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Medieval Poem versus 21st Century Film: Why Choose One When You Can Have Both?

Melissa Crofton

It's a movie that takes pleasure in confusing its audience a bit, if only to mimic the perpetual confusion faced by its protagonist, Gawain, played by Dev Patel.

- Selome Hailu

Giants, and speaking foxes, and...Saint Winifred? Oh my! Yes, these are only a few creatures and characters that can be found in David Lowery's *The Green Knight*, a 2021 film adaptation loosely based on the fourteenth-century medieval poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain has been a favorite hero in Arthurian myth, especially when it comes to his legendary accomplishments and faults, and no matter how much readers may root for him in his quest with the Green Knight, audiences have wondered how the story could have turned out differently for nearly seven hundred years. All of that, however, changed with the release of *The Green Knight*. Although the basic premise is upheld in the film—the Green Knight challenges King Arthur's men to a game, and Gawain accepts the challenge, whereby he is obligated to meet the Green Knight for a return blow a year later—David Lowery takes great delight in deviating from the original material in a variety of different ways. In doing so, Lowery has forever altered the way both scholars and novices can approach the medieval poem and its modernized adaptation. This special cluster of essays explores some of the most powerful changes Lowery makes in *The Green Knight*, and the six authors explain what we can learn about the importance—or dangers—of retelling popular stories in new and inventive ways.

This collection is not to disparage previous adaptations that fall under the category of Cinema Arthuriana, but the reality is that films

from the past have failed to live up to expectations in many ways. As Kevin Harty explains,

> Lowery's is the fourth film to attempt to grapple with the anonymous poem. Those by Stephen Weeks—*Gawain and the Green Knight* (1973) and *Sword of the Valiant* (1983)—fail even to come close to capturing the spirit of their source on screen. The second film is especially disappointing and leaves us with little more than a botched attempt by the director to conflate the plots of Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century Old French romance *Le Chevalier au lion* and his putative English source. Slightly better is the Thames Television 1991 adaptation. (31)

Our task, then, is to consider how successful Lowery is with his endeavor. As a filmmaker best known for *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, *A Ghost Story*, *The Old Man & the Gun*, a remake of *Pete's Dragon,* and *Peter Pan and Wendy*—currently streaming on *Disney Plus*—Lowery willingly admits how drastically altered his version of the tale is*:* "We were never going to make a strictly medieval history film. There is no historical accuracy to the film whatsoever. It is completely a fantasy" (Coggan). The film's original release date was planned for May 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic had other plans. Fortunately, as Lowery explains, "'I just gave myself permission to dig back into the movie, unlock it, and rework the entire thing,' he says. 'I found the affection I needed to cut it with love in my heart instead of disappointment and hate. It's different—it's much better'" (Robinson).

Andrew Wahnsiedler's "'I Will Tell You a New Tale': The Evolving Gawain Myth and Its Political Implications" opens our discussion since it provides an overview of Gawain in film. In his essay, Wahnsiedler notes how folklorists and literary theorists argue that updated versions of a story must retain the constituent elements of the core myth to be considered a successful adaptation. While Lowery's *The Green Knight* adheres to this principal, the alterations he makes—as well as those he does not—raise numerous questions regarding the evolving nature of canonicity. Wahnsiedler recalls Susan Aronstein's argument on how cinematic retellings of Arthurian legends are produced in response to a perceived social crisis, and he considers how Lowery's remake seems to be similarly responding to a perceived cultural crisis. However, *The Green Knight* does not merely reflect Gawain's struggle to navigate broader structural conditions. As Wahnsiedler suggests, this updated film also invites a consideration of the political implications of adaptation.

Rachel Martin's "'A New Tale?': The Welsh in David Lowery's *The Green Knight*" tackles the Welsh material Lowery adds to the film. Nods to the Welsh tradition presumably include talking animals, giants, and the Green Man, although Martin claims these are neither exclusive to, nor even present in, medieval Welsh materials. Lowery's film attempts to present a fresh approach to the medieval poem; however, Martin discusses how the treatment of Arthur, the Green Knight, and the inclusion of Saint Winifred in the film only serve to reproduce regressionary tropes and stereotypes that lie at the heart of the Arthurian tradition in the Anglosphere.

My essay, "'You Are No Knight': David Lowery Rivals a Medieval Poem in *The Green Knight*" details my experience teaching *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in my "British Literature and Culture" class at Florida Tech. Although the poem has been a perennial favorite in the course, students have always wanted more from the poem in terms of the plot development; more importantly, students want to watch the events unfold on the silver screen. When Lowery's film was finally released on DVD in the fall of 2021, I was finally able to grant them their wishes. Students admittedly had difficulty with several elements of *The Green Knight*, which include what they referred to as "overtly artsy filming," the radical transformation of Gawain, and the inclusion of characters who aren't found in the poem. However, their formal writing assignments reveal that many of my undergraduates appreciated Lowery's vision, and many urge me to continue teaching the poem in conjunction with the film.

Student appreciation for the complexity of the poem is also a focus in Kathleen Forni's "Lowery's *The Green Knight*: Honor Reconsidered." Like Wahnsiedler and Crofton, Forni is interested in the way in which the film not only speaks to modern audiences, but especially her own students and their understanding of what constitutes masculine honor. In her essay, Forni pays close attention to the definition of "lewte," "kynde," and "trawthe," ultimately arguing that Lowery's Gawain, played by Dev Patel, recognizes a similar kind of private interiority as the Gawain of the poem. As such, Lowery's adaptation is particularly well-suited for audiences who struggle with these inherently foreign medieval ethical constructs, and Forni is careful to elaborate how Gawain's conflict in the film is relatable to our cultural climate in which young men are often unwilling to enter the conventional expectations of male adulthood, otherwise known as "failure to launch" syndrome.

Wrapping up the cluster of essays are two that consider the expanded role of female characters in the film. Unlike in the poem, where women—excepting Lady Bertilak—occupy the periphery of the nar-

rative, women are the driving force for Gawain's actions in the film. Guinevere, Lady Bertilak, and Morgan le Fay are original to the poem, but Lowery bestows Guinevere with the gift of speech, transforms Morgan le Fay into Gawain's mother, and makes Lady Bertilak even more predatory in nature. Lowery also adds female characters to his script. There's Essel, a brothel-dwelling love interest of Gawain's, Saint Winifred, and a young princess who marries Gawain in the flash-forward montage of how his life will turn out if he conceals the green sash that can save his life from the Green Knight's fatal blow. For Drew Maxwell, more does not necessarily equal better, which she claims in "'Is This Really All There Is?': The Role and Representation of Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and David Lowery's *The Green Knight*." Maxwell argues that while we can applaud Lowery's efforts to include more female characters with speaking parts, we can—and should—at the same time question and critique the ways these female characters are portrayed and used in the film. Maxwell notes that the female characters in the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* have some power and agency on their own terms, but Lowery's modern adaptation takes away the agency that these female characters could have had in the film by portraying them as either fixated on Gawain or in need of his help. Rather than presenting viewers with more empowered women, Maxwell asserts that the female characters in Lowery's film just fill the same sexist roles that we see all the time (mother, queen, virgin, slut), which sheds light on how far we are from addressing and dismantling misogyny and sexism in our own society.

Last, but certainly not least, is Michelle Wolf's "'A Knight Should Know Better:' Sexual Integrity and the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy in Lowery's *The Green Knight*." According to Wolf, the role of women in the film is a rich area for scholarly debate, and she pays close attention to the development of two characters—Lady Bertilak and Saint Winifred. Lowery's addition of Saint Winifred occurs immediately before Gawain appears at the Bertilak home; consequently, this juxtaposition emphasizes Gawain's struggles. Rather than being a journey of personal and professional integrity as evidenced in the medieval poem, Gawain's conflict in the film is one of sexual honor. Borrowing Lowery's description of it being a "complex, erotic love triangle," Wolf declares how the Madonna-Whore dichotomy is imperative to Gawain's sexual integrity and devolution in the film.

David Lowery's *The Green Knight* has been available to viewers for nearly two years, and scholarly conversations are merely in the beginning stages; thankfully, more conference panels are turning their attention to the very intriguing film and what it has to offer to both the

academic community and the average moviegoer. From my own personal experience, the film needs to be viewed many times—I honestly lost count while drafting my call-for-papers, writing my three conference papers dedicated to the topic, and editing this collection of essays for the *South Atlantic Review*. No matter what one thinks of the film, Lowery is mindful that

> his references [in the film] would go deeper than most folks would be able to track on a first watch, but that didn't stop him from maintaining an obsessive writing process that kept him up at night even after *The Green Knight* had begun shooting, debating whether the details in his screenplay were true enough to the fictional 15th century hero and to the new version he was building with Patel. (Hailu)

My fellow co-authors and I enjoyed two lively panels at SAMLA 94, and I'm extremely thankful each one of them were willing to share their thoughts and ideas with me in this special collection. The scholarly community is the perfect forum to debate our responses to the film, and I look forward to many more years, conferences, and articles that David Lowery's *The Green Knight* will inspire. To return to the scene where Gawain questions the Green Knight—"is this really all there is?"—I can only defer to the enigmatic response of the Green Knight—"what else ought there to be?"

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"I Will Tell You a New Tale": The Evolving Gawain Myth and Its Political Implications

Andrew Wahnsiedler

In the summer of 2021, critically acclaimed film studio A24 released *The Green Knight*, written and directed by David Lowery. The film, ostensibly an adaptation of a medieval romance poem, tells the story of young Gawain, who must undertake a harrowing journey in order to receive a lethal attack from a supernatural entity. While the film received a fair amount of critical praise, it was also subjected to critical scrutiny, in that Lowery had deviated substantially from his source material. Audiences unfamiliar with the rich canon of Arthurian legend might have indeed been able to take the film at face value—as an artistic period piece with an underlying message of the audience's own interpretation.[1] However, for those familiar with the original poem from which the film derives, there are a number of additional considerations that must be taken to bear.

It is regrettably common for even the most serious of analyses of adaptations to become lost in issues of textual fidelity. Many will offer side-by-side comparisons of the original text and the adaptation, highlighting all the deviations, only to then dogmatically proclaim the original to be vastly superior.[2] Such quibbling, however, only serves to obfuscate what are invariably the more pressing issues presented by any adaptation. At its heart, adaptation is a tool of power. Granted, this can at first appear innocuously, such as the contemporary adaptation of an antiquated text for a modern audience—which is still the exertion of power over the original text. However, it can just as easily appear as cultural appropriation or co-optation, the adaptation of a potentially subversive text in support of society's dominant classes.[3] In this instance, adaptation acts as a type of ideological imperialism, potentially even colonialism, as marginalized groups see their unique stories appropriated in the service of dominant power. Case studies of adaptations, when divorced from the middling affairs of textual fidelity, can thus provide greater insight into the inherent politics of media, exposing both the colonial and biopolitical implications thereof.

In the case of *The Green Knight*, there is the additional issue of adaptational intertextuality. Lowery's film is not the first adaptation of the original poem; in fact, it is not even the first cinematic adaptation. In general, this type of situation presents a special challenge to anyone wishing to adapt a text with any degree of textual fidelity, as the perceived original may not in fact be the first in the sequence. As Julie Sanders explains, younger audiences may have gained familiarity with "classic" texts like Kipling's *The Jungle Book* or Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* through the Walt Disney animated versions before ever learning of the novels upon which they are based (4). Accordingly, anyone producing an adaptation for popular audiences, rather than relying solely on the original text, will necessarily need to consider previous adaptations as well (Hutcheon xv).[4] In his own version of the story, Lowery demonstrates this type of cultural fluency, an awareness of the adaptations that predate *The Green Knight*. As such, it is worth considering not only the degree to which Lowery's *The Green Knight* is responding to previous adaptations, but also the cumulative effect these collective versions of the story have on what might broadly be termed the politics of adaptation.

Adapting Gawain: The Rich Legacy of Cinema Arthuriana

Rather than a unique cinematic adaptation of a classic legend, Lowery's *The Green Knight* is in fact participating in what numerous scholars refer to as "Cinema Arthuriana" (Harty, "Overview" 7). In what might be viewed as an effort to infuse their chosen medium with cultural capital—a necessary endeavor given the long-running perception of an artistic hierarchy—filmmakers have regularly plumbed the depths of the literary canon for source material, and the Arthurian legends have proven a well to which they might repeatedly return.[5] Throughout the history of the medium, over thirty major studio films have been made based either on a canonical Arthurian legend or the characters featured therein. Sir Gawain, the nephew of King Arthur, appears in roughly a third of these films, which is not at all surprising given that he is a prominent figure in the canon of Arthurian literature (Williams 337). Not only is he the protagonist of such medieval romance poems as *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* and *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*, but he regularly appears as a supporting character in several other texts, including *The Avowyng of Arthur* and *The Awntyrs of Arther*. Moreover, he is a central figure in medieval English treatments of the fall of Camelot and the death of King Arthur, such as

in both the alliterative and stanzaic versions of *Morte Arthur*, as well as what is arguably the most famous of such treatments, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (Dalrymple 265).

Throughout the Arthurian canon, the depiction of Gawain varies rather widely, and understandably so. As each author submits their own contribution to the canon, they may be appealing to diverging literary traditions. One such literary tradition emphasizes Gawain's heroic role as Arthur's esteemed nephew and favored warrior, while another casts him in a diminished role, overshadowed by other members of the Round Table—most often Sir Lancelot du Lac, the favored knight of the French courtly tradition (Dalrymple 265). These diverging literary representations present a special challenge to filmmakers who cannot expect their audiences to be aware of these various representations of Gawain. As such, any move towards textual fidelity on the part of the filmmaker will inevitably result in a cinematic version of Gawain that is unique to the film, as is immediately evident from even the briefest of surveys of Cinema Arthuriana. In Richard Thorpe's *Knights of the Round Table* (1954), Robert Urquhart portrays Gawain as humorous and genteel, while that same year saw Sterling Hayden playing an older Gawain, acting as the titular character's mentor in Henry Hathaway's *Prince Valiant* (1954). Gawain is rash when portrayed by George Baker in Cornel Wilde's *Lancelot and Guinevere* (1963), whereas Liam Neeson's Gawain is tempestuous and prone to histrionics—although this might be due more to the melodramatic nature of John Boorman's *Excalibur* (1981) than an intentional characterization (Williams 337). Contemporary audiences, however, may be more familiar with the Gawain depicted in Antoine Fuqua's *King Arthur* (2004), which in its bid for historical accuracy deviates substantially from any of the previously upheld literary traditions: here, Joel Edgerton portrays Gawain not as a member of the Round Table, but as a Sarmatian knight in the Roman legion, humorously sarcastic in the resignation to his duty. Taken together, these various depictions of Gawain present a confusing aggregate for cinematic audiences, a far cry from the standardized stock character expected of a literary canon.

Despite their variances, what each of the aforementioned versions of Gawain have in common is that in each instance, the character is relegated to a supporting role. Indeed, this seems to be his expected place within the corpus of Arthurian cinema. However, this does not mean that Gawain has never served as protagonist. There are, in fact, a handful of films in which he is the central figure, and all of them harken back to what is arguably the most famous of all the Gawain romances: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Dating back to the late fourteenth century and preserved in the Cotton Nero A.X manuscript, the anony-

mously authored epic poem has been adapted numerous times. What is arguably the first direct adaptation, *The Green Knight* appeared in the early sixteenth century, although as Elisabeth Brewer has illustrated, vestiges of the original poem also feature prominently in other medieval romances, such as in *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle* and *The Turk and Gawain* (11, 179). Since then, the fabled encounter between Gawain and the Green Knight has been featured across a wide range of media, including multiple novels and short stories, plays and operas, and even a themed role-playing game in the *Dungeons & Dragons* tradition. Comparatively, the poem has been adapted to film relatively few times.[6]

The first attempt at a cinematic adaptation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* came from director Stephen Weeks in 1973, although audiences familiar with the film's source material would find a shocking lack of textual fidelity. What are arguably the poem's key narrative elements remain: the beheading game, the decapitated and recapitated Green Knight, and the promise to return a comparable blow a year later. However, Weeks omits several other important plot points—most notably Bertilak's trading game and the seduction attempts by Lady Bertilak—replacing them with elements from numerous other sources. The interactions between the two eponymous characters thus act more as bookends as Weeks spends the bulk of the film's runtime with a combined retelling of both Chrétian de Troye's's *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion* and Sir Thomas Malory's "The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney," from Book IV (Caxton VII) of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Weeks's *Gawain and the Green Knight* thus plays more as a jumbled pastiche, an uneven conglomeration that has only served to draw critical ire.[7]

Weeks's first attempt at adapting Gawain's legendary encounter with the Green Knight was largely forgettable in the public consciousness, but a decade later, he was given the opportunity to try again—this time with a conspicuously larger budget. This second version featured an expanded title—*Sword of the Valiant: The Legend of Gawain and the Green Knight*—and altered Weeks's earlier film to include an elaborate riddle. This riddle, which the Green Knight poses to Gawain during their initial encounter, is designed to teach the young protagonist about life, and by solving all four parts, Gawain can spare himself the return blow. Unfortunately, Gawain realizes the answer to the final part too late, at which point the film devolves into the standard sword play expected of such a Hollywood film.

