with sublimity forms a core, universal feature of human experience. This essay was written for Aesthetics with Dr. Zachary Simpson.

IN HIS *Critique of Judgment*, Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant explores the various mental faculties that, paired with experience of an object, give rise to enjoyment, emotion, sensation, imagination, and wonder. He notes the different kinds of aesthetic judgments—judgments of the agreeable, judgments of beauty, and judgments of the sublime. He elaborates on these with theories, regarding each type of judgment and what differentiates them. For Kant, the experience of the sublime is distinct from that of the beautiful. Both experiences presume a judgment of reflection, which Kant differentiates from judgments of sensation. Judgments of sensation, generally, give rise to feelings of pleasure and gratification, while judgments of reflection involve the “free play” of the imagination and understanding (or reason, as in the case of the sublime) (Kant 63, 98, 125).

But while both experiences of the sublime and the beautiful invoke this state of contemplation, the sublime involves a “supersensible” faculty, an experience of the subject’s attempt to comprehend the infinite (Kant 106). The experience of the sublime is evoked by scale or measure beyond comprehension (Kant 103, 105, 107). But even though it is included in Kant’s discussion of aesthetics, the sublime seems to have more in common with other supersensible experiences, such as accounts of mystic and religious experience. Kant attempts to describe and understand a human experience, one that is somehow simultaneously universal and wholly individual. And if not explicitly religious or spiritual, it is still profound and unutterable, an experience beyond measure and beyond the mundane. This quality of incommunicability connects various mystic and sublime experiences.

Kant argues that pure sublimity is found in experiences of nature (109). The subject is overwhelmed with a sense of the superiority of nature. For Kant, the very fact that nature has no purpose makes nature a purer form of the sublime (109). Kant distinguishes the sublime into two categories, the dynamic and the mathematical, which both give rise to feelings of awe and fear. However, there is significance in the similarities between these two experiences: a vastness, an immeasurable space, “beyond all comparison,” as Kant writes (107).

Rather than arguing that beauty or the sublime is found within the object itself, Kant argues that these are found within the subject. In section 28 he writes: “True sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging person, not in the natural object the judging of which prompts this mental attunement” (123). French philosopher Gaston Bachelard echoes this in the *Poetics of Space*, writing, “Im-mensity is within ourselves” (202). He writes of transcendence, mystery, peace, of sacred space. The ideas expressed in this chapter called “Intimate Immensity” complement Kant’s ideas on imagination, contemplation, the mind, and the sublime.

Bachelard also writes of experiences within nature, particularly those of forests. He cites mostly poets, such as Rilke and Baudelaire. As Kant emphasizes size, might, and magnitude, so does Bachelard speak of vastness, immensity, intensity, and infinity. He includes Milosz's expressions of ecstasy in solitude, in the vastness of night. Milosz writes of the eternal, of his "heart bursting into singing" to the universe as he ponders the sea, space, and stars (Bachelard 207).

In journalist Lezley Hazleton's *The First Muslim*, her account of the life of the prophet Muhammad, she describes Muhammad's first encounter with the angel Gabriel: Muhammad sought solitude and silence among the mountains. He was meditating within a cave. Her details in this section bear close resemblance to Kant's ideas on nature and the sublime. Kant writes of nature's might, even God's might, as manifested in storms, earthquakes, or turbulent seas (122, 123). Hazleton argues that it may be difficult for humans today to grasp what true awe and terror in nature is, what it feels like. We no longer know the terror of solitude amidst an earthquake, a thunderstorm in an open desert, or against an immeasurable ocean, Hazleton suggests.

Hazleton, in her descriptions of these mystic experiences, refers to German philosopher and theologian Rudolf Otto and his writings on the numinous, which is comparable to the sublime. The numinous is a term coined by Otto in his book *The Idea of the Holy*, which he uses to name and describe experiences that overwhelm the subject with awe and dread. In order to understand the numinous, one must experience it, he writes (7). This resembles accounts of lived mystic experience, which indicate that such experiences are incommunicable through language. Of course, there is always the attempt to communicate, as is shown in the writings of these mystics, theologians, philosophers, and others who have experienced.

These lived experiences are often found in the subject's communion with nature and complement Kant's theory on the sublime. One feels humbled against the height of a mountain and sobered by

the sea. In his *Letters from Italy*, Goethe writes repeatedly of landscapes, of a “magnificence . . . that comes into view as one descends,” which he also notes is “indescribable” (11). He writes of a lush landscape in which “one can believe again in a God” (5). Encounters with nature are encounters with the other, with some force or presence greater than oneself and beyond oneself. It is this acute awareness, this contemplation yet incomprehension, that leads to the subjective experience of the sublime.

In section 28 of his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant touches on the divine and its connection to the sublime. He has written on the sublime as arousing fear and dread within the subject, but here he colors this with nuance. Kant argues against a fear of God and claims instead that true admiration of the divine requires of the subject a state of “quiet contemplation” and free judgment (122). Kant also seems to open up his definition of the sublime, writing, “Whatever arouses this feeling in us, and this includes the *might* of nature that challenges our forces, is then (although improperly) called sublime” (123). (Kant is noting here that the sublime exists within the subject, and the object which arouses the feeling is not actually sublime.) The ambiguity of this phrase indicates that perhaps something other than nature can arouse such feelings. He finishes this thought with a claim that we can contemplate a “being who arouses deep respect in us” (123). This reverence and respect comes from our own mental faculties, our ability to make judgments freely and “without fear.” His thoughts here turn away from his focus on the terror found in nature, and turn instead, once again, to the processes within our own minds. In giving voice to Muhammad’s questions, Lesley Hazleton asks, “Was the voice of God within him, part of him?... Where did man end and God begin?” (102).

This notion that it is through our contemplation that we can experience God is also found in the writings of 12th-century Islamic polymath Ibn Tufayl, writer of the philosophical novel the *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan*. In this introduction, Ibn Tufayl cites various attempts to express ecstasy and the sublime, in which the subjects in these states

feel that truth and God exist within themselves (Ibn Tufayl 95). Ibn Tufayl's work is the tale of a boy growing up alone in nature, and through his contemplation and nature alone he develops intellect. He also experiences revelations, and in this world, the religious is compatible with the observable world. We see these themes arise repeatedly: the individual alone with nature, in a state of contemplation. And in this case, as in that of Muhammad, God entered the equation.

Ibn Tufayl also comments on states of "expansiveness," "divine ecstasies," and "a state of sublimity I had never known before." He writes that such an experience is beyond reason and beyond communication (95, 96). Again, this recalls Kant's sublime, which arises from the free play of the faculties of imagination and reason, yet is beyond reason. In his poem "Buoyancy," Sufi poet Rumi writes,

A mountain keeps an echo deep inside itself.
That's how I hold your voice.
.....
I saw you and became empty.
This emptiness, more beautiful than existence,
obliterates existence . . . (10-16)

Rumi's sentiment reflects writings by Saint Teresa of Avila, 16th-century Catholic nun and mystic. She writes of various states of prayer and of the "faculties of the soul" that are activated in such states. Teresa describes an "absolute death to all the things of this world and an enjoyment of God" (115). In this state, she writes, the faculties of the mind are unable to comprehend the process and experience they are undergoing. This experience is incomparable and calls to mind Kant's claims that in experiences of pure beauty and sublimity, the subject attempts to understand, to question, to reason, but is unable. Teresa writes of a "heavenly madness," an ecstasy paired with agony, as Hazleton writes of "a terrible awe," and "pan-

icked disorientation” of an experience which is “indescribably enigmatic” (Teresa 115; Hazleton 89, 90). These expressions echo Kant’s claims of the simultaneous feelings of both fear and awe in nature.

For some, the mind finds itself in contemplation and lands not on God, but on transcendence and meaning nonetheless. In his lyrical essay “The Desert,” French philosopher Albert Camus writes of his experiences within the various landscapes in the Mediterranean. He writes of cypress and olive trees, of stone, sky and sun. “But for my love and the wondrous cry of these stones,” he writes, “there was no meaning in anything. The world is beautiful, and outside it there is no salvation” (103). This experience recalls Kant’s criteria for the beautiful and the sublime: that there be no concepts, no purpose attached to these objects. Camus augments these criteria with the claim that there is no meaning in life or in the world. Yet he is stirred and overwhelmed by this landscape, or by his own intellectual and emotional response. He writes of landscapes whose beauty is “pure” and “unbearable”: “Plunged deep in beauty, the mind feeds off nothingness” (101). His language shifts as the intensity builds, and he writes, “this world annihilates me,” as he is “moving toward a wisdom where everything had already been overcome” (103). This sense of annihilation echoes Saint Teresa, though they were coming from vastly distinct worldviews. While Teresa attributes this feeling to God, Camus attributes it to the absurd.

I think this is precisely what is significant in Kant’s theory of the sublime. That this is a universally subjective experience, one felt by believers and nonbelievers alike. The experience arises within one’s own mind and soul, and we search in agitation and agony for reason and meaning yet find none. But the experience, the heightened emotion, is still there. Explanation of such experience has been attempted by numerous thinkers and theologians across time and space, and I think this attempt at expression, though impossible, brings us closer to understanding, closer to one another, and closer to the other, or the divine. ►►

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Could Face Masks Be Harboring Bacteria?