Both of Weeks's adaptations deviate substantially from their source material, and not just in terms of narrative elements. Still, this might be viewed as a necessary tactic on the part of the filmmaker. The original poem presents two immediate hurdles to any cinematic adaptation:

first, the passage of a year so early in the text, and second, the lack of detail regarding Gawain's journey to Castle Hautdesert (Williams 343). Given these narrative ambiguities, any filmmaker might be so inclined as to include narrative elements not present in the source material in order to present a more well-rounded and compelling story. However, Weeks's alterations are greater than what might be considered necessary expansion; both films dramatically alter the very nature of the Green Knight. In both films, the Green Knight is not an enchanted Bertilak, turned green by fairy magic, but rather a "mystic wild man" covered in vines, a "representative of the 'nature gods'" (Williams 342). As Robert Blanche and Julian Wasserman have argued, this new characterization of the Green Knight seems to reflect the influence of Jessie Weston's landmark study *From Ritual to Romance*, wherein Weston argues that rather than Christian tradition, Arthurian legend is in fact rooted in ancient paganism (Blanche and Wasserman 189-91). Accordingly, in both films Gawain is given a new timeline for receiving the return blow: rather than the legalistic year and a day, which implies the fulfillment of a contract, Gawain is given one year, suggesting that this Green Knight is more concerned with seasonal fertility rites. Upon receiving the return blow, Gawain then watches the Green Knight literally return to the earth, a force of nature dissipated with the changing of the seasons.

Although the two films are not identical, *Sword of the Valiant* is generally considered a remake of *Gawain and the Green Knight* rather than a standalone adaptation (Lupack 314). Superficially, this is attributable to Weeks acting as both the director and cowriter for both films. While the validity of auteur theory is certainly debatable, it nevertheless makes sense that having the same personnel across both projects would inevitably yield similarities.[8] However, the reiteration of Weeks's first film and its specific, idiosyncratic narrative elements carries deeper implications in that it represents the first steps in the codification of a "core Gawain Myth." As literary theorist Chris Baldick has illustrated, subsequent retellings of a story—or in this case, subsequent adaptations of a text—will preserve certain narrative elements, which are then codified into a core myth that must be maintained across all future adaptations. In his book *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*, Baldick illustrates this theory through a case study of what he terms the "Frankenstein Myth." According to Baldick, all versions of the *Frankenstein* story are invariably rooted in two specific narrative elements: 1) Frankenstein makes a living being out of inanimate body parts, and 2) the creature turns against him and wreaks havoc (2). In order to be recognized as a version of *Frankenstein*—regardless of whether said adaptation even

retains the name "Frankenstein"—each adaptation must be rooted in these two narrative elements. In retaining certain narrative elements between his two films, then, Weeks is similarly demonstrating the nascent stages of a core Gawain Myth—a myth that is ultimately codified nearly four decades later in Lowery's *The Green Knight*.[9]

The Green Knight: A New Entry in the Gawain Tradition

Film adaptations, whether they are drawn from other media or remakes of earlier films, are at least tacitly concerned with the question of adaptive value. The inherent questions surrounding any film adaptation are therefore, as Timothy Corrigan colloquially explains, "what makes an adaptation significant and important, or why does a particular adaptation matter?" (53). Numerous studies have since demonstrated how cinematic remakes or subsequent adaptations of the same source material have thus reflected a shift in social mores and values.[10] In the case of Cinema Arthuriana specifically, Susan Aronstein has argued how cinematic retellings of Arthurian legends are produced in response to a perceived social crisis. In her book *Hollywood Knights: Arthurian Cinema and the Politics of Nostalgia*, Aronstein illustrates how the nature of these Arthurian-themed films is especially telling when combined with the timing of their release. Historically, such films have clustered around periods of uncertainty or social upheaval: the Red Scare of the 1950s, the legitimation crises of the 1960s and 70s, the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, and even the crisis of masculinity in the 1990s. Such films, according to Aronstein, respond to a perceived cultural crisis "by first proposing an Americanized Camelot as a political ideal and then constructing American knights to sit at its Round Table" (1-2).[11]

Lowery's *The Green Knight* seems to be similarly responding to a perceived cultural crisis. The twenty-first century has been increasingly defined by concern for structural issues and their resulting social injustices. The growing recognition of economic inequality, systemic racism, and a retrenched patriarchy have given rise to questions of how ordinary people can even survive—let alone thrive—under such conditions. While these same questions underlie *The Green Knight*, Lowery does not, as Aronstein suggests, "[propose] an ideal medieval past as the solution to a troubled present" (2). Rather, he paints a bleak picture of the past, filled with dirt and danger and seemingly insurmountable challenges, as a means of engaging his audience and providing a way forward.

Lowery begins his version of the story with a clearly flawed protagonist, a womanizing Gawain prone to alcoholic overindulgence—a far cry from and yet much more realistic than the idealized chivalric knight. When the Green Knight interrupts the court's holiday feast, Gawain impulsively accepts the creature's challenge, thereby consigning himself to a journey to fulfill the second half of the Green Knight's beheading game. It is at this point that Lowery's version of the story diverges from previous adaptations: like Weeks before him, Lowery expounds upon the source material, but he includes a significantly different series of events. In his travels, Gawain happens upon the aftermath of a particularly bloody battle, where scavengers tie him up and rob him.[12] He manages to escape, and in what might charitably be considered foreshadowing, Gawain next encounters the ghost of St. Winifred, an early Christian martyr who was herself beheaded. Finally, Gawain arrives at a distant castle where he is offered lodging, and in a shocking bid for textual fidelity, Lowery reintroduces Lord Bertilak's trading game and Lady Bertilak's failed seduction attempt as significant—even if less consequential—plot points.

The film concludes as Gawain arrives at the Green Chapel, where Lowery introduces what is arguably his most striking deviation, both from the original text and from the earlier adaptations. Here, the audience is offered an expanded dream sequence wherein Gawain imagines the fallout from a potential escape: his return to Camelot, his ascendance to the throne, and the eventual downfall of his kingdom—a downfall due to his inadequacies as a monarch, given the dour expression on his face. This is how Lowery's film ends, absent the final blow and the denouement offered by both the original text and the earlier film adaptations. By eschewing the expected resolution, Lowery dramatically shifts the focus of his story from destination to journey, from Gawain's ultimate encounter with the Green Knight to his experiences along the way. Lowery's version of the story is thus not about rising to the challenge, but rather the more existential quest of becoming someone capable of rising to the challenge.[13] This is even reflected in the film's title. The title of the poem juxtaposes Gawain and the Green Knight, a juxtaposition upheld in both of Weeks's earlier films. Lowery, however, removes the diametrical opposition between the two characters, and in the process, he gives the title of his version a polysemic nature. By simply titling his film *The Green Knight*, Lowery invites the audience to view his protagonist eponymously and consider as the film's driving force not the conflict between Gawain and the Green Knight, but rather Gawain's inexperience.

Lowery's avoidance of traditional narrative resolution necessitates that the audience create their own end to Gawain's story—in essence,

the audience is left to choose whether Gawain endures the return blow or whether dream becomes reality as he flees to Camelot. Lowery nevertheless provides a hint as to the correct choice, the one he expects his audience to make. Just as the Green Knight readies the return blow and right before the film cuts to black, Gawain gazes directly into the camera with a look that can only be described as determination. This look—a stark contrast from the melancholia he displays during the dream sequence—speaks volumes. The relatable protagonist with his flawed origins has finally transformed into someone who will not be cowed into a life of cowardice, and even though he may lose everything, he will stand strong and face up to adversity in whatever form it takes. This look, pointed directly at the audience who has already begun to identify with Gawain, is an invitation for those watching to do the same.

Lowery's version of the story, with its emphasis on structural conditions and the ability to navigate them, certainly seems more befitting of contemporary audiences.[14] Despite this shift in focus and the alterations necessary to achieve it, Lowery nevertheless upholds several of the alterations introduced in Weeks's earlier adaptations. This is first demonstrated—at least superficially—through the depiction of an elderly Arthur, a characterization entirely attributable to Weeks as the original text makes no mention of Arthur's age. Additionally, there is the romantic subplot between Gawain and Essel, which echoes the romantic subplot between Gawain and Linet in the two earlier films. This first appears in Weeks's film due to his inclusion of outside sources, but it is still retained by Lowery, despite the fact that *The Green Knight* does not pull from the same sources.

The most notable alteration upheld by Lowery remains the characterization of the Green Knight. The original goal of the Green Knight in both of Weeks's earlier films was to test Gawain, and while this remains his goal in *The Green Knight*, Lowery adds nuance not present in the earlier films. It is heavily implied in Lowery's version—although the actual scene where this happens is not shown—that it is Gawain's mother who summons the Green Knight. Consequently, when Gawain's mother—not Lady Bertilak—gives Gawain the green sash, it reframes Gawain's ordeal as his mother's Machiavellian endeavor to position her son as successor to the king. Nevertheless, Lowery's Green Knight remains the Green Man of pagan tradition, a being of living vegetation, which follows Weeks's interpretation of the character. Lowery's Green Knight likewise insists on the contractual timeframe of one year, rather than a year and a day.

It is entirely possible that upholding these specific alterations was a bid for cultural fluency. Lowery might have anticipated—however

erroneously—his audience's familiarity with Weeks's earlier adaptations and retained these idiosyncratic alterations in accordance with what he perceived as their expectations.[15] However, this argument falls short considering Lowery's obvious references to the original text, as is evidenced by the reintroduction of Lord Bertilak's trading game and Lady Bertilak's seduction attempt—Lowery could have easily devised any number of scenarios to demonstrate the testing of Gawain, but he specifically chose episodes from the original text. In the end, it matters little as the effect is the same. In reiterating these specific alterations, Lowery has effectively codified a new version of the Gawain Myth. Now, in addition to the beheading game, the core Gawain Myth would seemingly include a paganistic Green Knight and the timeframe of one year.

The Implications of Adaptation

Lowery's ability to effectively adapt the Gawain Myth for contemporary audiences may speak to his ability as a filmmaker, but within the larger context of Cinema Arthuriana, it speaks more to the inherent adaptability of the Arthurian canon. In general, fairy tales and folklore have long served as repositories of adaptable material; they are, as Julie Sanders notes, "eminently adaptable into new circumstances and contexts" (106). In the case of the Arthurian canon specifically, the mythopoeic nature renders it "remarkably responsive to changes in symbolic content" (Merriman 26). This might explain why, as numerous scholars have already noted, recent decades have witnessed a veritable explosion of Arthurian themes throughout cinema. In some cases the references are obvious, such as with Indiana Jones's Grail quest in Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), but rarely are they so explicit. In George Romero's *Knightriders* (1981), the Grail quest is allegorical as an insular group of motorcycle stunt riders, who all practice their own chivalric code, pursue the American dream (Umland and Umland 154-63). In Barry Levinson's *The Natural* (1984), the eponymous Roy Hobbs plays a Perceval-like figure who signs with the New York Knights baseball team under the management of Pop Fisher, a character whose name alludes to the same legend explicitly referenced in Terry Gilliam's *The Fisher King* (1991) (Umland and Umland 163-67, 175-82). Matthew Vaughn's *Kingsman* franchise (2014, 2017, 2021) features a clandestine spy organization whose members utilize code names referencing various members of the Round Table, while both George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One* (2018) are Grail quests in their own right

(Harty, "Canon" 90-97). Lowery's *The Green Knight*, then, is yet another questing film in the ever-expanding corpus of Cinema Arthuriana.

With the exception of *The Green Knight*, all of the aforementioned examples are external quests. The protagonists of these films are all searching for something outside of themselves, whether it be a physical object, an escape of some kind, or an ideal way of life. Conversely, *The Green Knight* is more of an internal quest. Lowery intentionally frames Gawain's quest as the search for identity, for a sense of self. This existential character makes the quest much more personal, and as a result, much more reflective of Lowery's own experiences. Lowery himself has confirmed the film's autobiographical nature:

> "It became a drama about a mother and a son in a way that I hadn't intended," he says. "All of a sudden, I was writing about my own relationship with my mom, and the fact that I stayed, I lived under her roof for far longer than I should have. I had failure-to-launch syndrome, and she eventually had to force me out . . . It's just a messy relationship, and probably not exclusive to my own relationship with my mom." (Robinson "Ending")

The fact that Lowery's personal experiences as expressed in *The Green Knight* are so relatable to contemporary audiences might speak to a larger cultural issue, specifically the difficulty younger generations face in managing oppressive social structures and the increased intergenerational tension resulting from an ever-widening generation gap. At the same time, Lowery's experiences are by no means universal, and as such, his ability to incorporate them into his film raises additional questions regarding who is allowed to share their stories in this way.

It may indeed be true that younger generations are less likely to reach certain social milestones within the previously expected timeframe—for instance, moving out of their parents' house—but rather than a generational norm, this is in fact a position of privilege. It speaks to the privilege of having a financially solvent family that can both physically and economically provide for their adult children, which is simply not the case for many members of marginalized groups. Moreover, it speaks to Lowery's privilege not only as a filmmaker, but as a white male that he is able to tell this story. Despite recent achievements by marginalized filmmakers—the successes of Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019) and the Daniels' *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) are particularly notable examples here—cinematic storytellers are "still primarily white and male" (Smith et al. 4). As a recent study from the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative demonstrates, onscreen representation

of marginalized groups has indeed been trending upward over the past decade, but directors, writers, and producers are still 80% white and almost 90% male (Smith et al. 27). This is easily seen in the specific case of *The Green Knight*, which prominently features the British-born Indian actors Dev Patel and Sarita Choudhury, despite being directed by David Lowery.

The fact is, as Lowery clearly demonstrates in *The Green Knight*, any adaptation of a text will inevitably reflect—whether intentionally or not—the filmmaker's own experiences. As long as filmmakers are predominantly white and male, these adaptations will then overwhelmingly reflect the white male experience. Hierarchies are invariably supported by those who benefit from them, and white men disproportionately benefit from extant sociopolitical structures. Consequently, contemporary sociopolitical discourse sees the white male demographic as the strongest supporters of the status quo. Accordingly, as a film produced by a white male filmmaker, *The Green Knight* highlights sociopolitical structures while making no move to question them. Granted, Gawain's problematic situation—being forced to endure the return blow—is in part due to his own impulsive actions, but the greater fault here surely lies with his mother who summons the Green Knight and the chivalric code that requires him to pay a debt that will surely kill him. While textual fidelity dictates that Gawain would always end up at the Green Chapel, the creative license offered by the adaptational process allows for the possibility of framing these structures as negative, even villainous. However, Lowery actively chooses to present as valorous the resignation to one's place within the system, thus demonstrating his own allegiance to the structures in place.[16] In so doing, he has effectively codified the core Gawain Myth in the service of dominant power.

Conclusion

Recent decades have seen a democratizing shift in media production. Whereas "old media," including film, is produced by media elites representing dominant power, "new media" is increasingly in the hands of the subaltern classes. With the sheer global reach of the internet—not to mention the ready availability of recording and production technology—media production is a now a task undertaken by those people traditionally relegated to the role of the audience. Simply put, regular people can now make their own movies, or even produce their own adaptations of a canonical text. Not only does this allow audiences the opportunity to share their own stories, but as Michael Moore has argued,

they may now claim ownership over existing media by responding to or even adapting the stories with which they most identify. In this case, adaptation serves as a "strategy of participation" (Moore 183). Still, it is worth asking what audiences are responding to, and what they are adapting. If the core myth of a story has already been codified, then it will automatically serve as a baseline, the yardstick against which all subsequent adaptations—no matter how democratically produced—will be measured. Marginalized groups may yet manage to reclaim power by adapting canonical stories to represent their specific experiences, but they are inevitably doing so with stories that have been codified independently of them. Furthermore, if these stories are what have made the world—that is, if they have in fact directed the evolution of contemporary culture—then these marginalized groups are merely trying to carve out a niche in a world that has been determined without them. Lowery's *The Green Knight*, although presenting a necessary update on the legend, is similarly a codification of the story's core myth. As such, it will inherently act as the baseline for all versions of the story for the foreseeable future. It is entirely possible, of course, that the core Gawain Myth will shift through subsequent retellings, although given the current demographic trends in Hollywood exclusivity, there is no guarantee that such a shift will be in the service of inclusion. In the meantime, and much to the detriment of those suffering from structural injustice, Lowery's version will likely remain the Gawain audiences know and refer to for years to come.

Notes

1. As Linda Hutcheon explains in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, if we do not know that what we are experiencing is an adaptation—or alternately, if we are unfamiliar with the original text—then we simply enjoy said adaptation as we would any other work (120).

2. At the same time, there are those who will—perhaps somewhat prankishly—extol the superiority of the adaption, but as Gerry Canavan has said, this is merely "the champions' tier of the sport" (201).

3. Herbert Marcuse offers a greater consideration of the theory of co-optation in his book *The One-Dimensional Man*.

4. For an interesting example of this, we might consider Mike Flanagan's 2019 cinematic adaptation of Stephen King's 2013 novel *Doctor Sleep*. In adapting the novel, a sequel to King's 1977 novel *The Shining*, Flanagan was simultaneously producing a sequel to Stanley Kubrick's 1980 cinematic adaptation. He

therefore had to account for Kubrick's substantial deviations from the original text.

5. For a more in-depth consideration of cultural capital, see Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*.

6. This is not altogether surprising, though, as there are relatively few examples throughout cinematic history of multiple films being produced from the same source material. Still, it is worth noting that examples of cinematic remakes seem to be appearing more regularly, potentially in an effort to simultaneously maintain intellectual property rights while reducing the expenditure of intellectual labor.

7. Kevin Harty, arguably the foremost authority on Cinema Arthuriana, has spoken quite disparagingly of the film at length ("Overview" 18-19). David Williams similarly uses derisive language in his discussion of the film (341-42).

8. It is worth noting here that Weeks lamented studio interference, ultimately blaming it for the poor quality of *Gawain and the Green Knight* (Berry 7). This indicates that at the very least, he was not the final authority on either the film or its content.

9. In between *Sword of the Valiant* and *The Green Knight*, Thames Television produced the made-for-television film *Gawain and the Green Knight* (1991), directed by John Michael Phillips. Lauded for its textual fidelity, the film has been considered at length by Blanche and Wasserman, as well as by David Williams. However, it did not receive a wide release and has since been largely forgotten outside of scholarly articles and a few niche internet websites.

10. For a particularly fascinating example of this, see Kelley Crowley's study on how the multiple versions of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, 1978, 1993, 2007) have evolved to match the shifts in society's overarching fears. Terrence McSweeney similarly offers a study of how Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005) was updated to reflect the nuances of a post-9/11 invasion.

11. Aronstein's argument might explain the poor reception of Fuqua's *King Arthur* with American audiences. The film did well internationally, but it was a commercial failure with American audiences who were largely expecting a film in the Malorian tradition, a fantasy rather than a historical epic (Sullivan 86).

12. This scene was reportedly inspired by the Battle of Badon, which Lowery included for sole purpose of questioning the myth of Arthur's "peaceful" reign (Robinson, "Influences"). The scene thus illustrates the violence that existing structures of power might employ to maintain both their dominance and their legitimacy.

13. It would make sense, then, that Lowery reintroduces both Bertilak's trading game and Lady Bertilak's seduction attempt, as these are both episodes in the film that test Gawain's character. While they may have appeared out of place in Weeks's earlier films, they are perfectly suited to Lowery's existential quest.

14. Lowery's emphasis on structural conditions is further evidenced in the lack of names given in the film. The only two characters with names in the film

are Gawain and Essel, while the other characters—Mother, King, Lord and Lady—are defined by the roles that they play within larger structural conditions. While the audience might presume that Sean Harris is in fact playing King Arthur, the character is never referred to as Arthur in either the film's dialogue or its credits. The one exception to this rule is Winifred, who presumably regained her name in death.

15. When discussing Lowery's own cultural fluency, it is worth noting the casting of Joel Edgerton, who played Gawain in Fuqua's *King Arthur*. While Fuqua's film was not an adaptation of the original poem, the casting of Edgerton would seemingly demonstrate Lowery's awareness of Gawain's place within the larger tradition of Cinema Arthuriana.

16. This move becomes especially problematic considering his casting a person of color as the one who must accept his fate.

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"A New Tale?": The Welsh in David Lowery's *The Green Knight*

Rachel Martin

When David Lowery's *The Green Knight* came out, it was to a bevy of attention, with critics, academics, and audience members all commenting on the film's perceived faithfulness (or lack thereof) to the fourteenth-century text upon which it is based.[1] One thing in particular that received a fair amount of attention, at least by the usual glacial standards of Celtic Studies, is the usage of Welsh material in the film. In a perhaps overly enthusiastic review submitted to the *Wales Art Review*, Caragh Medlicott said, "In heightening the mythic pagan elements, Lowery draws primarily from the Welsh tradition." An article published on *Nerdist*, likewise, was entitled "The Welsh History and Mythology Behind the Green Knight," stating, "Lowery told *Vanity Fair* that in adapting the story he decided to lean into the history and mythology of Wales in particular," which is particularly interesting in that the article linked in the Nerdist piece does not contain any quote to that effect (Gates).[2] Common to both reviews are claims that the film's inclusion of talking animals, giants, and the Green Man are all nods to the Welsh tradition, none of which are either exclusive to medieval Welsh materials or, in the case of both the talking animals and the Green Man, even present in the medieval Welsh materials. The latter in particular, as Ronald Hutton has said, has some basis in a number of foliate images that appear to represent some form of relationship between humanity and the vegetable world, but is ultimately "an effective enough representation of a divinity-like being who has appeared in response to modern needs and within a post-Christian society" (192). The Green Man, like the Green Knight itself, was created in a thoroughly Christian or post-Christian milieu; its importance in the film is purely from the modern connection drawn between it and paganism, not because it is an accurate representation of pagan or "Celtic" themes. There was a seeming grasp for authenticity, a desire to show that the film was accurate—if not to the original fourteenth-century poem, then to some distant, hazy Celtic materials that, by very virtue of their status as Celtic materials and therefore indistinguishable from one another, do not need to be cited. In other words, as Simon Rodway has noted with regards to the treatment of Celtic material in pop cul-

ture in general, there is a "widespread perception that the Celts themselves have an elastic relationship with the world of empirically provable facts" (71). The Celtic materials, representing a literary tradition that is at least a thousand years old, have become a dumping ground for anything that is deemed to be strange, obscure, or arcane. The film does, indeed, give nods to the Welsh materials in some places, such as in the addition of Welsh accents to Arthur and Guinevere and to the presence of the indisputably Welsh St. Winifred; however, ultimately, instead of representing a fresh perspective on the material, as many of the reviews seemingly wished, it ultimately conformed to the imperialistic agenda of medieval English authors, even as, in other places, the film problematized the assumption of whiteness that often accompanies the Arthurian canon.

Inventing Arthur

Before we go to the film that this collection of papers is dedicated to, it is necessary for us, like the titular Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's court in Mark Twain's book, to be thrown back in time to the world of medieval Wales, where we have our earliest literary attestations to King Arthur. This is a rich avenue of inquiry, and one that many incredibly qualified scholars have gone down, but time is short, so we will not have the chance to give it the attention or the nuance that it deserves. Suffice it to say, our earliest surviving literary portrayals of Arthur are Welsh—this does not mean that Wales was the only region to have an Arthurian tradition nor even the only Celtic region, as we have evidence for traditions in Brittany and Cornwall. As Oliver J. Padel said in his introduction to Arthur in *Medieval Welsh Literature*, "Wales has no monopoly of the Arthurian legend" (9).[3] Rather, it means that we have a number of literary texts in Welsh, both prose and poetry, that are believed to predate the other surviving literature, even as Middle Welsh is notoriously difficult to date with authority. The earliest datable text of these is the *Historia Brittonum*, a Latin text popularly if somewhat erroneously ascribed to a "Nennius," who was a native Welsh speaker writing out of Gwynedd, under the patronage of the ambitious ninth-century Welsh king Merfyn (Dumville; Higham).

The significance of Arthuriana would change significantly within the twelfth century, as the Normans began to eye Wales, Scotland, and Ireland for their imperialistic exercises. Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, with their different laws, customs, clothing, and languages, became "an Other against which the Normans and English could define a new 'English' self" (Aronstein, "Becoming Welsh" 144). The Welsh were de-

picted as brutal, as barbarous, deserving whatever fate they received because, after all, they had had the control of Britain and lost it. To Gerald of Wales in his book *Descriptio Cambriae* (1193-1194), for example, the Welsh people "Finales autem fossas effodere, terminos transponere, et metas transcurrere, terrasque modis omnibus vel occupare vel dilatare, gens prae gentibus aliis ambitiosa" ("For their ultimate goal, they build trenches, shift boundaries, and run over boundary lines, and occupy or extend the land by all means, more than all other populations"; my trans; 211). Here, we can see a classic example of a propagandistic piece meant primarily for the colonizing force positioning the native group as hostile and themselves, imperialistic, as a means of minimizing or justifying the actions of the colonizing group. In the rest of the book, Gerald lays out the perceived flaws of the Welshmen of his day, arguing that they were treacherous; incestuous; keen to plunder their countrymen; incompetent in war; fratricidal; immoderate; had loose sexual inhibitions, only giving their daughters into marriage after a trial period of cohabitation;[4] and had lost their sovereignty "peccatis urgentibus, et praecipua detestabili illo et nefando Sodomitico, divina ultione tam olim Trojan quam postea Brittanniam amiserunt" ("hurried on by their sins, and especially that abominable and wicked vice of Sodom, as well as by divine wrath, so that as they had once lost Troy, they later lost Britain"; my trans; 215), in a move that surely flattered Gerald's Norman employers.

Gerald of Wales is a complex figure, a man of both Norman and Welsh descent who also enjoyed the patronage of the court of Henry II, "both the colonizer and the colonized at the nexus of language and power" (Vernon 170), and multiple scholars have devoted a considerable amount of ink to him and his own conflicted hybrid identity. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has noted, "Competing allegiances conjoined with tortured abjections characterize Gerald's writing throughout his career but are especially prevalent in his Welsh texts" (87). To bolster his point, Cohen draws specific attention to an episode in the *Itinerarium Cambriae* (*The Journey Through Wales*), in which a Welsh priest leads a Breton knight sent by Henry II through rough, difficult highways, eating grass along the way, so that the Breton knight reports back to Henry II that "Terram scilicet inhabitabilem, terram inviam et inaccessibilem, nullique genti nisi bestiali et bestiarum more viventi victui necessariam" ("The land was entirely uninhabitable, impenetrable and inaccessible, it could not sustain any population except a beast-like people with a bestial way of living"; my trans; 82), which causes Henry to leave the region to the previously captive Welsh prince Rhys ap Gruffydd. Cohen uses this point to argue for the reappropriation of colonialist stereotypes in order to gain an upper hand—to a Welsh

audience of the time, they might have had a good laugh at the gullibility of the Norman rulers, who claimed to be overlords to a region they knew little about, with Henry surrendering the land to Rhys being seen as ample payback for Rhys's initial surrender, which was done "dolose magi squam virtuose compulso" ("more by trickery than by virtuous compulsion"; my trans; Gerald of Wales 81). That being said, to the Normans reading this, it could be taken as evidence of Welsh duplicity and trickery, with an implicit warning to not underestimate their Cambrian neighbors. Such is the dangerous tightrope that Gerald walked, flirting with both sides while, generally, appealing most to the side who could bolster his reputation or his pocketbook. In other words, regardless of the nuance and the contradictory nature of parts of his work, it was also written, first and foremost, to appeal to the future conquerors of Wales, as part of what John Gillingham has called "an ideology of conquest" (*The English in the Twelfth Century* 17). It was, as Georgia Henley has stated, "deliberate, studied, and intended to persuade" albeit not without "certain sympathies for this culture" (52).

Gerald's contemporary, Walter Map, describes the character of Welsh people as follows: "probi tamen sunt, non dico uirtute boni uel uiribus precipui, sed acerbitate inpugnandi et acredine resistendi, sola scilicet improbitate probi, uite prodigy libertatis auari, pacis neclectores, bellicosi armisque prudentes et uindicte audi" ("They are, however capable, I do not mean that they are by virtue of their goodness or by virtue of a particular strength, but by the bitterness of their assaults and the sharpness of their resistance, only, that is to say, capable in wickedness , wasteful of life, covetous of liberty, neglectors of peace, skilled in warfare and arms and eager for vengeance"; my trans; Map 183). Again, we see similar stereotypes of the Welsh—they are fundamentally violent, hot-headed, independently minded, and generous, but to the point of foolishness.

Walter Map and Gerald of Wales provide just two examples of the rhetoric used by authors who, while they had their origins along the borderlands of Wales and England, were paid predominately by the court of Henry II. The Welsh were not safe to be self-governing; they wanted nothing more than to take Britain back for themselves, even though they had lost it in the first place due to their sins. As John Gillingham notes, "At times, as the Waterford debate [in which Irish prisoners of war were butchered] indicates, some of them were aware that they were falling short of their own standards, but felt they could justify this: they were in a conquest situation and . . . they felt they were only doing what their barbarous enemies would have done to them" (*The English in the Twelfth Century* 42). Perhaps there was a real anxiety

around the harsh and bloody attacks that the Irish, Scots, and Welsh made against the Normans, but I would note that, on that matter, we have predominately Norman accounts to provide us evidence for these attacks. It is not to say that such attacks were fabricated entirely, or even that the brutality of those attacks was—I believe that few people who have read some of the grislier scenes in, for example, the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* or the Four Branches of the Mabinogi would come away with the idea that the medieval Irish or the Welsh were pacifists. That being said, Norman accounts did set the register and the tone for how the attacks were perceived up until the present day. They simultaneously provide the evidence for why the Norman approach to the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh was that they were barbarians, while also themselves being examples of the constructed barbarity of their would-be conquests, highlighting a key anxiety that the vanquished would, one day, treat their colonizers brutally.[5]

It is in this context that Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae* was written, a book that would introduce Arthur to an international milieu.[6] Many different theories have been proposed as to Geoffrey's motivations for writing Arthur into *Historia Regum Brittania*. Some scholars have suggested it was an act of cultural appropriation, a scholar with Norman gold in his pocket justifying the conquest of Wales by using a Welsh figure for his own ends, arguing that both the *Historia Regum Brittaniae* and Geoffrey's other major Arthurian work, the *Vita Merlini* "legitimate Norman colonization of Wales by creating and perpetuating textual myths of the innate defeatedness—and the inevitable defeatability—of the British people" (Falatra 82). Others have suggested it was an act of anti-colonialism by a Welsh scholar, cleverly hiding pro-Welsh messages in the work and leaving the possibility of a Welsh reclamation of Britain open and offering a "powerful rejoinder" to "the twelfth century Renaissance's perception of the Celtic peoples in general, and the Welsh in particular, as barbarians" even if it "was not one powerful enough to offset the contemporary realities of a Welsh pastoral economy and an 'unreformed' Welsh social structure" (Gillingham, "The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'History of the Kings of Britain'" 39). It is impossible to fully know, and there is a great deal of territory left to explore.