ABIGAIL DAVIS

Abigail Davis describes and reports on a scientific study of bacterial presence on the skin and face masks of 25 test subjects during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing compelling evidence that face masks contribute to skin disease and irritation, possibly meriting precautionary measures among the mask-wearing public. This essay was written for Scientific Writing with Drs. Jason Shaw and David Reed.

ABSTRACT

Skin irritations such as acne and skin dermatitis have become more prevalent during the coronavirus outbreak. Face masks are now worn daily for long periods of time and are often required to be worn everywhere in public. Face masks provide a perfect environment for bacteria to thrive. Samples were taken from the face, hands, and inside and outside a face mask of 25 test subjects. The results were analyzed for abundance and statistically showed high concentrations of bacteria on the inside of the mask and on the face. This significance shows that the high abundance of bacteria could be the cause of the increase of skin irritations in the population since the coronavirus outbreak.

INTRODUCTION

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has brought about more issues than just a severe acute respiratory syndrome. Many people have been experiencing other difficulties when it comes to protection against the virus. Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) has become required in most countries during this time, especially among health care workers. Wearing equipment such as face masks for long periods of time has helped keep the virus from spreading, but it is causing other issues. Issues such as dermatitis and acne have become prevalent due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The novel coronavirus started in December of 2019 in Wuhan, China, and has spread rapidly to every other continent except Antarctica (Darlenski et al., 2020). To prevent the spread of the virus, it is encouraged to wear a mask to limit the dispersal of water droplets that come from coughing, sneezing, and talking (Han et al., 2020). These forms of moisture can start to collect under the mask. The mask is there to help protect oneself and surrounding people from the spreading of germs. Masks are not fully beneficial. It is known that PPE can have harmful effects on the skin (Szepietowski et al., 2020). The prolonged use of a face mask can result in contact dermatitis, seborrheic dermatitis, acne, and a variety of dermatological diseases along with worsening pre-existing skin diseases (Singh et al., 2020). These issues occur because of sheer friction and the mask sticking due to heavy sweating and other moisture derived from oil and humidity (Masen, 2020). The accumulation of moisture under the face mask can break down the skin and cause infections (Desai et al., 2020). The infections can have an increasing effect on the face.

The most affected anatomical sites include the nose, cheeks, and forehead (Alkubaisi, 2020). What is not understood by the public is the fact that people need to routinely clean their skin and add moisturizers at least one hour before wearing a face mask (Desai et al., 2020). Irritations caused by the face masks could discourage people from using them (Gheisari et al., 2020). This prolonged use could

put people, such as health care workers, at risk. The most reported skin disease for healthcare workers is occupational contact dermatitis (OCD). OCD accounts for 70-90% of all skin diseases reported in the workplace in the United States and Europe; however, this correlation between face mask use and OCD is not always documented in the healthcare setting (Al Badri, 2017). The fact that people other than health care workers are required to wear face masks for long durations may shine a light on the issue of unintended skin irritations.

The face mask may not be the direct cause of the skin irritations. Microscopic organisms such as bacteria are known to influence skin infections. Bacteria are everywhere and have symbiotic relationships with humans. There are different commensal microbiomes inside and outside the human body. The skin microbiome plays many important roles when it comes to skin diseases and the overall health of the skin (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2013). The complex diversity of the microbiota forms a barrier against outside influences on the surface microbiome and that of the skin appendices (Dreno et al., 2017). Changes in the normal composition of the skin microbiota have been linked to chronic inflammatory skin diseases including atopic dermatitis and acne. It has been shown that microbe-related human diseases are often caused by certain strains of bacteria, not the entire species (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2013). There are three common bacteria that are found on the skin: *Corynebacterium*, *Propionibacterium*, and *Staphylococci* (Dreno et al., 2017). Microbial involvement is one of the main contributors to the development of acne vulgaris, more commonly known as acne (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2013).

Acne is one of the issues that has risen amid the prolonged use of face masks. Acne is an inflammatory disorder that is caused by increased sebum production, hyperkeratinization, inflammation and *Cutibacterium acnes*, also known as *Propionibacterium (P. acnes)* (Zaenglein, 2018). This type of bacteria, along with other strains, may be correlated with the increased cases of skin irritations

when using face masks. Acne is one of the most common skin diseases among all ages, but it is more prevalent in teenagers (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2013). Cutaneous bacterial communities are known to be involved in the immune homeostasis and its associated inflammatory responses, resulting in acne (Dreno et al., 2017). The bacterial strain that causes acne is called *Propionibacterium acnes*, but it is also a prevalent bacterium that appears in the normal skin flora (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2013). Scientists are unsure whether *P. acnes* helps the health of human skin, plays a pathogenic role in acne, or both. *P. acnes* also inhabits the sebaceous follicle, inhibiting the invasion of some pathogenic bacteria and allowing other commensal strains to grow (Dreno et al., 2017). *P. acnes* is anaerobic and is the main microorganism in the pilosebaceous follicle, which produces extracellular enzymes and secretes chemotactic factors that attract the cells that play a role in the inflammatory response. This inflammatory response is the one that is responsible for the production of acne (Burkhart et al., 1999). This informs scientists that *P. acnes* is directly contributing to the existence of this skin disease. The growing number of bacteria on the face can affect the prevalence of skin irritations like acne.

Bacterial communities prefer to grow in high-humidity conditions. Face masks allow warm, moist breath and other forms of water droplets to stay close to the face (Dannemiller et al., 2017). It can be inferred that the rise in humidity levels, caused by wearing face masks for long periods of time, could contribute to the growth of bacteria on the face. The most commonly worn face masks are made from cotton. Particles containing bacteria and other microorganisms can be rubbed through materials like these (Ransjö et al., 1979). Most people continue the habit of touching their face while wearing the mask. Cotton is only five times better as a barrier garment than other materials tested for particle penetration and has a penetration rate of about 10%. The percentage increases to 100 with wet cotton. Cotton face masks are used to prevent water droplets from escaping, and when these droplets are caught in the masks, the

cotton becomes damp. This allows bacteria to penetrate through the mask, and all the bacteria one encounters could be transferred to the face, collect, and grow under the mask. This collection of bacteria is what was tested in the experiment.

In this experiment, data on the abundance and diversity of bacteria that is found on the face, hands, inside and outside of face masks was collected from 25 test subjects. From research and prior knowledge, it seems logical that the inside of the mask and the subject's face would have the greatest number of bacteria present. This can be inferred because of the closeness of the face mask to the face and the humidity created underneath the mask from water droplets, sweat, and oil secretions. This experiment could help scientists connect the effect of bacterial growth caused by face masks to the higher prevalence of skin diseases/irritations due to the coronavirus pandemic. This work seeks to address the following questions: Are masks creating and/or worsening acne problems? Could this be correlated to the number of bacteria found on or inside the mask itself? Is the mask creating a perfect home for bacteria to grow?

METHODS

THE EXPERIMENT STARTED with the production of nutrient agar (Atlas, 1993). The agar was then poured into more than a hundred petri dishes labeled with a number and the word "face," "hands," "inside," or "outside" to correlate with the test site and test subject. Samples were taken from 25 different test subjects. Each subject was asked four survey questions. After the questions were answered, the subject was asked to swab each of the four testing sites (face, hands, inside mask, and outside mask) using a sterile Q-tip. The sample was then inoculated onto the appropriately labeled petri dish and the Q-tip was discarded. All experimentalists wore masks and gloves and monitored correct sterile technique for each sample collected. After sample collection, the petri dishes were incubated for approximately 30 hours at 37 °C. The resulting cultures were counting and analyzed

according to diversity and abundance of bacteria. Data was collected, and two separate bar graphs were generated in Excel to display the mean and overall abundance. Fungi were present, but not included in data for this experiment. Statistical data was made by performing t-tests on the means between the inside and outside of the mask, the inside of the mask and the face, and the face and inside of the mask. Results were analyzed for significance.