Regardless of Geoffrey's own intent, however, we can see two highly different Arthurian traditions spring up in England and Wales in response to Geoffrey's work. The English used Geoffrey as a means of furthering their own imperialism, justifying their claim to a single Britain, unified under a single king. Wales, Ireland, and Scotland would all bend their knees to the English king, as they had done in the past to Arthur (Davies 42, 48). To the Welsh, however, the tradition

around Arthur provided a means of hitting back against Norman imperialism; they could draw strength from their own glorious past while comforting themselves in the chance of a better future. Whether or not Geoffrey was a secret Welsh patriot or a Norman propagandist or anything in between the two extremes, the text became a bestseller in Wales, receiving a number of Welsh translations/adaptations that have collectively become known as *Brut y Brenhinedd*, with around sixty extant examples ranging from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries that can be divided into three separate recensions, a truly breathtaking survival (Roberts xxiv).[7]

Especially tempting to the Welsh, perhaps, were the prophecies of Merlin that Geoffrey included, which said that one day the Welsh would reclaim their land, that the foreigners would be killed, and that they would call the land "Britain" again (Davies 41; Gillingham 38). This caused the Normans some amount of anxiety, and Gerald of Wales explicitly alluded to this in his own writings on Wales, emphasizing that "Sed mihi quidem longe aliter visum est" ("But to me, it seems very differently"; my trans; 216). Gerald, instead, emphasized the role that the Welsh's own sins had played in their losing Britain, allaying the fears of his audience while continually justifying the appropriateness of the Norman occupation of Wales, or, as Julia Crick states, "Gerald had silenced any resonances of wider Welsh aspirations in Geoffrey's text" (74). Elsewhere, too, we see an anxiety around Arthur among the Normans—Gillingham, for example, notes additionally that an anonymous reader made a point of noting that King Arthur had died at Camlann instead of returning to save Britain (*The English in the Twelfth Century* 39). Sometimes, this anxiety was not limited to simply words on a page—in 1282, the severed head of Llywelyn ap Gruffud, last native prince of Wales, was sent to London, put on a stave, crowned with a wreath of ivy, and sent to the Tower of London, in a macabre parody of the Galfridian prophecies (Davies 40). Arthur was useful as a tool of propaganda, but it was imperative for the Normans that he stayed dead, even if they had to kill him again themselves.

However, ultimately, it is not the Welsh texts that are most remembered in an international milieu and, save for those who specialize in Welsh materials and the Welsh Arthurian traditions, the bulk of the adaptation has, overwhelmingly, been to either the English or the French material. Such is the case of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the source material for the film that, finally, I'm going to be spending the rest of this paper analyzing. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is particularly relevant to the discussion of the role of colonialism in the Arthurian tradition, as it is itself a product of that colonialism, as it is set in the borderlands between England and Wales. The domi-

nant critical narrative has, traditionally, been that Wales is presented as a foreign, Other land, filled with mysticism and dangerous romance, with the court of Lord Bertilak as distinctly Welsh in contrast to the familiar English court of Camelot (Coley; Arner). Arthur, in the text, is a British king, his ties to Troy and to Aeneas laid out in the opening, but it does not appear, from Gawain's later travel itinerary, that he is a Welsh king, given that he is situated in Camelot (and not his Welsh court of Caerleon) and that Gawain passes through Logres in order to reach the court of Lord Bertilak (Arner 83). Wirral Forest, existing on the borders of Wales and England, is presented as a wild, savage wilderness: "In the wyldrenesse of Wyrale; wonde ther bot lyte / That auther God other gome wyth goud hert lovied" ("The Wilderness of Wirral—few were within / That had great will toward God or man"; Battles lines 700-702; The Pearl Poet lines 701-702).

A newer thread of scholarship suggests that the reference in the poem to Northern Wales, that says Gawain received no hospitality or companionship "Til that he neghed ful neghe into the Northe Wales" ("til he had wandered well-nigh into North Wales"; Battles line 697; The Pearl Poet line 697) indicates that Wales itself is a land of hospitality, but that the Welsh themselves are not to be seen in the poem's construction of Wales. As Joshua Byron Smith notes, "If *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* models any colonial relationship between England and Wales, it is the English poet's erasure of Wales as a separate space" (209). Wales is a safe space, but it is so because there is no trace of Welshness. This would be in keeping with the general medieval English literary attitude towards Wales, which was to pretend as if it were a relic of the past when it was mentioned at all (Meecham-Jones).[8] I am not certain that the two modes of interpreting the poem are inherently mutually exclusive—just as Lord Bertilak has two faces, both the obliging and hospitable lord and the otherworldly knight, perhaps the Welsh do as well, being both savage and alien while also being warm and hospitable, especially so long as they are kept in their proper place and can accommodate their English guests, even if they are somewhat inherently untrustworthy due to this duality. Even authors writing at arguably the height of the tension between the Normans and the Welsh such as Gerald of Wales and Walter Map admitted that the Welsh were generous and hospitable, but they were also savage and undependable.

The Green Knight

Lowery, however, changes the power dynamic of the film, even as he keeps the implicit colonialist biases of the text—Arthur (named "The

King" in scripts and credits) is, explicitly, presented with a Welsh accent, as is Guinevere. When discussing the decision, Lowery stated in an interview that, "Sean [Harris] and Kate [Dickie] in playing the king and queen really wanted to honor the Welsh origins of the original poem and that felt appropriate too" (Bui).[6] I will note that this was not a decision made by Lowery, at least not initially; however, regardless of his original intent, the implications of that decision are still present in the final film. Our first glimpse of Lowery's Arthur is as an old, withered man who, according to Lowery, was written to be dying at the time, with Lowery saying in an interview that "Sean recognized all the warmth implicit in that dialogue and pulled it out so beautifully, even though I also wanted him to play that part as if he were dying" (Letterboxd Crew). Still, Arthur's warmth is somewhat distant, cold, with he himself admitting to Gawain that "I recognize but do not know thee." The difference is even more stark in the screenplay, with the addition of a single word: "I recognize you but do not know thee," perhaps intentionally using the formal "you" in the first half of the clause and the informal "thee" in the second half to emphasize that while he recognizes Gawain as his nephew, it is a distant recognition. Arthur is sickly, Gawain coming into manhood in a world that is dying along with its king, the Britain that he wanders through is filled with ruins and littered with corpses. Arthur and Guinevere, our two traces of Welshness in the film, are fragile and frail, fated to die soon, but also distinctly Other, with David Lowery stating that: "The idea is that there's some rot at the heart of that court . . . In the screenplay, I described [Arthur and Guinevere] almost as looking like children or extraterrestrials" (Robinson). The King and Queen *are* Camelot, they are its authority and its gravitas, and they are also its imperialism and its ruin, holy (their heads eclipsed by metal halos giving them a distinctly saintly look), otherworldly, and foreign in both their accents and appearances to Gawain.

The warmth discussed by Lowery hides the darker truth: that Arthur's reign is built upon bloodshed and conquest, a fact that becomes obvious in Arthur's Christmas speech to his court, where he addresses his assembled knights:

> I thank thee for breaking bread with me this blessed day. And it is blessed, for out my window this morn I looked, and I saw a land shaped by your hands. You have lain those same hands upon our Saxon brethren, who now in your shadow bow their heads like babes. Peace, peace you have brought to your kingdom, so it is in peace that I now say to you that I am the luckiest here today because I am amongst thee.

It is a speech that is built on opposing imagery—peace and war, the warmth and comradery that Arthur shows his knights contrasted against the brutality of their actions, the female Morgan and the male Arthur cutting in between one another, paganism and Christianity dancing an anachronistic dance with one another on Christmas Day as nature, in the form of the Green Knight, is about to creep into the civilized yet decrepit and aged world of the court. The peace that Arthur speaks of is revealed as an illusion as Gawain, the outsider to the court, comes across the battlefield of Badon, represented as a barren, desolate landscape where the bodies are still relatively fresh, smoke still rising off the field. This is not an old battleground, but a fresh scene of slaughter. Here, he comes across Barry Keoghan's Scavenger, who tells Gawain, "The King—they say the King, he killed nine hundred and sixty, all on his lonesome." The discrepancy between Arthur's claims of peace and the bloody battlefield was not lost on film reviewers, with Robinson, for example, saying that the scene "calls into question Arthur's 'peaceful' reign." What goes unmentioned is that Gawain appears somewhat skeptical of the claims, responding "Nine hundred, eh?" to the Scavenger's claims, perhaps due to the weakened state of the King that we know. Still, while the Scavenger might be seen as a means of contrasting the exaggerated claims of the chivalric tradition and the perceived, constructed medieval reality, it could be seen as being figuratively true: Arthur himself did not kill over nine hundred men alone, but he has clearly taken part in aggressive, imperialistic actions in the name of his "peace." Furthermore, the speech appears to have been a later addition to the process, added at an unspecified time—it does not appear in the screenplay. The exact timeline cannot be known unless and until Lowery or one of the actors involved clarifies it; we cannot know, therefore, if it was added before or after Harris had been cast and voiced his desire to play the role with a Welsh accent. That being said, it does not appear to have been in the screenplay at that point.

The Arthur of *The Green Knight*, with his distinctly different accent from characters like Gawain and his lover, Essel, is warm and kind, but also authoritarian, corrupted, brutal, his way of life everything that the film is against, his death an incurable inevitability. He is the one to spur Gawain to danger and to go out to fulfill his promise, asking him: "Is it wrong to want greatness for you?" Gawain is at an odd point in his career, noting to Arthur himself that he has not yet accomplished any great deeds, which, in the world of the film, involves partaking in the oppression that is synonymous with Arthur's reign, as indicated in Arthur's Christmas Day speech. To become like those men, to become "great," implicitly would involve taking part in violence and imperialism in order to purchase what Arthur terms "peace." It is this mis-

taken drive that causes Gawain to cut off the Green Knight's head, thus spurring him onto his quest. This worldview is implicitly rebuked by Gawain's lover, Essel, several scenes later, when she asks Gawain "Why greatness? Why is goodness not enough?" Gawain, as the king's heir, is faced with two decisions at the film's climax. In one of them, in which he turns away and does not meet the Green Knight, the audience sees a sequence of scenes set over the decades in which he returns home, is knighted, made king, abandons Essel after taking their child, marries a noblewoman, and ultimately loses his kingship, with him dying in a battle after the wars that have engulfed the kingdom also take the life of his only son. His choice of wife is particularly interesting here—played by the Irish actress Megan Tiernan, she, along with the Scavenger, is one of the two most prominent figures in the movie played by an Irish actor, despite the film being shot in Ireland, and her flaming red hair and blue face-paint appears to conform to visual stereotypes associated with the Irish. Her union with Gawain represents, as J.M. Tyree states in his review, "Celtic dominance over the Saxons, whose suppression has allowed King Arthur's reign to flourish." Gawain's goodness, then, is at least partially incumbent on him maintaining his English identity, or at the very least, not drifting into the alien, Other realms of Celts (with all the questionable identity politics that word implies) like Arthur. To embrace a Celtic identity is to lose the possibility of his own redemption. Here, he has become a "great" man, joining the cycle of brutality, violence, and imperialism, dragging the country into a series of conflicts, rejecting his own humanity in exchange for empty stature, even as he loses the respect of his people. This possibility is rejected in favor of the second option, in which Gawain consciously unties the girdle from his waist when the Knight prepares to take his head off, thus accepting his own mortality. Lowery has spoken about this ending to the film, which does not reveal Gawain's ultimate fate, saying, "I wanted to write an ending where his head gets chopped off, and that's a positive thing. That's a happy ending. He faces his fate bravely, and there's honor and integrity in that. But that doesn't mean that he's dead, he's killed. He received the blow that he was dealt, and all is set right within the universe of the film" (Robinson). In the world of *The Green Knight*, goodness, embodied by Essel, and greatness, embodied by Arthur, are mutually exclusive concepts—it is impossible for Gawain to become a knight and remain a good man, and so his final victory is to lose his head and so forfeit the game. The film poses questions about authoritarianism and imperialism, but does not answer them. Like *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, which offered a similarly deconstructive approach to Arthuriana (albeit with very different tactics), *The Green Knight* "debunks myth" but "has nothing to offer in its

place . . . it proposes 'no serious possibility of a coherent and comprehensive alternative' to a society based on empty rhetoric and policed by violence" (Aronstein, *Hollywood Knights* 116).

Arthur, the Welsh king, along with his queen, as soft-spoken and kindly as he might appear, is fundamentally different from Gawain or Essel, and the worst possible fate for Gawain is to become like him. (No similar dichotomy is applied to the English Lord Bertilak, played by Joel Edgerton.) All this is not to say that Arthur's questionable morality in the film is explicitly or even intentionally tied to his Welshness; rather it is to say that, by combining the two of them together, along with the aforementioned notion of Arthur and Guinevere (the only two characters to have Welsh accents) as being like "extraterrestrials," they create an image of an explicitly Welsh Arthur standing as a representation of alterity, corruption, imperialism, and decay. The figure who was both appropriated from the Welsh and then reappropriated by them to become a figure of resistance to imperialist domination instead becomes a symbol of that same imperialistic domination.

A Meeting with St. Winifred

However, while the bulk of this paper has been spent on the appearance of Welshness in the movie, I believe that an equal case can be made on the reverse: the removal of Welshness where it should be. Much ink has been spilled on the inclusion of the Welsh saint, Winifred, in the film, to the point of her being the arguable breakout star. Her scene marks a dramatic change from the source material, which only states that Gawain stopped by Holywell. Lowery himself has commented on the change, saying that it was, at least in part, a way of drawing parallels between the decapitated Welsh saint and Gawain's own journey, saying in a Reddit AMA: "I have to imagine the poet didn't include the reference to Holywell simply as Welsh travelogue." Elsewhere, in that same AMA, he admitted that the scene was his personal favorite to film (David Lowery, "I'm David Lowery"). However, while the scene does provide a hitherto unseen level of the medieval Welsh literary tradition to the film, it should be noted that the actress playing Winifred, Erin Kellyman, is English and, unlike with Arthur and Guinevere, does not put on a Welsh accent. It has been pointed out that, as with the casting of Gawain, casting Winifred with a non-white actress helps to decolonize the Arthurian canon and, as noted by Graham Williamson, the figures that are cast with non-white actors are "outside of the English power structure." The casting of Winifred is radical, subverting the expectation and, at times, even anxiety, that the courtly lady worthy of

protection must be white, an anxiety that has been expressed with previous Arthurian adaptations, such as with the backlash against Angel Coulby's Guinevere in BBC's *Merlin* (Tollerton 114; Edwards 59-60). However, it is an imperfect decolonization, as it attempts to unsettle the notion of whiteness as the default in Arthuriana by embracing Anglocentrism. Winifred is sympathetically portrayed, her confrontation with Gawain a key moment in his character development, but, paired with the Otherness of Guinevere and Arthur, the message the film appears to send is that she is sympathetic at least in part because she sounds like Gawain, Welsh in name (and, even then, using the anglicized form of *Gwenffrewi*), but taken away from her social, cultural, and linguistic context.