Figure 1 *Abundance of Bacteria on the Face, Inside of Mask, and Outside of Mask on 25 Test Subjects*

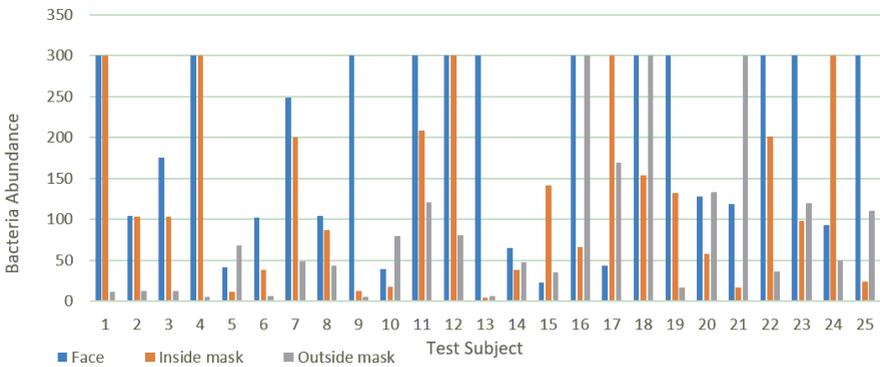
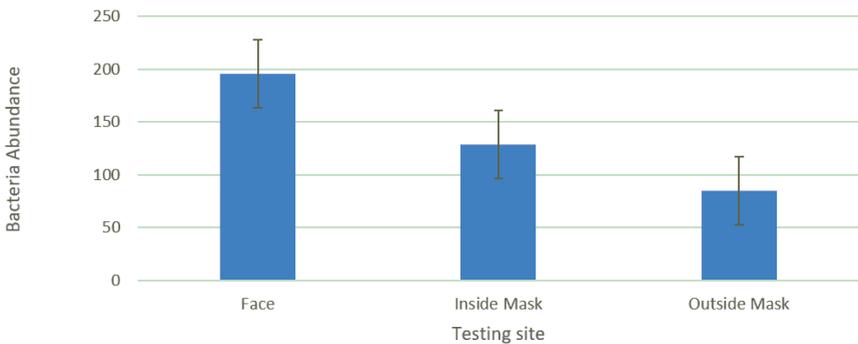


Figure 2 *Average Bacteria Abundance on the Face, Inside of Mask, and Outside of Mask on 25 Test Subjects*



RESULTS

THERE WAS AN increase in abundance of bacteria on the inside of the mask and on the face. The outside of the mask only had a higher abundance for six out of the twenty-five test subjects (Fig. 1). The average abundance of bacteria was 195.56 on the face, 128.8 on the inside of the mask, and 85.04 on the outside of the mask (Fig. 2). The means were used to perform t-tests. The t-test between the face and the inside of the mask produced a p-value of 0.0225. This value is slightly lower than the 0.05 alpha level. The t-test between the inside and the outside of the mask produced a p-value of 0.077. The t-test between the face and the outside of the mask produced a P-value of 0.0003.

DISCUSSION

THE RESULTS SHOW that the mean of bacterial abundance was higher on the face and inside the mask as compared to the outside of the face mask. The significance of these findings can be seen in the statistical results. For the t-test between the face and the inside of the mask, the p-value was slightly smaller than the alpha number. This result shows a small significance between the two abundancies. The p-value between the face and the outside of the mask showed less significance because it is substantially smaller than the alpha number. The p-value for the inside and outside of the mask showed greater significance because it was higher than the alpha number. This supports the original hypothesis of the experiment.

These results support the statement that bacterial abundance is higher on the face and inside the mask compared to the outside. This finding could help support the idea that prolonged wearing of a face mask could increase the cause of skin irritations such as acne. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, masks have become essential and, in most places, required (Darlenski et al., 2020). Face masks can be seen worn by people for more than a few hours at a time, especially in the healthcare setting (Al Badri, 2017). The proximity of the mask

to the face and the water droplets that are collected inside of it can create a humid environment, which is a perfect place for bacteria to collect and grow (Masen, 2020). Reports of “maskne” and skin irritations are rising in the populations that have increased the use of masks.

The results of this experiment affirm that bacterial abundance is greater on the face and inside of the mask but do not definitely prove that this trend is the exact cause of acne. These findings could show that face masks may be a contributor to the rising skin issues that have arose during this pandemic. For future work expanding on this experiment, it would be beneficial to further culture the bacteria samples. Taking samples and studying the diversity of bacteria could further increase our understanding of these bacterial species. It could also help find the answer to whether masks directly cause facial acne or not. Taking the information from this experiment and moving forward could aid finding better answers to the questions that were posed in the initial experiment.

CONCLUSION

The prevalence of skin irritations such as contact dermatitis and acne has increased since the COVID-19 outbreak. Face masks are now mandated in public places and are being worn for long durations of time. This could be a correlation of why skin issues have become so prevalent. Face masks create a perfect breeding ground for bacteria to thrive and reproduce. Where are the most bacteria found when wearing a mask? As seen in the results of the experiment, bacteria are most abundant on the face and inside of the face mask. With these results, it can be concluded that the increase in bacteria could be a contributor to facial skin irritations. ►►

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Rhetoric and Rock

SHAWN MCDANIEL

In this analysis of the song lyrics, music videos, and album art of hard rock bands like Five Finger Death Punch, Redlight King, and Art of Dying, Shawn McDaniel's rhetorical perspective reveals the constructive and empathetic messages underlying a musical genre widely misunderstood as violent and depraved. This essay was written for Rhetoric & Composition with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

AS THE GREAT rhetorician Aristotle once wrote, “Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (24), and rhetorical devices such as ethos, pathos, kairos, and others help to focus rhetorical observation. However, when it comes to music, specifically the genre of rock and its subgenre of hard rock, rhetorical observation is rarely used by the masses, who instead focus on the stereotypes associated with the genre, those being that this genre is associated with violence, anger, suicide, and, in some cases, demonic or satanic worship. However, should those same masses pause to listen some lyrics or watch a music video and apply rhetoric, they would discover a genre about fighting through hard times, about dealing with mental health issues such as depression, about helping those who for

whatever reason can't help themselves, and about staying strong despite suicidal thoughts. These messages become clearer when analyzing rhetorical devices such as God and Devil terms, metaphor, ethos, image, and pathos.

God and Devil terms tend to invoke a good-versus-evil mentality with their names alone. However, as rhetorical tools, the terms were coined by Richard Weaver, who described the god term as “that expression about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers” (212). And according to Ken Broda-Bahm, “Devil terms are not terms you avoid, but are rather terms that you embrace in describing the other side, and in helping to frame what your audience should be against.” Neither of these concepts are necessarily good or evil, but because of their names, we associate them as one or the other:

A god term means more than just a “good term” but is instead a “rhetorical absolute,” something that carries a strong automatic meaning. That is, it isn't good because we can think of an argument why it is good. Instead, it is good because it fits with at least one common worldview that our audience holds about what is good. (Broda-Bahm)

So, what are some Devil terms associated with hard rock music? The biggest devil term for the genre is, perhaps fittingly, Satan. Hard rock bands have long been associated with satanic worship and practices and while some bands, such as Five Finger Death Punch or Disturbed, have somewhat embraced the concept by featuring demonic beings on their album cover, other bands break that stereotype. A popular example is Skillet, a Christian hard rock band. Despite not using explicit language, their songs deal with the same themes as other bands in the genre, such as self-harm and depression, which leads into another devil term, Suicide. A popular stereotype is that the genre glamorizes and encourages suicide among its listeners. The obvious counter argument to that is that, if these bands encouraged their listeners to commit suicide, how are any of

their fans still alive? But beyond that, most of the songs from the genre that deal with self-harm and suicide actually have lyrics that urge the listener *not* to kill themselves and to keep fighting. An example of this is the song “Get Through This” by the band Art of Dying, the chorus of which is:

If I can get through this
 I can get through anything.
 If I can make it through this
 I can get through anything.
 If I can get through this
 I can get through anything.
 If I can make it through this
 I can get through anything.

These lyrics appear to be meant to psych up the listener and to encourage them to keep going, while also reassuring the listener that they will get through everything. Another common devil term associated with the genre is Violence, more specifically that this genre of music encourages its readers to commit acts of violence and that the genre generally increases aggression. The stereotype is somewhat correct. Many songs in the hard rock subgenre have violent lyrics. However, the lyrics aren’t encouraging random acts of violence. Rather, the suggested violence is merely a metaphor for the battles we go through in life. For example, the lyrics to the song “Got Your Six” by the band Five Finger Death Punch on face value are about two men in a type of gladiatorial arena, with one encouraging the other that they “have his six,” a military term meaning that they will guard his back. Analyzing it another way, the song is a metaphor about being there for one’s friends and one’s friends being there in return.

A metaphor is a valuable writing tool in both prose and poetry. However, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson write, “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3). Lakoff

and Johnson talk about the conceptual metaphor of “argument is war” and how our culture tends to view arguments similar to war. That same use of war as a metaphor for other activities is prevalent in the hard rock genre and might add to the generally public’s view of hard rock music being violent. Rock and its subgenres frequently use war metaphors in their lyrics. However, this should be to the genre’s favor. As Lakoff and Johnson say, “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (5). While someone who doesn’t have a mental illness or self-harmful thoughts might not understand the feelings of someone going through those in plain, face-value words, they might understand the metaphors that a band might use to convey those thoughts, especially since war metaphors are so ingrained in American culture. For example, the song “Bullet in My Hand” by the band Redlight King has the lyrics:

There’s someone lookin’ out for me.
I came out of the darkness
With a bullet in my hand.
I got one more shot at livin’.
I’m lucky that I can.

These lyrics appear to be a metaphor for coming out of a deep depression thanks to the aid of someone, possibly a therapist, and now having the tools necessary for a second chance at a normal life. Hard rock doesn’t just use war metaphors when talking about mental health or suicide, though. Some bands sing simply about being stressed out, yet they still use war metaphors. For example, the song “State of My Head” by the band Shinedown has lyrics like: “We’ve been shot up, beat up by the fallin’ of the arrows,” and, “Yeah, I’m full of deep cuts right down to the marrow.” While these lyrics at face value are about an unnamed narrator getting severely wounded, metaphorically they are about being stressed out by multiple problems and being worn out and tired. A similar example is the song

“Bulletproof” by the band Godsmack. While the title and lyrics talk about a man being bulletproof, they are a metaphor for someone being emotionally hardened by situations in their life and not being able to be hurt the same way again. Both songs have lyrics about being worn down by life but still overcoming obstacles, whether by actively fighting back in Shinedown’s case or by becoming used to the stress until it loses its effect in Godsmack’s case.