There is only one distinctively Welsh aspect retained in Winifred's story, which is in the original script, in which her rapist maintains his Welsh name of Caradoc (spelled, somewhat perplexingly, as "Caradogg") (Lowery, Screenplay of *The Green Knight* 37). In the final film, however, even that trace of Welshness is removed, with Winifred saying, instead, "A lord came seeking shelter, like thee. Perhaps he was thee." It works as a means of criticizing the patriarchal chivalric order that Gawain is a member of, explicitly drawing a comparison between her attempted rapist and Gawain, who unchivalrously asks her for a favor before agreeing to return her head, while, as Kevin Harty noted in his own close reading of the film, simultaneously drawing a line between Gawain and Winifred herself, since they are both subject to a sexual attack in their bed (43). Winifred is a reflection of Gawain, of Lady Bertilak herself (both women criticizing him for his failures to live up to the knightly standard), of Essel (as a vulnerable woman asking for a form of protection from Gawain) and even of the Green Knight, as both of them are otherworldly spirits who have lost their heads, the difference being that Winifred is an explicitly Christian figure while the Green Knight is depicted as a pagan one. What she is not, however, in the context of the film, is a Welsh woman. Likewise, while making Caradoc an unnamed lord serves the broader thematic purposes of the film, it also de-emphasizes Caradoc's status—in *Buchedd Gwenfrewy*, for example, he is, explicitly, "vab y brenhin" ("son of the king"; trans mine; Baring-Gould and Fisher 400). In *Buchedd Beuno*, he is "y brenhin a oed ar y lle hwnnw" ("the king was upon that place"; trans mine; Sims-Williams §12.3). In other words, he is, explicitly, a royal figure, not a generically noble figure. This might seem to be a small point to argue, especially given that Gawain himself is a king's nephew; however, by making that change, it removes the presence of another explicitly Welsh king. Arthur is a Welsh king in presentation, but he rules as an English king, without the clusters of kings around

him that would be expected of a Welsh king. The world he rules over is seamless, albeit violent, with one high king over it. The Saxons, we are told, are oppressed in the world of the film, but, at the same time, can Arthur and his court really be considered *Welsh*, when, even in their case, Arthur and Guinevere's Welshness is mainly communicated via their accents? (And other characters, such as Morgan and Gawain, despite being related to them and, presumably, being Welsh by that standard, do not have any trace of a Welsh accent.) The Welsh are oppressive rulers, but Welsh kingship, Welsh aristocracy (even, in the case of Caradoc, negative examples of it) have been elided in favor of an artificial sense of conformity. The adaptation has, essentially, followed both postcolonialist readings of its source material, simultaneously associating Wales with danger and decay, in the forms of Arthur and Guinevere, while also making it safe, palatable, and sympathetic by erasing its identity in the form of Winifred, all the while removing any hint of Wales as an independent kingdom. It is simultaneously omnipresent and invisible, a phantom country that haunts the film, lingers at the edges of it, but is never allowed in. Over the course of nearly a thousand years, Arthuriana still has not come to terms with it – perhaps it never will, because to come to terms with it would be to pull itself up at the roots, exposing, as in the film itself, "the rot at the heart of [Camelot]."

Conclusion

In the opening scene to *The Green Knight*, the narrator promises a "a new tale . . . of an adventure brave and bold" and, judging by the critical reception to it, it can be said that the vast majority of professional critics agreed with it. An article from *The New Yorker* bears the title "'The Green Knight,' Reviewed: David Lowery's Boldly Modern Revision of a Medieval Legend" (Brody). Another review calls it a "faithful, yet quietly deconstructionist version of *The Green Knight* saga (Crow)." Ultimately, however, while Lowery's *The Green Knight* was presented and is often praised as a fresh take on Arthuriana that was willing to confront and examine the underpinnings of Arthuriana, that deconstructive tendency does not extend to the roots of the anglophone Arthurian tradition, which are still, as ever, bound in with the mistreatment of the Welsh. It is one more piece of media that enjoys the landscapes of Celtic countries, enjoys the romanticism and the mystique that is often conjured by the word "Celt," but it ultimately treats the peoples, cultures, and languages of those countries with suspicion and mistrust.

Notes

1. I would like to extend my thanks to Georgia Henley for her extensive work in suggesting additional resources for Gerald of Wales and Geoffrey of Monmouth; this paper could not have been made without her guidance. I would also like to thank Catherine McKenna and Eleanor Smith for acting as second readers, as well as to Allison Wise for editing it. My special thanks to Melissa Crofton for introducing me, in full, to the original poem when I was an undergrad, as well as for her consistent support throughout the writing process. Any errors that remain are mine and mine alone.

2. For another review that used that same Vanity Fair article as justification for the giants, see Tomberlin.

3. For a fuller overview of the evidence from other Celtic countries, see Padel, "Cornwall and the Matter of Britain"; Le Bihan.

4. This requires a slight bit of explanation as far as the situation according to the Welsh legal system—according to the Law of Women, there was an expectation that a woman should be a virgin upon marrying a man – if she was found to not be a virgin on the wedding night, she would be repudiated and publicly humiliated. A union did not gain full legal status until the seventh year, after which any divorce would require a splitting of all marital assets; if a divorce was initiated before that point, depending on who initiated it, the woman might only get certain payments, including the price of her virginity, or *cowyll*. In other words, if we are to take the Law of Women as evidence of medieval Welsh sexual mores and legal practice, then, far from cohabitation for young men and women being normal and expected, it would in fact be highly disadvantageous to the woman. For more information on this, see: Charles-Edwards, particularly at §45, §47. While this might appear on the surface to be more sexually lenient than in medieval England, it is still very clear throughout that virginity for unmarried women and sexual chastity for wives was a source of anxiety and that, while there were provisions in place to end a marriage, this was not seen as ideal. Furthermore, there is no real legal evidence for a man being able to keep more than one wife. For other interpretations of the Law of Women, see Patterson; Stacey.

5. It should be noted that, while Gillingham, for example, talks extensively about English attitudes towards the Scottish, the Irish, and the Welsh as an "imperialist perception of Celtic peoples" (*The English in the Twelfth Century* 9), which is certainly an attractive and long-standing paradigm, this is not a case of "Celtophobia," or a blanket hatred of the Celtic peoples purely on the basis of their being Celtic. While debates around terms such as "Celtoscepticism" and "Celtomania" are outside the scope of this paper, it is vital when examining the past to not put our own ideas around "the Celtic peoples" or even, following the trends of Renan and Arnould, "the Celtic race" onto the past, especially when those ideas center around the notion of the Celts as an eternally bedraggled, beaten-down people. The Breton knight mentioned by Gerald would be as Celtic as the people that he described as savages, and yet he was not situated inside that constructed Other. Rather, the Othering of the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh peoples was the result of pragmatic imperialism—

they all existed alongside England's borders and so they were all targeted, even though the ultimate means of assimilating those countries into the British Empire would be different in each case. For a sampling of the current scholarship on the Celtoscepticism-Celtomania controversy, which has become a major source of debate within the field of Celtic Studies, see Sims-Williams, Patrick. "Celtomania and Celtoscepticism (Archaeology, History, Question of Definition, Celtic History)"; Collis; Cunliffe and Koch; Sims-Williams, Patrick. "An Alternative to 'Celtic from the East' and 'Celtic from the West'"; Pope.

6. On a technical level, Geoffrey's career was about a generation or so before the other two mentioned authors—that being said, he was still existing in the same political and cultural context re: the goals of the Normans regarding Wales.

7. For comparison's sake, I would note that the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, considered by many scholars of medieval Welsh material, including myself, to be the apex of the native Welsh prose tradition (if not the apex of the medieval European literary tradition in general, if my colleagues who work in other areas will allow the Celticists our occasional vanities), exist in only two fourteenth-century manuscripts, *The Red Book of Herghest* and *The White Book of Rhydderch*.

8. For a slightly alternative analysis, see Davenport.

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"You Are No Knight": David Lowery Rivals a Medieval Poem in *The Green Knight*

Melissa Crofton

Scholarship on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is abundant, and while critics continue to introduce new and inventive ways to read the poem and the characters who inhabit it, filmmaker David Lowery breathes new life into the chivalric tale in his 2021 film, *The Green Knight*. The transition from page to screen entails a significant amount of danger, especially for a work as beloved as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and reviews of the film range from outright condemnation to praise.[1] Reviews on *Rotten Tomatoes* generally concur that the film is a waste of time and money. Take, for example, the censure of John H., who writes, "Self-indulgent claptrap. Scenes are shot because they look cool, with no thought to the story. Story, you say? There is none. I don't mind changing a 600-year-old classic, but have a reason. They've removed the morals, removed the chivalry, and replaced them with nihilism." Perhaps unsurprisingly, film critics are more attuned to the brilliance of Lowery's adaptation. K. Austin Collins writes, "Rarely has [the poem] been revisited as disarmingly, nor as movingly, as in Lowery's *The Green Knight*. It is a strange film from the start, riddled with the sparks that have animated Lowery's work from the beginning of his career." In a similar vein, film critic Richard Brody raves, "In *The Green Knight*, Lowery revises a legend, in style, and substance, in order to evoke a way of telling different stories, and of telling stories differently. He takes the risk of perpetuating a deluded gospel of evil, or of seeming to do so, in a daring effort to dramatize a world in desperate need of artistic redemption." In fact, Brody's observation captures the magnitude of *The Green Knight's* opening scene, where viewers watch a crowned figure, seated on a throne, engulfed by flames. A female's haunting voice invokes the legend of Arthur pulling Excaliber from the stone, but changes direction abruptly, warning the audience, "this is not that king, nor is this his song. Let me tell you instead a new tale."

For a poem that revolves around the importance of the telling of tales, I can think of no better way to frame this essay than by offering to tell you *my* tale of how I taught the poem in conjunction with David Lowery's 2021 film; however, before doing so, indulge me while I explain why I decided to do so. *The Green Knight* was the first film I saw in

a movie theater after COVID turned our world upside down. Literally armed with my two doses of the vaccine, I set out on the quest to see a movie I had been eagerly anticipating since the news of its filming was released. The film wasn't getting a lot of national hype, so I wasn't surprised that the theater was nearly empty—only one other gentleman and I were in the theater.[2] I was engrossed with the events that played out on the screen, and nearly every scene provides a number of things worthy of discussion.[3] After the credits finished rolling, my fellow moviegoer and I both got up to leave. The two of us met under the glare of the exit lighting, when he looked at me and asked, "Well, what did you think?" I laughed and replied, "I'm a medievalist, and I've been teaching this poem for more than twenty years. I don't know if you're ready to hear all I have to say, and to be completely honest, I'm still trying to process what I just saw." The two of us chuckled, and he answered, "You're probably right. I had no idea this was based on a poem, and if this movie is true to that, I guess I don't know what to think." He wasn't alone in his thoughts, for even I was at a loss for words.

Tales about the reign of King Arthur, his knights of the Round Table, and the glorious realm of Camelot abound, and the poet luxuriates in presenting the court as being formed of

> The most kyd knyghtes under Krystes selven,
> And the lovelokkest ladies that ever lif haden,
> And he the comlokest kyng, that the court haldes. (Battles 51-53)

> The knights most renowned after the name of Christ,
> And the ladies most lovely that ever life enjoyed,
> And he, king most courteous, who that court possessed. (Tolkien 51-53)[4]

Of these renowned knights, Gawain is a perennial favorite, especially when it comes to his legendary accomplishments—and faults—in the medieval poem that bears his name. Lurking below this idyllic world, however, is the adultery between Lancelot and Guinevere. That ill-fated relationship is not the subject of the poem, and in "Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History, and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," Sheila Fisher notes how,

> Through its emphasis on beginnings, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* [. . .] tries to revise Arthurian history in order to make it come out right. The purpose of this revisionary agenda is nothing less than to demonstrate how the Round Table might have

> averted its own destruction by adhering to the expectations of masculine behavior inherent in Christian chivalry. (129)

Without a doubt, Lowery takes the process of revision very seriously in his adaptation, though on a much larger scale than evidenced in the poem. *The Green Knight* confronts unchivalrous behavior and makes it an even weightier issue; however, Lowery removes the usual suspects for Camelot's demise and places responsibility on the decisions of Gawain. In doing so, Lowery actively rejects the poet's idealism by presenting viewers with a figure who is a far cry from the chivalric figure who inhabits the poem. Not only is Lowery's reconstruction of Gawain more akin to branches of Arthurian myth that depict him as a womanizer, but he is not even a knight, though he desperately yearns to become one.[5] In the film's opening mise-en-scène of him, Gawain is fast asleep in a brothel before being rudely awakened by his lover, who throws a bucket of water on his head. Because of Lowery's radical transformation of Gawain, Alissa Wilkinson suggests a playful double-meaning for the title of the film. While it still identifies the poem's antagonist, brilliantly played by Ralph Ineson, Wilkinson observes that it also mirrors the characterization of Gawain, who "is young, impetuous, prone to carousing, and ashamed of how little of his life has been spent on bold and brave exploits. He's new to manhood. In other words, he's also 'green', and that's an important part of the story."[6] For a lad who is depicted as knowing his way around a brothel, Lowery's Gawain will be ill-equipped to handle the Lady's eventual temptation.

Of course, Lowery's version of Gawain as a young, inexperienced, want-to-be knight is dependent upon a dramatic face-lift for Camelot. In *SGGK*, Camelot is resplendent in its décor, and

> Quene Guenore, ful gay, graythed in the myddes,
> Dressed on the dere des, dubbed al aboute;
> Small sendal bisides, a selure hir over
> Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe
> That were enbrawded and beten wyth the best gemmes
> That myght be preved of prys wyth penyes to bye, in daye;
> The comlokest to discrye
> Ther glent with yyen gray,
> A semloker that ever he syye
> Soth moght no mon say! (Battles 74-84)

> Queen Guinevere the gay was with grace in the midst
> of the adorned dais set. Dearly was it arrayed:

finest sendal at her sides, a ceiling above her
of true tissue of Tolouse, and tapestries of Tharsia
that were embroidered and bound with the brightest gems
one might prove and appraise to purchase for coin any day.
That loveliest lady there
on them glanced with eyes of grey;
that he found ever one more fair
in sooth might no man say. (Tolkien 74-84)

Instead of a court in its glorious early years, *The Green Knight's* Camelot is a decidedly postlapsarian one. Filmed with very little ambient light, the court of Camelot is cold, dark, and foreboding, and its decay reflects Gawain's lacking moral fiber. If it weren't for one, the change in the other would not play out as spectacularly as it does on the screen. The beautiful, young Guinevere of the poem is replaced with an aging Guinevere, who is accompanied by a likewise aging Arthur. Interestingly enough, neither of them are named; they are merely referred to as their titles of King and Queen. While this depiction might vex both fans and critics alike, it ultimately remedies the longstanding problem of the queen being objectified as a beautiful creature, who not only lacks substance in the poem, but also a voice. Since the emergence of feminist criticism, scholars have decried the fact that Guinevere is "marginalized to such an extent that she is buried in the plot of the poem" (Fisher 135).[7] Lowery, on the other hand, grants her the power of speech, albeit minimal, and she will ultimately set events in motion after reading the Green Knight's letter concerning the game.

Similar to the poem, Lowery's court is gathered to celebrate Christmas, but it is incongruous with the one presented in the poem "With rych revel oryght, and rechles merthes" ("Amid merriment unmatched and mirth without care;" Battles, *SGGK* 40; Tolkien, *SGGK* 40). The celebrants in the film are many, and though they interact with one another, the room seems fraught with tension. It becomes even more so when Arthur, looking at his retinue, calls Gawain forward. Gawain's discomfort is clearly visible when his uncle directs him to "Sit here next to us. Besides me and my queen." When Gawain admits that the empty seat on the dais is not his place, Arthur concurs, "No. Let it be today. Its owner is away. Who knows when he will return?" It is up to the viewer to figure out whose seat this might be, but I think it's Lancelot's, which fits quite well with the action that will occur in Lord Bertilak's home.[8]

With an aging king, who has no immediate heir of his own, Gawain is poised to inherit the throne after his uncle's impending death. Whereas "Gawain's claim to fame is his *lack* of identity independent

of Arthur" in *SGGK*, the close bond they share with one another in the poem is absent in the film (Kamps 318). Arthur, who confesses he knows next to nothing about his nephew, tries to amend this by asking Gawain to join him on the dais. "Tell me a tale of thyself, so I might know thee," Arthur murmurs, and a dumbfounded Gawain responds, "I have no tale to tell." Gawain's right, of course, because his only exploits thus far have been the prolific sowing of his wild oats, as evidenced by the entire brothel's knowledge of him. It is at this point that Guinevere comes to his defense, prognosticating, "Yet. You have none to tell yet." She directs Gawain to look around the banquet hall and tell her what he sees. The camera pans over the Round Table, where a large retinue of knights are shown, and Gawain answers, "I see legends." When Guinevere warns him not to take his "place amongst them idly," Arthur stands to deliver a heartfelt speech to his men:

> Out my window this morn I looked, and I saw a land shaped by your hands. You have lain those same hands upon our Saxon brethren, who now in your shadow bow their heads like babes. Peace. Peace you have brought to your kingdom, so it is in peace that I, I now say to you, that I…I am the luckiest here today, because I am amongst thee.