Another rhetorical tool to use is ethos, or a person’s character. Ethos has long been used in rhetoric: “As early as the fourth century BCE, Greek teachers of rhetoric gave suggestions about how a person’s character could be put to persuasive uses, and rhetorical theorists continued to discuss the uses of ethical proofs throughout the history of ancient rhetoric” (Crowley and Hawhee 146). These proofs are still used today. However, our definition of character has changed over time. Nowadays, character is synonymous with personality. However, according to the ancient Greeks, “character was constructed not by what happened to people but by the moral practices in which they habitually engaged” (Crowley and Hawhee 149). Two kinds of ethical proof exist and each one has its own place. One is invented ethos, which is ethos the rhetor invents for the occasion where it is needed. The other is situated ethos, which is ethos that the rhetor is known for in the community. An important note is that invented ethos is not false ethos. Invented ethos is for situations where the community or audience isn’t aware of the speaker’s situated ethos, and therefore the speaker must create an ethos for themselves on the spot. However, it is the situated ethos of hard rock bands that doesn’t get mentioned often. One example of the situated ethos of hard rock bands happened in 2018 when hard rock bands Five Finger Death Punch and Breaking Benjamin each donated \$95,000 to two different charities (Erickson). Breaking Benjamin donated their money to the charity Prevent Child Abuse America, while Five Finger Death Punch donated their money to C.O.P.S., Concerns of Police Survivors. Another example also occurred in 2018 when Five Finger Death Punch frontman Ivan Moody donated

fifty sleeping bags to Pillars, an organization that helps the homeless (Meinert). He also made similar donations in Colorado Springs and Minneapolis. Judging from of this situated ethos, both bands have broken the popular stereotype of hard rock bands blowing all of their money on drugs and alcohol. Another hard rock band, Disturbed, breaks the perceived ethos of hard rock bands only singing about violence with their song “Another Way to Die.” While the title makes it sound like a song dedicated to killing an opponent creatively, the song itself is actually about the environment and how the human race is polluting the planet at an alarming rate, with verses like:

Glaciers melt as we pollute the sky,
 A sign of devastation coming.
 We don't need another way to die.
 Will we repent in time?

The title is in reference to the human race creating yet another way to die, only this time it is one we can control and, hopefully, fix before it becomes irreversible.

A rhetorical approach that applies to this topic is Roland Barthes’s “Rhetoric of the Image.” Barthes talks about two things that apply well to the hard rock discussion: the connotative image, and the denotative image. The denotative image, according to Barthes, “is both evictive and sufficient[;] it will be understood that from an aesthetic point of view the denoted image can appear as a kind of Edenic state of the image; cleared utopianically of its connotations, the image would become radically objective, or in the last analysis, innocent” (158). From this description, it is easy to gather that the denotative image is an image that is taken literally. The connotative image resembles the denoted image, but with added associations meant to evoke a response from the viewer. Examples of this from the world of music are album covers. For example, the cover to the Five Finger Death Punch album *Got Your Six* features a giant, muscular, demonic figure warding off other demonic figures

with a baseball bat in one hand and a serrated sword with a knuckleduster handle in the other (fig. 1). Based on the amount of blood on the cover and on the main entity, the viewer can discern that the main entity has been fighting off the horde of other demons. By viewing it purely as a denoted image, it is simply another hard rock band with a



Fig. 1. Album cover for Five Finger Death Punch's Got Your Six.

piece of violent and bloody cover art. However, viewing connotations derived from the songs on the album, the viewer can see the metaphor in the image of fighting one's own demons. Then, through that lens, the weapons the main demon carries can be seen as metaphors for aids such as therapy or medication. The horde of demons are now seen as metaphors for depression, anxiety, stress, and self-harm. And finally, the main demon becomes the viewer themselves.

Finally, the last rhetorical device to be applied is pathos. According to Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, "In the fifth century BCE Plato and Aristotle began to use the term Pathos to discuss emotions in general" (170). The most common pathos appeal associated with the hard rock genre is anger, and that's not a baseless claim. Several songs in the genre are sung angrily or have angry-sounding lyrics. However, anger is usually the only emotion associated with the genre and that is untrue. In fact, the band Five Finger Death Punch uses the emotions of compassion, pity, and shame in several of their

music videos. For example, in their music video for their song “Wrong Side of Heaven,” they use all three of these emotions, as well as fear and despair, in order to tell the story of four veterans, three of whom become homeless when they return to the United States. However, rather than just show a simple before and after, the video shows each veteran’s individual struggles with PTSD, all the while showing the statistics for homeless veterans, veterans with untreated mental illnesses caused by combat, and veteran divorce rates. The video also ends with a list of charities that their fans can donate to. Another example is their music video for their cover of “Gone Away.” This video is also about a veteran, although one who suffers not only from PTSD, but from survivor’s guilt as well. Both videos show the horrors of war while calling on their fans to donate to charities to help veterans, showing both an anti-war and pro-veteran message. Finally, their music video for their song “When the Seasons Change” follows two police officers who are ambushed upon answering a call. Both are shot, though one gets hit in their vest. The other one is rushed to the hospital after being hit in the neck. The band uses pathos to make their viewers anxious over the fate of the wounded officer (spoiler alert: he lives), while also using flashbacks showing the two officers growing up together to evoke a sense of empathy and compassion for the other officer as her best friend and partner fights for his life. At the end, it shows that the video “is dedicated to the memory of the Las Vegas cop Charleston Hartfield, who lost his life in the 2017 Route 91 mass shooting. The police officer and Army veteran used his body to shield and protect others from a hail of bullets.”

These examples of rhetorical proof show that hard rock music is more than the stereotype the public has of it. The songs of this genre are not about encouraging their listeners to commit random acts of violence or to kill themselves; rather, they are about encouraging their listeners to live on despite whatever troubles they might face. Their pathos is not about inspiring anger in itself but about inspiring strength in their listeners to keep on fighting against life’s hardships.

Their ethos is not of the Satanic worshipper, but of people who give to charity, make music that incorporates social issues into the lyrics, and make music videos that encourage their fans to donate to charity and raise awareness to issues that most would rather forget. Above all though, these rhetorical tools and techniques show that the hard rock genre isn't as one-dimensional as the general public believes it is. ►►

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The Symbolology of Serpents in Greco-Roman and Biblical Mythology

WENDELL HIXSON

In this panoramic study of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and biblical passages ranging from Genesis to Revelation, Wendell Hixson examines the role of serpents as ancient symbols of power, virility, and the bilateral forces of good and evil, chronicling snakes' connotatively rich roles as foils of the gods and barometers of human morality—roles that outstrip the rote symbolism of devilish cunning. This essay was written for World Literature I with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

AS SERPENTS SLITHER through the history of the Near East and the developing psyche of Europe, they seem to ubiquitously coil around the collective consciousness of many cultures and literary eras in the ancient age. The significance of snakes and their inspiration for divine beasts, such as leviathans of the ocean, basilisks of the earth, and dragons of the sky, reveal the pervasive beliefs that serpents not only occupied but fearfully controlled every realm of their natural and divine world. Through the biblical accounts of flying, fiery adders to the horrendous, venomous serpent in Ovid's account of Cadmus in the *Metamorphoses*, its monstrous qualities distinguish this beast as something to be awed and feared. However, a Brazen Serpent recognizably was killed and erected on a cross to bring the Israelites salvation from those very fire-breathing

snakes, and Cadmus sowed the slain serpent's teeth to birth vivacious soldiers from the soil. These creatures bring salvation and life just as they breed fear and death. In another vein altogether, the serpent represents a very forceful and sexual symbol—one that represents both male and female sexuality—usually indicating either the beginning of creation or the creation of knowledge through the concept of *Chaoskampf*, a battle between a god and a serpent for control of chaos. The complex symbology of the serpent permeates mythology across the Mediterranean and becomes central to this collective identity as eternal beings which inspiringly depict the most beautiful and most horrifying aspects of divine and worldly existence. Additionally, the serpent bridges these two dichotomous domains and encapsulates the dynamic of the intermingling mortal and immortal realms. In full, the diverse symbology of the serpent richly presents itself throughout biblical tales and Ovid's Greco-Roman myths, establishes these creatures as emblems of the dualistic nature of thought and religious belief, and demonstrates the importance of their enigmatic and transformative abilities.