Arthur's delivery of this praise is slow and deliberate, and as he moves around the room, Gawain is strategically seated in Arthur's shadow. As a young man with no tales under his belt, let alone a knighthood like the rest of the men possess, Gawain is all the more eager to prove himself, though the look on his face indicates he doubts his ability to do so. The chance comes quickly, for as soon as Arthur bids his court to regale him with a tale of glory, the doors blow open, and the Green Knight stands in the doorway, summoned through the sorcery of Gawain's mother, who is not Morgause from traditional Arthurian myth, but rather her sister, Morgan le Fay.

Unlike in the poem, where the court, described as "berdles chylder" ("beardless children"; Battles, *SGGK* 280; Tolkien, *SGGK* 280), stares at him in amazement, the men in Lowery's film are older and more accomplished; consequently, they immediately stand with drawn swords as the Green Knight advances.[9] Arthur directs them with one word to "Hold!" and he waves the Green Knight forward. The significance of depicting Arthur as an elderly king in *The Green Knight* becomes all too clear when Sean Harris, who plays Arthur, acknowledges his limitations: "Though my will longs to leap across this table and meet thee, my body will not follow." All in the room bear witness to their king's inability to uphold his honor, and Guinevere, who looks down in res-

ignation, has a tear streaming down her face. Arthur looks around the room, and in a dramatic reversal of the poem's actions, requests a volunteer, "Surely there is one amongst us here who will meet this knight on his terms."[10] All remain silent, looking around for someone to come forward until Gawain, now standing behind his king and uncle, steps forth. No matter how much Lowery deviates from *SGGK*, he draws inspiration from it at the most strategic moments. In the poem, Gawain accepts the knight's challenge by humbly declaring,

> I am the wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,
> And lest lur of my lyf, who laytes the sothe;
> Bot for as much as ye ar myn em I am only to prayse,
> No bounté bot your blod I in my bodé knowe. (Battles 354-57)

> I am the weakest, I am aware, and in wit feeblest,
> and the least loss, if I live not, if one would learn the truth.
> Only because you are my uncle is honour given me:
> save your blood in my body I boast of no virtue. (Tolkien 354-57)

The concept of Gawain as being the weakest, the feeblest, and having the least value of life is decidedly more apropos in the film, as Arthur's previous conversation with Gawain indicates. Dev Patel, in the role of Gawain, does not evince the humility or the eloquence of Gawain's response in the poem; instead, he simply states, "I will do it." Arthur asks his nephew, "Do you understand this challenge?" Gawain's response is, "I do. I think I do," turning to Arthur for approval. Of course, Gawain is unprepared for this—and any other challenge—by not having his own sword, and when the Green Knight dismounts, Gawain swallows, hangs his head, and pleads, "I need a sword." A glance around the room shows what the rest of the court thinks of him. Not only do Arthur's men have their swords at their sides, but they grasp them firmly by the hilt, indicating how personal one's weapon is to his identity as a knight. Gawain repeats, "I need...I need a sword," and since he is the only one willing to uphold the honor of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, Arthur does the only thing he can under the circumstances—he graciously offers Excalibur, though he seems to struggle with its weight. Maybe, perhaps, he struggles with the fact that he's handing it over to his nephew—a nephew he barely knows and who has not participated in any battles like the knights of the Round Table have done.

Audiences who know Arthurian lore are reminded of the tales of Robert de Boron or Malory, where a young Arthur effortlessly pulls Excalibur out of an anvil. Gawain, however, is no Arthur, nor is Lowery's

Arthur the same Arthur from lore. Gawain thus becomes his uncle's proxy, doing exactly what Arthur's aging body denies him—facing the Green Knight. The otherwise dark lighting of this scene changes the moment Gawain wields Excalibur, with a light shining down on him as he accepts the legendary sword. As Gawain gazes longingly at Excalibur, you can see his fear, mixed with determination, while the Green Knight's footsteps echo in the background, getting ever closer to his prey. This is Gawain's moment to amaze the court and prove himself worthy, and he impulsively leaps across the table, just as his uncle previously wished he could do. On the defensive, Gawain breathes deep, and challenges, "Have at me, Green Knight."[11] In an attempt to muster his nerves, Gawain demands, "Stand up and face me," inching closer and closer to his foe, who has always been standing up *and* facing Gawain. Guinevere, rising from her throne whispers, "Have courage," and Gawain boasts, "Never forget what happened here upon this Christmas day," before delivering what would be a fatal blow for any mortal. The camera pans to Arthur, who doesn't seem very proud of his nephew's first beheading, and as the Green Knight's head tumbles across the floor, the camera angle shifts to an aerial shot of his body, sprawled on a floor that has an inlaid pentangle design. Although Gawain should be proud of his ability to behead such a formidable character with a single blow of someone else's sword, his face becomes one of sheer terror as the Green Knight stands up, walks across the floor, picks up his head, and utters the only words he's spoken during the entire scene, "One year hence."

The scene continues to build in intensity, and the Green Knight cackles maniacally as he rides off in a style reminiscent of Washington Irving's headless horseman. Lowery reverts to another aerial shot of Gawain standing on the blood-splattered floor before the camera pans around the room, focusing on everyone's cheers for the spectacle they've just beheld. While the atmosphere in the room has changed significantly, becoming one of exuberance instead of gloom, Gawain's ability to complete the Green Knight's challenge using Excalibur does not represent hope for the future, as it did for Arthur under the tutelage of Merlin. Gawain's heroics are short-lived, and although he becomes the talk of the town after his victory, he quickly reverts to his earlier lifestyle of debauchery. Unlike his uncle and his literary namesake in *SGGK*, Dev Patel's greenness haunts him in the days leading up to his departure, and he ultimately tries to weasel out of his obligation. Arthur is significantly weaker after the passing of the year, and his declining health leads him to expect greatness from his heir. Self-doubt consumes Gawain at every turn, and he has only lived up to that expectation once. His vulnerability becomes even more apparent when he

admits, "I fear I am not meant for greatness." Even Essel, his brothel-dwelling love interest, later ponders, "Why greatness? Why is goodness not enough?" Perhaps therein lies the answer, though I'm not entirely sure one could even call Lowery's vision of Gawain good.[12]

Challenging the canonicity of any literary work in this way can create a backlash, as seen in Rachel Martin's, Drew Maxwell's, and Andrew Wahnsiedler's essays. In "Is This Really All There Is?: The Role and Representation of Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and David Lowery's *The Green Knight*," Drew Maxwell notes that the problem is not the fact that Lowery changes the conventions of the poem, but that he fails to improve the representation of women in the film, especially considering his addition of several new female characters. My interaction with my fellow moviegoer made me wonder. If scholars and the average moviegoer weren't as generous with their accolades as film critics, how would my undergraduates react to the film? Would they, who don't know the poem as well as medievalists, react to the film more or less favorably?[13] Of course, I have to preface my experience with a brief explanation of where I teach—Florida Tech, a popular STEM university. Teaching literature at a STEM university is rewarding, but it entails a significant number of difficulties. Are students fascinated by science, space, and engineering? Most definitely. But do they appreciate the minimal exposure to courses in the humanities that their program of studies requires them to take? Not always, especially in a world where the concept of entertainment revolves around film, music, and television. Woe to the professor who expects her students to actually read. An English professor's task is even more complicated when the course is a survey of Medieval and Early Modern literature.[14] Although my students and I have lively discussions about the literature they are required to read, most still grapple with thoughts and ideas that are very foreign to the twenty-first century STEM-focused mindset. Unlike Kathleen Forni, who claims in her essay, "Lowery's *The Green Knight*: Honor Reconsidered," that many of her students have been introduced to the poem in high school, an overwhelming majority of my students have never heard of the poem, let alone read it. The average number of individuals who claim they have rarely extends beyond three or four, and that's a generous estimation. Of course, high school curricula vary significantly from state to state, and Florida Tech also has a sizable international student population. Add to that the fact that students are products of a virtual education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it's not surprising that *SGGK* is no longer the staple it once was in the high-school English classroom.

The release of *The Green Knight* thus creates a new world of possibilities for teaching the nearly 700-year-old poem. I considered a

number of ways to incorporate the film in my classroom, but I ultimately settled on the following method. I provided an introduction to the poem on our first day, and then we covered one fitt per day. My students had very high expectations when we wrapped up fitt three, and their first essay was due after they finished reading fitt four, which is always when they express the most disappointment. In anticipation of their usual response to the ending—"Wait! This was just some ridiculous test?!"—I ask them in the prompt to consider what they would like to see in the film adaptation. My discussions focus on the representation of female characters, for, as Geraldine Heng posits,

> This unfamiliar-familiar story transmits the registers of the feminine text, whose key players are curiously elusive, enigmatic women. Plans initiated by one woman are directed at another, performed by a third, and modulated by the actions of a fourth: read in this fashion, the romance is a theater of its feminine figures, a field in which forces of tension and filiation circulate within a feminine relay. ("Feminine Knots" 501)[15]

I was not surprised, then, when my students expressed a desire to see the role of women expanded. Interestingly, they were very opinionated about which female characters they'd like to see more of on the screen, and how they'd like them to act. One student, whom I've had in a freshman composition class, wanted to see a lot more of Morgan le Fay:

> I found the poem a bit disappointing because Morgan le Fay is the mastermind behind the whole plot, and the reader does not get to interact with her at all. Morgan le Fay is also not an ordinary woman of the Middle Ages, and I would have liked to see the poem explore the consequences of being such an unconventional woman. (Barnes 2)

Many students were likewise annoyed with Lady Bertilak's lack of agency in the poem, which parallels Lawrence Warner's argument in "The Lady, the Goddess, and the Text of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*":

> The lady of Hautdesert is either a passive cipher of her husband's wishes [. . .], who performs her limited task in ignorance of its purpose, or rather, as Paul Battles has recently put it, "a fundamentally ambiguous character" with "an air of sustained mystery about her," whose "centrality to the poem" earlier critics have overlooked. (334-35)

Students wanted this situation to be rectified, and Adam Lastowka, a former student of mine who is a physics major, was right on target with regard to the trajectory that Lowery's Lady would ultimately take in the film. According to him,

> Lady Bertilak's motivations need [to be] updated. Ever since the wakes of the third and fourth wave of feminism began to sweep through cinema, we have seen a resurgence of powerful female characters weaponizing their sexuality for their own means. The femme fatale is a complex, paradoxically sexist and empowering role, but through it, I think Lady Bertilak's behavior could be appropriately translated to today's films. However, at the end of [the poem] the titular antagonist reveals he commanded her to seduce Gawain. This arrests our impression of Lady Bertilak's power and agency, degrading her character and destroying our intrigue. For a modern adaptation to succeed, I think Lady Bertilak should be reimagined as the mastermind behind the whole game, or possibly some sort of free agent [. . .]. Right now she is just a pawn. (3)

Jillian Earley recommended a similar revision of Lady Bertilak, but she also wanted to see Guinevere's character developed more:

> Ideally, I would give Guinevere a more active role, instead of being silent for the entirety of the poem. In a similar vein, I would like to give Lady Bertilak some autonomy, but that would undermine the story since she was built to be obedient to Lord Bertilak. As a compromise, I might instead make it so that it is clear that she is improvising her temptations with Gawain [. . .]. I think a scene of Gawain alone contemplating the temptations of Lady Bertilak would be a good addition to the movie, as it will allow the audience to both see and hear the mental turmoil Gawain experiences that would otherwise be missed unless the audience has already read the poem. (3)

Another former student, Isabelle Hudgins, took the expansion of the women's roles a bit further by suggesting it should be done in a manner that escalates Gawain's danger in the bedroom as Lady Bertilak attempts to seduce him:

> I feel there was a lot that could have been explored by having Lady Bertilak succeed in her seduction on the third day, and having the exchange as it had every other night. Gawain had

> already compromised some of his morals and was committing light adultery anyhow, as well as [breaking] the terms of his deal. I think fully committing to his moral compromise and then completing the terms of his deal would leave open an interesting place for discussion about the view of morality on sexuality, and whether it was weighed any differently when with a man or woman. (2-3)

Last, but certainly not least, is Johann Vennink, a sophomore in Aerospace Engineering, who echoes the previous sentiments about wanting more character development; however, he also wants to see more of Gawain's journey from Camelot to Castle Hautdesert. As he notes in *SGGK*, Gawain faces dangers from beasts like wolves, trolls, bears, and giants on his travels, but his adventures are quickly summed up by the poet:

> Nade he ben dughty and dryye, and Dryghtyn hade served,
> Douteles he had ben ded and dreped ful ofte. (Battles 724-25)
>
> Had he not been stalwart and staunch and steadfast in God,
> He doubtless would have died and death had met often. (Tolkien 724-25)

Consequently, Vennink was careful to note,

> While there is mention that the woods were perilous and Gawain had to contend with various threats, the journey is skipped. From a writing perspective, this makes sense because the meat of the story has to do with Gawain's time playing the various games. For a film, however, [. . .] the journey needs to be fleshed out a little more. Secondly, the women. From literature, we know Guinevere is the good queen and from the text we can gather that a good queen acts a certain way, but considering modern standards, a "seen but not heard" queen is not generally accepted. A film would probably want to change this in order to appeal to more people. (3)

While most students accurately predicted how Lowery would handle his adaptation, most of their responses echoed some of the issues I grappled with in my first few viewings of the film. In my opinion, *The Green Knight's* success comes through the radical transformation of its female characters. From the shocking revelation of Morgan le Fay as Gawain's mother, to Guinevere's ominous recitation of the Green

Knight's challenge, the film packs a powerful punch when it comes to a woman's ability to overpower her male protagonists. The strong performances of Sarita Choudury, Katie Dickie, Erin Kellyman, and Alicia Vikander take women out of the margins and place them front and center, where they belong.[16] Of course, Lady Bertilak has always been a formidable presence in the poem, though she becomes even more so with Alicia Vikander's dazzling performance. The dramatic subversion of Gawain's character becomes necessary in order to realize the threat she represents, and I was proud of the students who realized this.[17] As much as I would love to include Adam Lastowka's full response to the film review, here are his insightful comments about Gawain's transformation:

> David Lowery's 2021 adaptation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a mind- bending, kaleidoscopic deconstruction of the source material. The film is slow, dense, and full of symbolism [. . .]. Gawain is drenched in sin from the start. Following some Delphic foreshadowing, we see Gawain hungover, naked, and flirting with his friend-with-benefits, Essel, in a brothel on Christmas morning. He lies to his mother about attending mass, and he beheads the Green Knight not to defend Arthur, but to impress him. Sir Gawain begins his quest as just Gawain—he is not even a knight. This is Lowery's Gawain: pathetic, weak, aware of his shortcomings, and desperately trying to improve himself. While the poem assumes Gawain's honor as an ideal, Lowery pulls apart the knightly virtue's threads to expose its nucleus: self-worth and fulfillment. (1-2)

Even though Lastowka is the same student who wanted to see Lady Bertilak's motivations updated, like Drew Maxwell, he was not impressed with how the film handled its other female characters. His critique was that "Essel was only loosely characterized, Arthur still took major precedence over Guinevere, and Winifred's function was mechanical and not much more" (6). Lastowka was, however, the only one who rose to Lady Bertilak's defense by noticing that the film grants her significantly more agency. In lecture, I paid close attention to her description in *SGGK*:

> Ho was the fayrest in felle, of flesche and of lyre
> And of compas and colour and costes, of alle other,
> And wener then Wenore, as the wyye thoght. (Battles 943-45).

> She was fairer in face, in her flesh and her skin,
> Her proportions, her complexion, and her port than all others
> And more lovely than Guinevere to Gawain she looked. (Tolkien 943-45)

I warned my class that if Lady Bertilak could rival a young, prelapsarian Guinevere in the poem, Gawain's playboy lifestyle on film was definitely going to land him in more trouble than he has ever found himself. What makes Lady Bertilak even more dangerous is the fact that she *knows* she has this power, and she knows just how and when to wield it. This is best evidenced in the library scene, an addition Lowery makes to the film that is both rhetorically and visually stunning. The scene begins as Gawain is shown wandering through the Bertilak home before finding an impressive library. Lady Bertilak discovers him examining the books on her shelves, and Gawain exclaims, "I never knew so many books existed. Have you read them all?" The Lady replies, "Yes, all of them I've read. Some I've written, some I've copied. They're tales I've heard, songs that have been sung to me. I write them down and, sometimes, don't tell anyone this, sometimes, when I see room for improvements, I make them." Her bold declaration, "When I see room for improvements, I make them," not only applies to her literary prowess to rewrite the faults she finds in her manuscripts, but it's also a playful nod to what Lowery, himself, has accomplished with *The Green Knight*.[18]

The most widely-debated topic for my students—both in their writing and our classroom discussion—was the ending of the film. We spent an entire day talking about this, and even the quietest students were very opinionated about it. Not surprisingly, nearly everyone expressed frustration with the ending. When the Green Knight hefts his ax for the reciprocal blow, Lowery interrupts it with a long dream sequence in which Gawain is shown to be a terrible leader if he keeps the belt. After coming to this realization, Lowery returns us to the scene of Gawain's beheading. Gawain, knowing how miserable his future rule would be, takes off the belt and says, "There. Now I'm ready. I'm ready now." The Green Knight bends down, caresses Gawain's cheek, and proclaims, "Well done, my brave knight. Now... off with your head." In a *Vanity Fair* article, Lowery admits, "I wanted to write an ending where his head gets chopped off, and that's a positive thing," he says. "That's a happy ending. He faces his fate bravely, and there's honor and integrity in that. But that doesn't mean that he's dead, he's killed. He received the blow that he was dealt, and all is set right within the universe of the film" (Robinson).

Several students recognized the philosophical complexities of the ending, and one of them predicted Lowery's sentiments from the *Vanity Fair* interview:

> While I think both endings are equally meaningful, the movie's ending was more satisfying and entertaining than the ending in the poem. Gawain going from immature to chivalrous in the face of death was a satisfying and inspiring character arc that showed how the character truly changed. The Green Knight telling Gawain he made the right decision is Lowery's message that despite the flaws in Gawain's chivalry, he can still become a good man. The message I extrapolated from the text is that Gawain is human, and not even the most chivalrous knights can maintain their honor when they are pushed to the limit, but [they] can still be a good man. (Raj 2-3)

Once more, Adam Lastowka rose to the challenge of the written assignment by remarking,

> Gawain searches for a father figure in Arthur, Lord Bertilak, and the Green Knight. All of these characters offer Gawain support in their own way, but in doing so, they also emasculate him—a real man wouldn't need any help on his quest. Ultimately, the one who witnesses Gawain's transition into a true man is the one who beheads him. But before he does, he tells Gawain, "Well done, my brave knight. Now, off with your head." This affectionate, fatherly affirmation is Gawain's reward for his trials, and I felt sympathetic satisfaction when I heard it. In the poem, the Green Knight is a paradoxically benevolent and antagonistic character, and these two final sentences display that contrast in full. The irony in the scene is multifaceted: if Gawain truly becomes a man at the end of the film, he shouldn't need to hear someone say, "good job" as he dies. (3)

Finally, I return a final time to the ideas of Isabelle Hudgins, who presents two versions of how she interpreted the ending:

> It is left a bit up to interpretation as to whether or not Gawain dies. Depending on the potential ending, this changes my feelings on it. If Gawain were to die in the end of the film, and the dream sequence was truly a flash of the life of power he could have led but ultimately did not, then I find it to be a

> very interesting glimpse into what could have been if Gawain was a better man; this is especially true because we see him coming short of deserving this glory so many times. If Gawain goes on to live after having his potential life flash before his eyes and continues down that path, then I find the dream sequence to be a cheap storytelling element here. If Gawain was to live, however, I appreciate that it was accurate to the poem's ending, although he should be going back in shame, not glory. (3)

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a tale that will never grow old, but modern adaptations of it on film have, for the most part, been epic failures.[19] All of that changed with the release of A24's *The Green Knight*, though, as Danièle Cybulskie maintains, "While it's not likely to be a blockbuster with its slow pace and artistic choices, *The Green Knight* is the first in a long time that medievalists will appreciate for its sometimes fierce loyalty to the source material, even if this version of Gawain is not the one we love and are familiar with." No matter what one's opinion of the film is, Lowery has forever altered the way students and scholars approach the poem, and the medievalist in me admires how Lowery revels in subversion. From waking up in his lover's bed on Christmas morning, his unchivalrous rejection of Essel's proposal, his inconsiderate demand to be compensated for retrieving Saint Winifred's head, and finally, to his literal entrapment at the hand of the Lady, Gawain has proven that he isn't ready for knighthood, and that's precisely what makes Lowery's adaptation so magnificent. With the state of the humanities in such turmoil when it comes to higher education, the addition of the film in the classroom creates a world of opportunities if handled properly, and I'm sure other methods would work as well as the manner in which I designed the project for my course. I briefly considered showing my students the film before having them read the poem based on Jen Yamato's query, "Is it better to go in blindly, or have read the CliffsNotes?" Though I opted for having my students read the full-length text over jumping in to the film clueless, I can't help but wonder how the opposite method might have altered their opinion of both the poem and the film. Would they, perhaps, love the film, but hate the poem? If my encounter with a fellow theatergoer is any indication, perhaps not. After all, he had just as many questions as I did without even knowing the film was based on an esteemed piece of medieval literature. Overall, students appreciated the experiment as much as I did, and many believe I should continue teaching the poem in conjunction with the film, even if the ejaculation scene proves to be quite a shock. In the end, there's always bound to be at least one

fault-finding critic, so perhaps Essel embodies the voice of reason and wisdom when she ponders, "Why is goodness not enough?"

Notes

1. Hereafter *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* will be abbreviated as *SGGK*.

2. According to IMDB.com, the film grossed $18,887,953 worldwide.

3. Nearly two years after my first viewing of the film, Justin Chang's assessment of the film perfectly sums up my experience: "For more than two hours I sat there properly transfixed, bewitched, ensorcelled."

4. All quotations are cited by line numbers.

5. For an analysis of the womanizing Gawain, see Larry D. Benson's *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. As Benson notes, "in the First Continuation of *Perceval*, in which Gawain is generally a model of chivalric virtue, he is guilty of two characteristic crimes, lechery and rape. Rape was seldom necessary, for Gawain is one of the most accomplished lovers in medieval literature" (103). For a more recent treatment of Gawain, see Cory J. Rushton's "The Lady's Man: Gawain as Lover in Middle English Literature" in *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*.

6. In the special features section of *The Green Knight* on DVD, many cast members comment about Ralph Ineson's portrayal of the Green Knight. Lowery describes his vision of the Green Knight of being "an 8-foot-tall Druidic being made of Wood." Beside wearing layers of prosthetics, Ineson wore contact lenses made of wood.

7. Although this list is by no means exhaustive, the role of women in *SGGK* is discussed in Battles (323-43), Fisher (71-105), Rowley (158-77), and Heng ("A Woman Wants" 101-34 and "Feminine Knots" 500-14).

8. Kevin J. Harty questions whether the seat belongs to Lancelot or Perceval in "Notes Towards a Close Reading of David Lowery's 2021 Film *The Green Knight*." Harty claims, "the king assures Gawain that the usual occupant—a special knight (Lancelot? Perceval?) perhaps put on a quest—is absent" (35).

9. An early discussion of the term "berdless" can be found in Patricia A. Moody's "The Childgered Arthur of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" (173-80). See also "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: An Essay in Enigma" by Derek Pearsall (248-58).

10. In *SGGK*, when the Green Knight taunts the court after no one agrees his game, Arthur initially accepts the challenge:

> Gif me now thy geserne, upon Godes halve,
> And I schal baythen thy bone that thou boden habbes.
> Lyghtly lepes he hym to, and laght at his honde. (Battles 326-28)

> Give me now thy guisarm, in God's name, sir,
> and I will bring thee the blessing thou has begged to receive.'
> Quick then he came to him and caught it from his hand. (Tolkien 326-28)

11. I'm a Monty Python fan, and I couldn't help but envision the scene in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* in which Arthur meets the Black Knight. Even A.O. Scott notes Monty Python resonances in his *New York Times* article.

12. Although Lowery's Gawain is not the chivalrous one from the poem, Patel's performance in the film is compelling.

13. With the glacial pace of publishing in a post-Covid world, there are very few full-length essays about *The Green Knight*. Blogging has thus far been more popular with medievalists; however, the discussions are not lengthy. For more information, see Richard Fahey's "*The Green Knight*: Another Medievalist's Review," Elyse Martin and Sean Rubin's "Medievalists Ask Five Questions About A24's *The Green Knight*," Murray Dahm's "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the Movies," and Danièle Cybulskie's "Medieval Movie Review: *The Green Knight*."

14. Because Florida Tech has such a small Humanities department, we used to only have two literature survey courses, which combined British and American literature—the first survey covers the eighteenth century through the end of the nineteenth century, and the second survey begins with twentieth-century literature. In 2018, I designed a new survey, "British Literature and Culture," which begins with Anglo-Saxon literature and ends with the seventeenth century. This is one of a small number of courses that students can take to satisfy their Humanities core curriculum for undergraduate studies. For this exercise, I was teaching two sections of this course with forty-two students.

15. Some of these sources have already been cited earlier in the essay, but for more information about this topic, see Warner (334-51), Rowley, Heng ("Feminine Knots"), Kamps, Fisher ("Leaving Morgan Aside" and "Taken Men and Token Women"), and Turner (57-70).

16. While Erin Kellyman's character, St. Winifred, does not make an appearance in the poem, there is the passing reference to her as Gawain

> fares over the fordes by the forlondes,
> Over at the Holy Hede. (Battles 699-700)
>
> Over the fords he fared by the flats near the sea
> and then over by the Holy Head (Tolkien 699-700).

17. It also helps that Alicia Vikander is cast as Essel, Gawain's love interest in Camelot.

18. I delivered my first conference paper on *The Green Knight* at the 57th International Congress on Medieval Studies in May 2022. In my paper,

"Sometimes, When I See Room for Improvements, I Make Them": Revising Lady Bertilak's Agency in *The Green Knight,*" I argue that Lowery grants Lady Bertilak significantly more agency in the film, unlike Drew Maxwell's argument in her essay from this collection. I'm currently revising this essay for publication. I am also part of the upcoming 58th ICMS, where I am a panelist on a session hosted by the *Pearl*-Poet Society called "'And they were Zoommates': Teaching, Translating, and Technology."

19. I'm referring to two films directed by Steven Weeks. The first, from 1973, is titled *Gawain and the Green Knight,* starring Murray Head and Nigel Green. The remake of the film, *Sword of the Valiant: The Legend of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, was completed in 1984, and stars Sean Connery as the knight.

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Lowery's *The Green Knight*: Honor Reconsidered

Kathleen Forni

It is a complete reversal of the poem's ending, turning this into a story about living in peace with yourself, as opposed to an impossible Code thrust on you by society. In many ways, it's like Vikander's Lady also saying she changes the stories she reads when she sees room for improvement—although Lowery tells us that line was not intended to be self-referential about how he adapted the poem.

-David Crow

Unlike some of my colleagues, I've found that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* can sometimes be a tough sell, in part because my students often encounter the poem in high school (and they've "already read it"), but also because its mannered decorum and seemingly esoteric and privileged crisis of chivalric conscience can be increasingly alien to some undergraduates seeking "relevance," and challenging for instructors desiring to diversify the medieval canon. Students can appreciate the intricate balanced structure of the poem, the themes of mortality and mutability, and the implications of the test that Gawain fails (i.e., fear for one's life leads to ethical compromise or violation), but they often don't find the poem to be necessarily applicable, as they say, to their own lives. Gawain appears willing to sacrifice his life to keep his word. I ask students what *they* would be willing to die for, and protecting their family is the most common answer. Breaking one's word or a promise, however, particularly within the context of a game without apparent consequence to the opposing players and simply as a point of honor, seems less compelling, if not baffling. They were, however, quite taken by David Lowery's 2021 film adaptation *The Green Knight* (notwithstanding their complaint that there was "too much water") and accurately concluded that in the end Gawain was "true to himself," a conceit (or cliché) they did find compelling.

While David Crow suggests in my epigraph that Lowery completely reverses the ending of the poem, the medieval Gawain's shame for failing to be true to himself is arguably the same case in the original poem since his failure at loyalty in the exchange game is forgiven by

the Green Knight and honored by Arthur's court. His patent sense of mortification at his "untrawthe" or untruth (2383; 2509) appears to be a matter of individual ethical and religious integrity rather than a failure to maintain chivalric honor.[1] The film helps the students see the consequences of this failure in material (or as one student said, "real life") rather than simply moral or spiritual terms. Using the notion of the quest as a series of tests leading to the maturation of the knight, the film speaks to a new generation of young people—perhaps specifically men—for whom honor or public image seems predicated less on performative loyalty to social convention than on personal integrity based on a resistance to traditional aspirations. The twenty-first century Gawain seems less frightened of dying than enduring a living death of conformity to social expectations.

Lowery makes a number of narrative changes to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* that emphasize the different worlds the chivalric protagonists inhabit that might suggest his own protagonist's reluctance to join the legendary adult status quo. In the poem, Camelot is in its joyful "first age" (54):

> With mony luflych lorde, ledes of the best —
> Rekenly of the Rounde Table alle tho rich brether—
> With rych revel oryght, and rechles merthes [. . .]
> For ther the fest was ilyche ful fiften dayes,
> With alle the mete and the mirthe that men couthe avyse;
> Such glaum ande gle glorious to here,
> Dere dyn upon day, daunsyng on nyghtes. (38-47)

> Many good knights and gay his guests were there,
> Arrayed of the Round Table rightful brothers,
> With feasting and fellowship and carefree mirth . . .
> For the feast was in force full fifteen days,
> With all the meat and the mirth that men could devise,
> Such gaiety and glee, glorious to hear,
> Brave din by day, dancing by night. (Boroff 38-47)[2]

In sharp contrast to the mirth, carols, and dancing, the Yuletide setting in *The Green Knight* is restrained and stony, "with the Round Table and the castle rendered in dull, almost industrial grays and harsh lighting" (Wilkinson). One gets a sense of the staid senescence of *The Green Knight's* Camelot, and viewers, like Gawain himself, probably view the commoners' tavern as more convivial, and certainly more vital. Lowery suggests that the intended effect is "The idea [. . .] that there's some rot at the heart of that court" (Robinson). While the medieval Gawain is

well integrated into the court, sitting next to Guinevere during the holiday festivities, in a display of chivalric humility he describes himself as the "wakkest [. . .] and of wyt feblest" ("the weakest and of feeblest wit"; my trans) and he says that he has "no bounté" (virtue, honor) but for his relationship to Arthur (354-57). The modern Gawain, however, for whom the description would be uncomfortably accurate, is clearly not a regular at court functions, and when we are first introduced to him he is literally in an unexpected position: hungover, in a brothel. He is conspicuously "not a knight" as he and other characters observe. As Wilkinson suggests, he is an inexperienced "green knight," or in Kevin J. Harty's more colloquial phrase, he is "Gawain the Slacker" (38). The original Gawain eagerly asks for the Green Knight's challenge to exchange blows after Arthur himself must take up the ax as his warriors look on "stowned" (301) or astonished and "al dares for dred" (315), trembling with dread. In *The Green Knight*, Gawain musters the courage to volunteer for the "game." One assumes from this somewhat ignoble beginning that the film will show Gawain's coming of age and adoption of his socially designated role as a warrior and leader, however unappealing joining the grownups might appear.