From their legless, slithering movement to their shedding of skin, serpents' features have captivated the attention of ancient cultures across the world and, as symbols, have been given an enormous range of interpretations, and central to this convergence of definitions is their symbolism as a bridge between the earth and the heavens. The bridging quality of serpents originates mainly from their perceived immortality, due to the sloughing of skin being seen as a way for snakes to live forever; their underworldly origins, as they lived within burrows and crags leading ancient Greeks and Romans to believe they journeyed to and lived in the underworld; and their lives being focused on earth rather than on Mount Olympus or in Hades. They were consequently believed to be an enigmatic creature that, though immortal and capable of travel between realms, largely lived and interacted with mankind. This travel between worlds can also be implied in their use as a symbol of Hermes, the

caduceus. These ideas create multiple influential implications. Serpents are earthly beings beyond simple mortality, giving them a status as demideities, which places them in the theomachical world where good and evil are constantly in battle. They hail from the land of the dead and rely on stealth and darkness, which establishes their nature as naturally cunning and venomous, and thus can be easily construed as evil. However, serpents also possess another important attribute of that same deadly venom: “Venom of snakes was panacea” (Antoniou, et al. 3-4). This explains the Rod of Asclepius, the symbol of the medical field often confused in North America with the caduceus, and its association with the medical institution. They protect life and can thus be seen as naturally good. They connect the duality of good and evil perceived in many cultures, making them inherently and perpetually fascinating. Their venom, however, only scratches the surface. Though it clearly demonstrates why serpents have become so innately contradictory, the ensuing duality that erupts from serpent symbology quickly becomes unwieldy; there is no way to demonstrate their symbolic entirety without creating an encyclopedic listing of every appearance and meaning, but there are many crucial narratives in Ovid’s anthological *Metamorphoses* and in the Bible that aptly present these scaled wonders.

Authors throughout the Mediterranean understood this ambiguity and incorporated multiple meanings in their works; they sometimes presented many meanings within the same stories. Greek culture was enamored with snakes themselves and had already reflected their converging and diverging meanings—depending on their context—through the medium of language. The Greeks had approximately forty-one words for snakes, distinguishing different species as well as distinguishing monsters and dragons; an expert on serpent symbology posits, “Words are symbols and the words for serpent present a world of symbology, especially for biblical scholars” (Charlesworth 499, 515). Firstly, Ovid presents the great story of Cadmus to markedly illustrate the serpent’s Greco-Roman diversity. Cadmus in his journey to found the city of Thebes

encounters a basilisk of Greek proportion, a horrendously giant serpent capable of felling trees by simply moving about the forest, ripping spears deeply lodged into its near indestructible scales, and emitting a scorching breath like the “black blast that stinks from holes of Hell” (3.63-97). Cadmus luckily hurls a spear that impales the beast into a tree, but this creature is respected and feared by the gods themselves, and immediately they grow indignant of Cadmus’ treatment of such a holy being. It is seen in their response that serpents command respect from the divine, and it is later seen that they rival gods in strength, as is seen in Apollo’s battle with Python (1.57-60). After the battle, Pallas even descends upon Cadmus and commands him to sow the serpent’s teeth, which births a virile race of armed warriors (3.98-130). Pallas’ instructions and the birth of the soldiers, juxtaposed with the grotesque creature’s description, begins to develop the complexity of the narrative of Cadmus. Despite his obedience to Pallas, as is customary in many Greco-Roman tales, many gods begin to torture Cadmus and destroy his life. A Fury slaughters his children and grandchildren with vipers, Cadmus exiles himself from the city he founded himself, and eventually sorrow envelops him and he accepts his fate: the curse of becoming the very thing he slew (4.482-616). His legs join together, scales wrap around his body, his tongue splits in two, his arms wither away, he falls to his stomach, and he swears to peacefully live alongside humankind. His wife joins him in this fate. And so, Cadmus becomes a tragic hero solely because he slew the serpent, but he ennobles the creature in the process. The gods, still indebted to him and wishing to still bestow a reward upon the founder of Thebes, punish him by transforming him into the very thing they respect. He becomes a being that is immortal just as the gods are, and one that peacefully lives alongside humanity, as opposed to the hellish beast he killed.

Ovid’s portrayal of the multifaceted nature of the serpent doesn’t end with Cadmus. For example, the tale of Tiresias depicts an interestingly divergent image of the serpent. “Tiresias” chronicles the short account of the argument between Juno and Jupiter

that drives them to question the wiseman Tiresias. Their argument humorously surrounds the gendered question of pleasure during sex (3.324-42). Who enjoys sex more? Is it the man or the woman? And the reason they consult Tiresias does not rest on his wisdom, but rather a punishment he received years prior. While walking through a forest, Tiresias had stumbled upon two snakes in the throes of entangled coitus. Either in a panic or out of disgust, Tiresias struck the fornicating little reptiles. Juno, out of anger, transformed him into a woman for seven years. The accounts differ—and Ovid doesn't include it—but seven years later, the womanly Tiresias had stumbled upon two snakes once again in passionate entanglement and left them be. Juno, as a reward, had transformed him back into a man. Now having experienced sexuality as both a man and woman, Tiresias receives the of the god and goddess: which state was more pleasurable? Tiresias easily answers that women enjoy sex much more than men. After disagreeing with her, Juno punishes Tiresias once again by blinding him, but Jupiter, as a reward for taking his side, consoles Tiresias with the gift of prophecy. Importantly, the serpent again commands respect from the gods, as Hera leaps to their aid, and the influence of even regular snakes simply fornicating in the forest holds up to the draconic beasts in Cadmus' story. Additionally, the serpent represents another central dichotomy. The sexual duality of the phallus and the yoni, the man and the woman. Greco-Roman culture used the ouroboros—the serpent biting its own tail—commonly and not simply to represent eternal life, but to also represent the sexual elements of eternity and existence. The tail of the snake represents the phallus, while the mouth of the snake symbolizes the yoni. Accordingly, it does not seem random that Hera essentially castrated Tiresias by transforming him into a woman after he struck the snakes. Also, as brought up earlier, Apollo's battle with Python lends itself freely to diverse interpretation, and an important element is the sexual nature of the battle between a god and a serpent. Delphi, the Greek center of the world, was the home of Python and where, after Apollo's victory, a great

temple was built to house the Oracle at Delphi. The phallic and chthonic snake was slain and cast underground and out of Delphi, and in its absence creation began in an intense sexual encounter where the phallus resides in a fertile or chaotic space, and once removed something begins to develop, much like the womb. The fumes of Python's rotting corpse also connect the Oracle directly to Apollo giving her intense visions. Furthermore, Delphi originates etymologically from the Greek word *delphys*, literally meaning "womb."

Moreover, "snakes had long been associated with the cult at Delphi. It was here that Apollo had defeated the primordial serpent . . . Python in an encounter that was seen as a struggle of order against chaos" (Strootman 436). While the sexual aspect of the theomachy between a god and a serpent is important, the theomachy itself is nearly ubiquitous in cultural explanations of creation. It usually involves a chaotic or uncontrolled space that a divine entity could exert influence over, and the concept of *Chaoskampf*, literally German for the "struggle against chaos" and denoting the battle between good and evil, usually involves a heavenly thunder god battling a chthonic or undersea serpent (Kitts 89). This widespread story of creation displays the dual idea of good challenging evil across the many regions of the Mediterranean, and Margo Kitts also states, "Now, indisputable cross-Mediterranean patterns of material exchange have been established for the late Bronze through Classical ages, and there is no question that Hesiod was influenced by Near Eastern myths" (87). The Near East and Greece were known to be linked mythologically and culturally, and developed simultaneously through many ages. Both the Near East and Greco-Roman myths remain similar in their reliance on narratives of transformation that depict an evil or chaotic place morphing into a realm of potential and creation.

Thus, transformation becomes a means for creation and transformation is creation in its own right, where something else is destroyed to become something new. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* frames

the story of Greece and the rising of Rome around the transformations throughout mythical history, and serpents are aptly characterized as transformative creatures. The belief that they are a tether between dual ideals also emphasizes the dual worlds of Greece, which was sloughed off as an old skin, and the new, complex Rome, which is strong and, like the serpent, a center for all human experiences and a bridge between the earthly and the divine. This epic anthology defines Rome and how its people view the noble history of their Greek spiritual ancestor. As one author discussing Chaoskampf, puts it, “The idea of a struggle between good and evil is common to all peoples who have attained to any moral consciousness. For a non-philosophical people the abstract is too difficult to apprehend, and all things are personified. Evil has thus always taken a definite form, preferably that of a serpent” (Murison 127). Through serpents, Ovid especially highlights the way the Romans would have viewed the world around them as clearly divided into death and life, man and woman, good and evil, Rome and Greece.

Crossing the Mediterranean Sea into the Near East, serpents later in time had a fundamental impact. For example, the Bible parallels Greco-Roman myth continuously. As the connection between God and the serpent is enhanced, the concept of Chaoskampf is clearly demonstrated throughout all of Revelation, and the prevalence of serpent sexuality remains. In Numbers 21.4-9, the biblical God unleashes a swarm of “fiery, flying serpents” upon the disobedient Israelites (*New American Bible [Rev. Ed.]*). The bites are extremely deadly, and the swarm destroys all in its path; this tale seems to reaffirm the usual negative connotation of serpents in Judeo-Christian mythos. However, God commands Moses in the only possible way to curb the swarm and cure the adders’ bites. Through an act of obedience and Godly mercy, Moses is given the task to raise a Brazen Serpent upon a wooden pole, usually depicted as a cross. The “Nehushtan” was the derogatory name given to the Brazen Serpent that Moses erected over the land (2 Kings 18.4). By foreshadowing the crucifixion with a serpent, the Bible ennoble the

serpent by having it suffer hatred and disrespect while on Earth but affording it a divine respect as a redeemer of humanity. And the rarely quoted lines of John 3:14-16 undeniably bestow such an honor upon this symbolic being:

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

Christ even invoked the serpent to His Apostles and sent them out into the world saying, “Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves” (Matthew 10:16). “Shrewd” was used to refer to wisdom and cunning, while “simple” referred to gentleness and kindness. Yet these depictions of the Brazen Serpent and the serpent’s exemplary shrewdness aren’t the most influential or infamous accounts of serpents in the biblical narrative. The temptation by the serpent in the Garden of Eden remains a notoriously defining moment for the perception of snakes in Christian lore, as later in time the concept of the devil was projected onto the serpent in the Garden, mainly coming from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, making it seem malevolent (Antoniou et al. 3). Their association with cunning suddenly came to be seen as evil, and the identifying nature of the serpent was that of a devilish tempter that brought about the Fall of Man. Though there is considerable disagreement between biblical scholars about the actual implications of the serpent in the Garden,

Some critics find in the story of the fall two strata. In one the serpent is not evil but wise, and the initiator of mankind into knowledge, while in the other and later he becomes a tempter. As has been seen, the serpent was regarded by the Semites, as well as by other peoples as being the wisest of animals. (Murison 128)

In Genesis, the wickedness of the serpent is not expressly declared, while its superior wisdom is emphasized. It does not even lie to Eve. Rather, the serpent tells her the truth—though, granted, not the whole truth—and fulfills the creation story by leading people to the fruit that wouldn't kill them, but would bring knowledge that would give them freedom and a prophecy which would one day bring God to redeem humanity and give it eternal life in Heaven. It brings humanity knowledge and creates the reason God Himself must later come into the world. Perhaps the projection of Satan onto the serpent was a near-negligent case of giving the serpent an absolute meaning as evil, while it was also playing a crucial part in the development of humankind. If anything has been discovered, ancient writers in the Mediterranean rarely confined the serpent to a single definition in their stories, which make the allegories much more interesting than they might have been without such a complex creature.

In addition, the sexuality associated with the serpent importantly intermingles with biblical analysis just as it had with Greco-Roman mythos, and this analysis continues into the concept of Chaoskampf, once again demonstrating the collective culture of viewing the world in a dualistic manner: good and evil, man and woman, birth and death, etc. Just as Apollo and Tiresias experienced the sexually subconscious nature of serpents, the serpent in the Garden of Eden interacts with the Judeo-Christian God in such a manner. A phallic being penetrates a confined, comforting, fertile space, and after manipulating the woman to eat fruit—fruit being a sexual symbol throughout cultures—the woman is cast out of the Garden. The naïve first humans are then birthed out from the Garden and forced into the outside world, experiencing a kind of birth trauma from such a fall from grace. Ross G. Murison acknowledges that some scholars even believe the first sin to not have been disobedience but believe it might have been carnal: “Because the curse pronounced upon the woman is to be realized in child-bearing, it has frequently been held that the serpent represents the lusts of the

flesh, and the first sin was of this class” (129). The allegorical nature of the narrative seems to conflict with this analysis. Regardless, there is interestingly proto-Freudian evidence that sexuality was used to explain cosmic creation in an allegorical manner. This passage from the final book of the Bible explicitly reveals the importance of a woman’s sexuality and her grotesque relationship to a blasphemous dragon:

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days. Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it. (Revelation 12:1-9)

But this sexual conflict is simply an element of the framing narrative of theomachy. Though it is “subtle,” as Kitts describes it, in Genesis, the Chaoskampf and the theomachy demonstrate themselves clearly through Revelation. As described earlier, Chaoskampf involves a thunder god and a sea serpent battling for control of the impressionable chaos, and Kitts enumerates two essential elements in this cosmic clash:

Its most striking feature is violence. However subtle in Genesis, the Near Eastern Chaoskampf extols a violent force which suppresses a cosmic threat. . . . A second feature is complex, aqueous foes, personified sometimes as rebellious waters, but often as sea monsters. Monsters range from the Akkadian... to the West Semitic Lotan, Litany, or Leviathan. (89)

The bizarre and celestial grandeur that Kitts describes can be seen in the chimeric beasts seen in Revelation, like the crowned hydra that waits to eat the child and then battles with Heaven, and “the Beast of the Sea” accomplishes her second crucial detail of Chaoskampf: “Then I saw a beast come out of the sea with ten horns and seven heads; on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads blasphemous name[s]” (Revelation 13.1). These beasts are usually directly associated with the devil and even explicitly stated to be Satan in certain cases, but these creatures are directly battling with Heaven itself. Their destiny is to be defeated and for Heaven to conquer the entirety of everything. Conversely, the serpent in the Garden acts on a much smaller scale. There is not an explicit theomachy occurring in the Garden. The stakes of good and evil are not as neatly defined in Eden as they are in Revelation. The serpent that tempted Eve can’t be definitively defined as purely evil, and, I think, leans more into the usual serpentine ambiguity of the Mediterranean.

Overall, the diverse symbology of the serpent reveals the philosophy of the ancient world, especially the Mediterranean Greco-Roman and Near Eastern cultures, and how duality informed most people’s understanding of the world. The idea of everything being complex or relative is a fairly modern notion, as most ancient cultures viewed the world in terms of black and white. They saw man and woman. They saw life and death. They saw good and evil. And the reason the serpent captivated them so magnificently revolves around its naturally enigmatic properties and behaviors. It subverted and fulfilled their dualistic ideals and bridged them, which presented something that diverged from their hierarchical way of

thinking. It allowed for humanity to believe that their mortal world was linked to the divine, and presented the world and history as a transformative experience where empires rise and fall, beliefs merge and diverge, and good and evil cannot always be easily separated. The serpent was an avenue for evolving complex thought and symbolic experimentation, and through the serpent's perpetual importance throughout the world into the modern era, the slithering anomaly has very well proven the immortality it has always been known to have. ►►

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The Peculiarities and Paradoxes of Soviet Consumer Technology, and American Influences

LOGAN NITZEL

In this thoroughgoing account of Soviet consumer technologies like automobiles, televisions, toasters, electric guitars, and radios, Logan Nitzel explores the fascinating and often unexpected influence of Western consumerism on culture and industry within the USSR, stressing the enduring collision of communist ideology with private comfort and entertainment. This essay was written for History Seminar with Dr. James Finck.

DURING THE COLD WAR, the levels of technological innovation rose to heights never seen before in human history. The driving force behind these leaps and bounds into the limits of possibility was, in part, the animosity and fear bred between the NATO Coalition and the Warsaw Pact. During these times, the products available to the ordinary people of both nations rose to the heights of *Sputnik* and *Saturn* in terms of both variety and abundance. In the West, mass-production of nearly every conceivable good or commodity was in full swing following the Second World War. In the East, though, the perceived necessity to produce non-essential, and non-military goods was much lower, and at

points in the history of the Soviets was almost nonexistent. Indeed, Soviet technological advancement in terms of arms and armor was often on par with America and its allies, but its citizens suffered through low-grade technology that was often so obsolete as to be, in the best cases, useless, and in the worst cases, dangerous. While the Soviet Union innovated independently through novel avenues of research, America's influence fundamentally changed the production of Soviet home goods because their products were often identical, they often reverse-engineered our products, and their technology stagnated when their access to Western and American goods diminished or ceased. And so it was that, while proxy wars were being waged in the tense periphery of global tension, another battle was being fought in the hearths and homes of ordinary people: the fight for dominance in the consumer sector.

Whereas the post-war United States still lived under the promise of a “chicken in every pot, and a car in every driveway,” Soviet citizens were content with having a house and a pot to cook the chicken in; never mind the dream of being able to secure themselves one of a handful of highly sought-after automobiles produced by factories in the USSR. Cars, along with a myriad of other consumer products, were often in short supply. Indeed, it was sometimes the case that products were in such an abysmal shortage as to be unheard of by many Soviet *potrebiteli*, or consumers. It was not until very late in the lifetime of the Soviet Union that the American system of “abundance economy” was realized to be advantageous, as is depicted in their own writing. It was American pressure or influence that often drove Soviet innovation in home and consumer technologies. America had long been seen as the impediment to Soviet global economic and political domination, but frequently it was the United States who forced the Soviets to adapt, to stray further and further from their roots in controlled market economies and embrace systems of capitalism to increase the quality of life for their citizens. Examples of American technologies were purchased on the

market or imported for purposes of reverse-engineering for manufacture in the Soviet Union or its satellites. In many cases, too, Soviet agents would gain access to cutting-edge American technologies by more sinister means, a trend that had been in place since 1944, with the capture of a stricken American B-29 that had crash-landed in Siberia.¹

CARS AND CULTURE

DURING THE 1950s, nearly a decade after the first case of Soviet replication of American heavy machinery, the Soviet Union found itself in the peculiar situation of needing private, personal consumer transportation. As the Soviet Union had become less and less agricultural and more industrial, its citizens had begun to find themselves walking long distances to areas of cities and countryside not serviced by bus routes. Alternatively, they were required to operate under transportation deadlines incompatible with public transport schedules. The natural solution was to manufacture automobiles. Trucks and tractors were already a facet of the Soviet production arsenal, so cars should have been a simple matter of design and retooling. However, as stated by Dr. Lewis Siegelbaum, a Soviet automotive historian at Michigan State University, cars were considered items of “capitalistic” function: “It is a machine, by design, for private, personal business.”²

Their lack of alternative uses was also an issue. Trucks could carry large numbers of people and move freight. Cars, conversely, could only carry a small handful of people. (Towing was by and large unsustainable with small Soviet powerplants.) The function of trucks, ergo, was wholesomely communistic; the same truck could

¹ Yefim Gordon and Vladimir Rigmant, *Tupolev Tu-4: Soviet Superfortress* (Hinckley, Leicestershire: Midland Counties, 2002), 8-10.

² Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 19.

carry workers, tow farm equipment, transport troops, and be converted into any number of niche specializations, from repair truck to field hospital. Cars, on the other hand, could carry a businessman across town or his family with their luggage. Business and recreation were two seldom-calculated motivations for industrial production in the USSR.³

Cars, before the Second World War in the Soviet Union, were considered remnants of the aristocracy: machines that served as large, expensive playthings, unfit for the proletariat of the many. Following the First World War, trucks were the focus of any automobile production going on in the fledgling Soviet factories. Trucks were useful; they were thought to “bring in the harvest, spread the word, and [transport officials].” Production of non-utility vehicles did not cease after the October Revolution, however. Instead, cars were “gutted,” any apparition of luxury being discarded in favor of cost and production efficiency. The resulting products were merely shells with internal engines (throwaways that couldn’t handle the pressure requirements necessary for freight trucks). Cars were “marketed” as a tool of defense. Combines and tractors, it was known, were useful implements of production, being the weapons of choice for hard farm work. A nation of literate automobile drivers, though, was a population that could be trained easily to understand the complexities of driving tanks, armored cars, and military trucks. And so, car production went on. The elite could secure automobiles under the guise of training themselves and their friends on the technicalities and nuances of automobile control. Several auto clubs, including those administered by *Spartakiad*, the USSR’s sports authority, were formed around Moscow to cater to these drivers and structure education in four-wheeled travel.⁴

It was not until after the cessation of hostilities at the end of the Second World War that sedans and coupes shared production lines

³ Ibid., 19-21.

⁴ Ibid., 210-211.

with half-ton trucks. American Lend-Lease equipment, including both improved Studebaker “Deuce-and-a-Half” trucks, which became much more sought-after than the ZIS-5 trucks, and Willys “Jeep” and “Beep” designs, were deconstructed and eventually reimagined as the GAZ-67, Russia’s “homebrewed jeep.” Guzzling gas at almost a gallon a mile and unreliable to the extent of being dangerous, these vehicles prompted many Soviet units to refuse resupply with anything but American Jeeps from Detroit.⁵

In the 1950s Soviet cars were seen, finally, as a necessary tool for continued economic expansion. Very different from the American “boats”, the overly large, fourteen-foot-long Cadillacs and Pontiacs that clogged U.S. interstate highways, Soviet post-war sedans were spartan in nature, taking functionality over form, though testimony by those lucky enough to drive them show a concise picture as to the lack of functionality. By far, the single most produced and most influential design was the first fully “Soviet” designed car, the Volga. Whereas the previous models, named the Moletolvet and the Pobeda, were carbon copies of Packard and Ford designs, respectively, Volgas were the amalgamation and synthesis of everything learned by state automobile engineers. Unhindered by brand models, concepts, and legal patents, the technicians at GAZ, the USSR’s state-owned automotive company, could select features and specifications from any American automobile on the market. The Volga, official numerical nomenclature GAZ-21, was produced well into the 21st century, with the last Volga rolling off the assembly lines in 2009.⁶

Parts for repair were often nonexistent during most of the Communist era of Russian history. Parts to build the automobiles outright were used almost as quickly as they could be produced, so parts for maintenance of already-constructed cars were practically a pipedream for many broke-down Soviet motorists. Even if a part

⁵ Ibid., 26, 61.

⁶ Ibid., 62-77.

could be procured from a factory or one of several “dealership”-style buildings found across the country, many Soviet citizens were not well-versed in automobile repair, so depositing the broken automobile with an auto mechanic was often necessary. These individuals, specializing in car, truck, and tractor repair, were themselves in short supply across the country. Self-maintenance, though, was sometimes discouraged to maintain the relevance and necessity of mechanics. The right to a job was, naturally, a highly communistic principle, and denying a fellow member of the proletariat the right to commit to his craft was frowned upon.⁷

This fixation, though, on acquiring and obtaining replacement parts led to the rise of what could be termed “street mafias.” Bands of children, teenagers, and sometimes adults, roamed the streets of major cities, looking for parked cars, and looting items such as tires (spare or otherwise), bumpers, rearview mirror, side mirrors, radio antennae, radios, and even glass windshields: anything and everything that could make a profit at any of the semi-sanctioned “grey markets” or outlawed “black market” locales.⁸

This level of criminal activity does raise the question, why didn't Soviet citizens guard more closely their precious automobiles? Officially, crime was a non-issue to the average citizen. Education and proper attendance at the Workers Party meetings would veritably eradicate criminal tendencies. However, the reality often was that, while Moscow and Leningrad police could often be brutal, they cared little for the apprehension of petty thieves. Soviet citizens were forced to drive their cars to the edges of cities, the only places where parking garages could be found. The wait to be assigned a parking garage slot was almost as long as actually acquiring the car, and the process could not be initiated until after the assignment of the automobile to the individual, or submit their car to being parked on the side of the road. The post-war housing boom in the United

⁷ Ibid., 245-247.

⁸ Ibid., 247-251.

States had no analogous phenomenon in the Soviet Union, and the concept of suburbs did not exist, so the universal ownership of driveways was unheard of. Therefore, parked cars on the sides of streets were at the mercy of the whims of passersby's proclivities. Often, individuals would proactively take everything off that could be potentially stolen and hide them away in back rooms of homes until the car was needed. And so, due to hardships suffered via simple maintenance and the constant chore of keeping the automobile safe and in one piece, Soviet citizens would scrimp and save to bribe their way into ownership of a state-manufactured automobile, only to utilize a handful of times a year. More days than not it would sit, idle and stagnant.⁹

Cars were merely the first of many industries that compelled the Soviets compromise their beliefs, after both influences by the West and necessity dictated a change in ideology. Dozens of such industries, mainly electronic, were founded completely from scratch to satiate the growing demands of Soviet consumers.

TELEVISIONS

TELEVISION BECAME A cultural phenomenon, much like automobiles. The ownership of a television receiver set, and the production of entertainment programs, became a phenomenon of Soviet culture. But, unlike cars, Soviet television as an extant product and form of art came into its zenith at almost the same point that American television reached its own, as the influences of production and screenwriting were rapidly integrated into Soviet practices. American "Westerns" and Soviet "Easterns" (taking place in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, for example) aired on their respective airwaves, a remarkable turn of events, considering the cultural blockade that existed between the two nations and the governments' unwillingness to disclose source material used in the creation of its own cinema.

⁹ Ibid., 251.

The true difference in television broadcasting between the Soviets and Americans, though, lay with the receiving sets of the ordinary people. Soviet production of televisions moved out of prototypical stages following World War II, beginning in earnest in 1949, with the creation of the KVN-49, an analogous invention to the earlier RCA-1, of which nearly three million were manufactured until 1960. The vacuum tubes used to power these televisions were Soviet-produced models, based on radio tubes scavenged post-war from American Lend-Lease radio sets. The Soviet tubes, at the time, were inferiorly manufactured and not suitable for portable long-range radio sets. However, following the war, the Soviets did not see fit to spend resources on constructing and refining their own vacuum tube design. Instead, they opted to simply reverse-engineer and copy American radio tubes, incorporating them into the design elements of the television.¹⁰

The American tubes, though superior to their Soviet-made models, were too weak to handle the strain of producing moving images while simultaneously powering the audio receiver. That fact, coupled with the proclivity for power surges in major cities such as Moscow and Leningrad, made owning a KVN-49 dangerous. This was because, under conditions of prolonged usage (roughly eight hours), the television set had the unfortunate tendency to explode catastrophically. Besides, many Soviet consumers scrounged the floor models and requested private access to the backrooms of the often rare Soviet “department stores” to find television sets that had manufacture dates corresponding to the first half of a month. These sets, built early in any given month, were of higher quality than those which came later in the month. The reason was that, as the month ended, many factories found themselves behind on their quotas. The corresponding surge of production assured these newly produced

¹⁰ Kristin Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home Television Set in the Soviet Union, 1950-1970.” *Slavic Review*. 66, no. 2 (2007): 278-305.

TVs were of inferior, rushed quality, leading to even further complications and making them even more dangerous during operation. An estimated five thousand fires were caused due to defective sets, with an unknown number of casualties.¹¹

America's television technology soon surpassed the outer limits of what the Soviet Union's was capable of. Color sets appeared in the Soviet Union as early as 1965, but were far from affordable for the average citizen, at an average of nearly 200 rubles versus the 120-ruble price a black and white television commanded. (The average Soviet worker made 700 rubles yearly.) Instead, a novel concept was invented. Colored plastic lenses were set in front of the television, to mirror semi-chromatic television broadcasts. This mimicry, though, was less than ideal. The size of screens, too, was abysmal, with the KVN-49's spanning only about five and a half inches in length. To compensate, a glass dish was set in front of the screen like a magnifying glass. This hollow lens then acted as a reservoir for water, effectively creating a refracting projector to simulate a much larger screen.¹²

TOASTERS AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD GOODS

TOASTERS, LIKE THOSE seen in many American households, were nearly unknown to the Greater Soviet Union. They were only manufactured at one, single remote and solitary factory in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. They were produced at the *I.V. Lenin* factory, near Beltsy, one of the largest cities in the whole of the Moldavian SSR, with a population of about fifty thousand throughout much of the 20th Century. Here, toasters enjoyed some recognition. But, despite its specialization to the one, singular product, the factory produced only ten thousand individual toasters every year. This

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² David Grossman, "The Soviets Used Magnifying Glasses to Watch TV." *Popular Mechanics*, June 19, 2019, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.popularmechanics.com/science/a28102367/soviet-television-magnifying-glass/>.

atrocious production rate, coupled with the massive number of Soviet citizens, insured that demand for toasters was never more than what could be produced for the locals by the single factory.¹³

Much like the toasters, other seemingly benign products, such as refrigerators and washing machines, were in short supply, and often were simply nonentities in the Soviet consumer warehouses. As late as the 1980s, Soviet economic planners began to realize the value of time-saving consumer products. Time and resources were valuable assets to the Soviets, and streamlining the everyday lives of its citizens to preserve those resources was an activity of paramount importance to the Economic Council. In the 1920s, Stalin had instituted “plans” of varying length and breadth. The most pivotal of these was the “Five-Year Plans,” followed then by the “Twenty-Year Plans.” In the first “Five-Year Plan” of the 1980s, the Economic Council realized the necessity and possible utilization of home appliances for Soviet citizens. It was estimated in their own report that seven hundred man-hours could be saved per family of four by having within their home a full complement of home utilities and appliances.

Consumer goods were also a point of chafing between the Soviet Union and the various “autonomous” Soviet Socialist Republics under its control. This was visible as, in the 1980s, the government began attempts to streamline the geographic manufacture of simple consumer goods by taking a large portion of control over state-run businesses. The “Five-Year plan” used the example of how, in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine, plastic clothespins were manufactured in factories (termed “enterprises”) in every single *oblast*, or district/state making up the Ukraine SSR, and these enterprises were run by at least ten departments and ministries, even though the demand for plastic clothespins in the entirety of Ukraine did not

¹³ Steven R. Reed, “The Great Soviet Toaster Mystery,” *United Press International*, November 20, 1982, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/11/20/The-great-Soviet-toaster-mystery/5966406616400/>.

exceed what could be manufactured by a single, dedicated clothes-pin factory. This is merely a cross-section of the level of bureaucratic morass encountered during the construction of basic kitchen and laundry appliances.¹⁴

ELECTRIC GUITARS

ELECTRIC GUITARS, BEING a purely American invention, were slow to proliferate in the USSR. So limited was the knowledge of them that, upon the USSR's decision to begin production of the instruments, no knowledgeable technicians could be found in any enterprise in the entirety of the nation who was versed in the construction of electric guitars. And so, in 1965, the USSR practically reinvented the electric guitar from scratch. The Ural and Formosa models, the two most expensive and sought-after models, were themselves copies of the Danelectro '58 and the Gretsch DuoJet, respectively, but the only reference materials on hand were catalogs from West Germany, and photographs of the instruments in the hands of famous American musicians.

Soviet technicians' hand-planed the first examples out of Siberian spruce and experimented with wiring plans and harnesses, creating, as they did so, novel effects built directly into the control modules of the guitars. Soviet instruments were listed at 130 rubles, whereas American instruments often commanded prices up to 2,000 *rubles* (roughly \$1,900) in 1985, the equivalent of nearly \$5,000 in today's economy. Most Soviet citizens made roughly 700 rubles a year, which testifies to the reverence paid to smuggled American instruments.¹⁵

¹⁴ I. Rakhlin, I, "New Technology and Personal Consumption (the Socioeconomic Aspect)," *Problems in Economics* 25, no. 3 (1982): 21-38.

¹⁵ Terry Bright, "Soviet Crusade against Pop," *Popular Music* 5 (1985): 123-48.

RADIO

POSTWAR RADIOS IN the Soviet were, truly, no different than those manufactured in the United States. As in televisions, post-war copycats of American vacuum tubes were used, but unlike their utilization in the television sets, their propensity for exploding was much reduced when installed in radios.

What truly set the Soviet citizen's radio experience apart from that of a Western individual was the total lack of non-Soviet, non-governmental programming. Whereas, throughout Western Europe, the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and the Voice of America could be heard by tuning the dial to the appropriate frequency, these signals were unavailable in the Soviet Union. The reason for this was the radio phenomenon known commonly as "the Russian Woodpecker." The Woodpecker System, developed by Soviets to block incoming radio signals from being dispersed across the border, effectively acted as a literal "wall of sound." It accomplished this by directing sonic beams in a controlled, directional pattern skyward across the entirety of the known radio frequency spectrum, thus distorting and destroying any radio signals caught in its path.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

SOVIET CONSUMER technology, from automobiles to the automatic washing machine, was, plainly put, often mimicry of analogous American products. Any individual who happens across an extant specimen of Soviet manufacture, on their first impression, will notice it is not of quality. Though for many the nostalgia of yesteryear plays a certain part, it can be roughly generalized that American products of similar vintage are often of higher quality construction.

¹⁶ Wilson, David L. "The "Russian Woodpecker . . . A Closer Look." *Monitoring Times*, Summer 1985, accessed October 9, 2020, <http://www.mysterysignals.signalshed.com/Wpecker5.html>.

The other fact to be noted is that, looking at simple, bare production numbers, Soviet goods did not have quantity on their side, either. Even granting the fact that the Soviets had, for the majority of their history, no free market production, and therefore no overproduction or saturation of goods in the marketplace, many Soviet products were chronically, and to many a Soviet citizen comically, in short supply. It is often joked in modern economic circles that one can tell how a nation-state is faring societally and economically by looking at the number of toasters the nation's factories produce. Toasters, being a pure creature comfort (it is not necessary for food preparation or to maintain a standard of living), are a decent analog for prosperity. If that is the case, the Soviets ran about 10,000 a year, for distribution to a population that hovered well over 100 million individuals for the majority of its 69 years of existence, essentially equating to roughly one toaster for every 10,000 Soviets. And one exploded television for every 20,000 comrades.¹⁷

Ideologically, militarily, and in many cases scientifically, the Soviet Union and the United States can be said to have been rivals, two great symbols of the polarizing power of human ambition and stubbornness, but in one way, a crucial way, the Soviet Union was a distant second: the basic ability to provide for its citizens what they could not make themselves. Communism, regrettably, cannot be eaten nor wrapped around oneself for warmth, but it can organize perhaps the greatest disparity ever seen between military might and resource wealth and the greatest absolute disregard for the material comfort and security of citizens in the history of mankind.

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JERNIGAN
AWARD WINNER



America Will Persevere!

ERIN MCCASLIN

Each year, the Betty Baker Jernigan Endowed Scholarship Fund offers a \$1000 award to the winner of an essay contest open to qualifying continuing and incoming USAO students. The contest asks students to write 300-500 words addressing the question, “How is America doing – politically, socially, economically?” *The Drover Review* also offers to publish winning submissions.

The winner of the 2021 Jernigan Award is Erin McCaslin, who argues that the current era of polarization and crisis has also yielded a quintessentially American resurgence of activism, innovation, and community—evidence that the nation can weather the storm.

America has long been held as a “city upon the hill,” a nation to which other countries look. We lead the world with top economies, strong military forces, and a powerful government. However, many people argue that our time as “a beacon of hope” is over. Political polarization, the COVID pandemic, and sometimes violent social movements have caused many Americans to lose faith in the United States. However, in spite of these events, I feel America is strong and will persevere.

Political polarization can be seen everywhere: the news, social media, and especially in our homes and places of work. Although disagreements about our presidents and the political parties have divided some, such debate does have a positive side. People are talking about the issues and they want their voices heard. They are having discussions about important matters like healthcare, the economy, climate change, race, the Supreme Court, and so much more. No more apathy: people are voting in record-breaking numbers.

The COVID pandemic is another challenge our country is facing. Over 500,000 people have died; unemployment is at its highest; and people are forced to isolate themselves from their loved ones. But even amid a pandemic, Americans have stepped up. Science and technology have become essential to our physical and mental health. Researchers are working tirelessly trying to find a cure and vaccine for the virus. We've discovered new ways to communicate using Zoom, Google Meets, and FB Portal. High school and college students are taking courses online. The USDA Farmers to Family program is helping put food on the table of all Americans. Everyone is working together to make the best of a desperate situation.

The last few years have also been marked by social movements such as Black Lives Matter and the Me Too Movement. Although I don't agree with the violence of the riots, I understand the message they are trying to send: "We want our voices heard." People are standing up for what they believe in. They are uniting with others to make a difference. That is what our country was built on.

"How is America doing?" you ask. America is doing exactly how it's always done; it perseveres. Whether we're facing political differences, the pandemic, or social movements, the American people will meet the challenges head on and look for ways to make things better. That is America. It's who we are. ► ►