Lowery's Gawain does have something that the original does not: a mother. In Lowery's film it is she, not Morgan le Fay (to assay the "surquidré" [2457] or pride of Arthur's court; to cattily scare Guinevere), who conjures the Green Knight, presumably to give her son some occupation or some "tale" (job experience) to tell Arthur, as the king demands at his Christmas feast. Or perhaps Gawain's mother creates the supernatural challenger to hasten the aged Arthur's own obviously delayed retirement. It is his mother who initially gives her "boy" a green belt, with three runes suggesting protection from danger or suffering.[3] His mother will appear again to him in a dream later at Bertilak's castle, gently tending to his wounds as he lay naked in a green silken womb-like tent. Indeed, Mark Kermode finds Gawain's mother "setting otherworldly Oedipal wheels in motion." Lowery himself suggests that Gawain's mother's role is not incidental: "It became a drama about a mother and a son in a way that I hadn't intended [. . .] All of a sudden, I was writing about my own relationship with my mom, and the fact that I stayed, I lived under her roof for far longer than I should have. I had failure-to-launch syndrome, and she eventually had to force me out" (qtd. from Robinson).

We are presented with, in short, a character very different from the perfect pentangle chivalric hero in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* whose shield emblazons his loyalty to "trawthe" (626): to truth—physical, emotional, and spiritual. The modern Gawain (who carries a shield without the pentangle) has been born into privilege and with

the expectation that he will join the family business, but he remains an amiably disaffected playboy, or a "failson" as A. O. Scott describes him. Since Arthur apologizes for his neglect in inviting him to official functions, Gawain has been presumably ignored by his father figure or male mentor, and is more at home in an alehouse than at the king's antiquated court where his job as a knight will clearly be to "spill blood." David Sims suggests that "Lowery's subject isn't what's wrong with the quest to become a knight—it's the very world in which *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has been handed down, from generation to generation, as an exemplary work of literature of heroes tested in battle, consecrated in blood, and celebrated for killing." Gawain says twice at the beginning of the film that he is "not ready yet" to become a knight, which seems to mean that he is not ready to adopt the mantle of social and military responsibility expected of him, though Dev Patel, the actor who plays Gawain, was thirty years old when the film was shot. As he himself suggests, Lowery is tapping into a popular *zeitgeist* or general cultural climate that sees young men as often unwilling to enter the conventional expectations of male adulthood, sometimes referred to in popular culture as a "failure to launch" or the "Peter Pan Syndrome."[4] Lowery's emphasis on the grim and dour seriousness of Arthur's court validates for the viewer Gawain's reticence, so his mother gives her "boy" a push.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the poet only briefly describes Gawain's journey to find the Green Knight:

> Sumwhyle wyth wormes he werres, and with wolves als,
> Sumwhyle wyth wodwos that woned in the knarres,
> Bothe wyth bulles and beres, and bores otherwhyle,
> And etaynes that hym anelede of the heghe felle. (720-23)

> Now with serpents he wars, now with savage wolves,
> Now with wild men of the woods, that watched from the rocks,
> Both with bulls and with bears, and with boars besides,
> And giants that came gibbering from the jagged steeps. (Boroff 720-23)

In keeping with medieval romance conventions emphasizing episodic adventures that frequently test the knight, Lowery lingers on Gawain's journey. Soon after leaving home and witnessing the carnage that Arthur reigns over (the film appears to reference the *Historia Brittonum* version of the Battle of Badon in which Arthur kills 960 men),[5] the inexperienced Gawain loses his mother's protective belt (and his horse,

and weapons) to young scavengers, the have-nots of Camelot, whom he fails to adequately compensate for simple directions.[6] They leave him bound in the forest, and the purpose of a 360-degree mortality decay scene and Gawain's struggle to unloose his ties is perhaps to show his final will to live notwithstanding the cruel and confusing world he has been thrust into. What Mark Kermode describes as the "existential melancholia" of his quest continues in a segment titled "... a meeting with St. Winifred," in which Gawain seeks rest in an apparently abandoned house. St. Winifred, a seventh-century Welsh martyr decapitated by a spurned seducer, seeks his help in retrieving her skull from a nearby spring (the Holy Well, or "Holy Hede" [700] mentioned in the poem). When Gawain unchivalrously tries to touch the ghostly woman, she admonishes him: "Do not touch me. A knight should know better." He also appears to assume that aiding a damsel in distress is a transactional relationship. Gawain asks Winifred, "What will you offer me in exchange?", to which she petulantly responds: "Why would you ask me that? Why would you ever ask me that?" He is, however, rewarded with an ax and a guide in the form of a fox for his efforts to restore her head. The hapless knight proceeds to eat some wild mushrooms and witnesses spectral naked giants traversing a long valley, perhaps alluding to the "etaynes" [723] or giants in the poem. Always pragmatic, Gawain asks for a ride on their shoulders, but shrinks in fear at the enormous offered hand. The hallucinogenic journey confused some viewers; A. O. Scott, for instance, muses, "Is he learning anything of value, or just stumbling along in search of the next adventure? Is this a concept album or a jam session?" But part of the point here seems to be Gawain's education about the dangers and the wonders of the wider world. He has been pampered and protected (he still lives with his mother) and is learning how treacherous (the scavengers), traumatized (St. Winifred), and ethereally powerful (the giants) his future subjects might be.

Lowery also jettisons the highly structured exchange of winnings game at Bertilak's castle, in part because "he didn't want to leave Gawain's perspective for so long" (Robinson). In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, over three days the lord hunts (deer, a boar, a fox) as Gawain sleeps late, his peaceful slumber interrupted by Bertilak's wife's efforts to seduce him. Gawain's reactions to her correspond with the animals hunted: he is skittish the first day like the deer, bold the next like the boar, and tricked the last like the fox. In *The Green Knight*, there are allusions to the hunts and the exchange of winnings, but the attention is focused on Bertilak's wife's enigmatically erotic interactions with Gawain, for she not only gives him a heart-shaped book of love poems, but she also paints his portrait. The lady is a double,

played by the same actress, Alicia Vikander, who plays Essel. The so-called "objective double" might reflect the protagonist's doubts about "perceptual reality" (Andrade 4). Or perhaps the doubling suggests the instability or superficiality of social categories, with both women—the lower-class Essel and the married Lady—representing the objects of Gawain's forbidden desires. More specifically, Cormac O'Brien observes, "Nearly all doubles spring from controlling, corrupt or unsatisfactory societies [. . .] The double isn't just a mirror image, but also a product forcibly born from the society that creates it. The original is often the misfit, the outcast or somehow unacceptable." The function of Bertilak's lady in the poem is to tempt Gawain not only to violate his duties as a guest but to balance courtesy to the lady with loyalty to his host. But in the film, the Lady's function reinforces the artificial social hierarchy that discriminates against the lower-class courtesan but not the high-class seductress (even though, to paraphrase Chaucer's observation in the *Manciple's Tale*, "Men lay one as low as the other" [222] my trans).

The Lady's function in the film is not simply to tempt Gawain, and it is she who is given a central thematic disquisition on the color green and its association with the relentless transience of life:

> We deck our halls with it and dye our linens. But should it come creeping up the cobbles, we scrub it out, fast as we can [. . .] we cut it down, we stamp it out [. . .] but it comes back [. . .] Pull it out by the roots one day, and then next, there it is, creeping in around the edges. Whilst we're off looking for red, in comes green. Red is the color of lust, but green is what lust leaves behind, in heart, in womb. Green is what is left when ardor fades, when passion dies, and when we die, too [. . .] Moss shall cover your tombstone, and as the sun rises, green shall spread over all, in all its shades and hues. This verdigris will overtake your swords and your coins and your battlements and, try as you might, all you hold dear will succumb to it. Your skin, your bones. Your virtue.

Water—dripping, running, leaking—pervades the film, and suggests the passage of time, inevitable change, and impermanence. Gawain must face his fear of the rot and the moss, and he must decide if he is willing to give up the red in his life—and his virtue—to forestall the inevitable creep of mortality. In a subsequent bedroom encounter with the Lady, and disturbingly witnessed by the Old Woman, she proffers the protective green belt, daring him to "take it," and Gawain himself leaves the green of his lust.

In the climactic encounter with the Green Knight, Lowery partially follows the sequence of the poem, as both protagonists must weigh their sense of honor in the face of sudden mortality. In *Sir Gawain the Green Knight,* the poet again presents us with a tripartite episode to echo the exchange of winnings at the castle and the bedroom scenes: with first blow, Gawain acts like a scared deer, with the second, like a bold boar, and for the third, the Green Knight tricks him, like a fox. The original Gawain is certainly not suicidal, and shrinks before the first blow:

> Bot Gawayn on that giserne glyfte hym bysyde,
> As hit com glydande adoun on glode hym to schende,
> And schranke a lytel with the schulderes for the scharp yrne. (2265-2267)

> But Gawain at the great ax glanced up aside
> As down it descended with death-dealing force,
> And his shoulders shrank a little from the sharp iron. (Boroff 2265-2267)

Lowery's Gawain similarly cringes. The Green Knight says, "You flinch . . . You've had a year to find courage," to which Gawain replies, "One year or a hundred, wouldn't make a difference." At this point in the poem, the Green Knight accuses the medieval Gawain of "cowardise" (2273) and Gawain swears on his "trawthe" or word (2287) that he will stand the next stroke, holding himself still as a stone or a stump whose roots are embedded in rocks for the second blow. But Lowery's Gawain has a moment of panic. Before the second blow, Gawain jumps away and says, "Wait wait. Is this really all there is?" The Green Knight portentously responds, "What else ought there to be?" Indeed, what more could the privileged heir ask for?

In a protracted sequence that Lowery describes as "a long 'what if?' scenario" (Robinson), Gawain imagines that he runs away as his companion fox (channeling his mother) suggested he do, and his subsequent salvaged life flashes before his eyes. That life, the one that is presumably the culmination of his quest to become a knight, proves to be fleeting and dismal, restricted by the green belt of power and obligation. He is knighted by none other than Arthur, rejects his consort Essel, takes their child away from her, becomes king, and marries an acceptable virgin from a convent, in each case visibly restrained by the green belt. He lives to see his son killed in battle before witnessing his own end as his popularity and power plummet and he waits to be conquered, killed, or worse. As he sits on his simple throne in

his abandoned court, he finally relinquishes the green belt, appearing to pull it from inside his body—and shockingly loses his head as he perhaps should have done in his confrontation with the Green Knight. His desire to become a knight brings him nothing but sadness, and he endures a stale but successful life as the result of his cowardice; that is, his fear of death. His mother, throughout this fast-track montage, visibly looks alarmed, disappointed, and grim as she witnesses the product of her efforts to launch her son. Although perhaps cued by the actress, Sarita Choudhury, viewers (or at least my students) responded in a similar way, dismayed by the cold and rigid leader that Gawain apparently becomes.

Before Gawain sets off for the Green Chapel the Lord (Bertilak) asks him what he "hopes to gain" by facing the Green Knight, what he calls "this hue" of vitality and decay. Gawain tentatively answers "honor?" as if he is unsure. Upon brief reflection, he adds, because "that is what a knight does what he does" [. . .] "It is part of the life I want." By honor, Gawain seems to desire something conferred: "Great respect, esteem, or reverence received, gained, or enjoyed by a person or thing; glory, renown, fame; reputation, good name" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1.a). Gawain seeks the "greatness" that Arthur wishes for him, to have a tale to tell, to establish a reputation for bravery that will make him fit to adopt the scepter of leadership. The *OED* adds that honor can also be conceived as "Allegiance to a conventional standard of behavior among a particular group of people (often those otherwise considered to be unprincipled)" (2.c). Lowery's Gawain does seem to want the courage to face a future endowed with the esteem that comes only with conformity to the kinds of compromised and cruel actions that garner respect in Arthur's superannuated court. This is the honor, too, that his mother desires for him.

This seems different, however, from what the medieval Gawain seeks. As an esteemed member of Arthur's court, Gawain already has the honor, in the medieval sense of enjoying "an act [. . .] displaying [. . .] esteem" (*MED* 1) or "a state or condition inspiring respect" (*MED* 3.a) that his modern counterpart presumably hopes to gain. The medieval Gawain is honored by Bertilak's nobles when he arrives at the castle (830), Bertilak himself claims that Gawain honors him as his house-guest (1033), and Bertilak's lady seductively observes that Gawain's honor is praised by lords, ladies, and all that bear life (1228). His test or challenge seems to consist of achieving a more private form of honor, in the medieval sense of "virtue, moral or spiritual uprightness" (*MED* 4) or a "fine sense of, and strict adherence to, what is considered to be morally right or just" (*OED* 2.a). And while Gawain receives public

honor at Arthur's court at the end of the poem, one assumes that he too believes that honor is unearned.

When the original Gawain is reprimanded after the third glancing blow that leaves a nick and lasting scar on his neck, the Green Knight accuses him of wanting not courage as in the case of his modern counterpart, but "lewté" or loyalty (2366) in concealing the green sash: "Bot here yow lakked a lyttel, sir, and lewté yow wonted" ("But here you lacked a little sir, and wanted loyalty"; my trans).[7] This is the first of the three appearances of this word in the poem, each instance associated with Gawain's lapse (2381; 2499). But loyalty to what? At their initial encounter at Arthur's court, Gawain had sworn his "trawthe" (403) to seek out the Green Knight in a year. Bertilak asks him to "sware with trawthe" (1108) to uphold the rules of the exchange of winnings, a pact between the two men variously designated as a "forward" or agreement, "bargain," and "covenaunt."[8] Gawain's not keeping his word to exchange the "chek" ("enterprise, feat; doings," *MED* 3) he achieves each day presumably constitutes his lack of loyalty as he returns the kisses but does not offer the green belt as part of his winnings on the third day. To complicate matters, Gawain also accuses himself three times of cowardice and covetousness when his fault is revealed to him by the Green Knight (2374; 2379-80; 2508). The cowardice seems obvious since he hopes the green belt will provide some talismanic protection against losing his head, but the covetousness, which the *MED* consistently associates with the material ("Immoderately desirous of acquiring worldly goods or estate; greedy . . . avaricious" 1.a) has never made sense to me, nor have I been able to clearly explain the self-accusation to my undergraduates without an excursus on medieval penitential theory.[9] The narrator explicitly states that Gawain keeps the girdle not out of a desire for "wele" (wealth) or because of "pryde" in its material value, but instead "to saven hymself" (2037-40). That is, he presumably covets his life, which could be construed as a worldly or temporal good. The Green Knight readily forgives him since he lacked loyalty to the agreement not out of "wylyde werke" or guileful action (2367) or to woo Bertilak's wife, but because he loved his life ("ye lufed your lyf" 2368). The Green Knight praises Gawain as the "fautlest freke that ever on fote yede" (2363), the most faultless man that ever went on foot, and he assures Gawain that he is as polished and pure as when he was first born and that he is a pearl among the white peas of knights. He offers him the belt as a gift to remind him of his adventure and invites him back to his castle to continue celebrating the New Year, given the evidence of his "grete trauthe" (2470)—and his popularity with the household given his legendary courtesy. Gawain is nonetheless deeply ashamed and mortified. He later shows his mark of "unleuté" or unloyalty (2499)

and confesses his "faute" (2488) to Arthur's court, where he will have the scar and will wear the sash as sign of his disloyalty and as a "token of untrawthe" (2509) to contrast with the pentangle of perfection emblazoned on his shield.

Gawain's readers have taken his cue and have often denounced him for violations ranging from "the most deadly sin, pride" (Evans 733) to what Martin Puhvel calls basic "insincerity and evasiveness" (63) resulting from "worldly vanity" (66). Derek Pearsall provides his assessment after reflecting on a lifetime considering the "enigma" of the poem's ethos: "What about the shoddily unheroic cheapness of putting his life first before his honor? What about the sin of betraying his loyalty to the Virgin and the faith of the pentangle, so consistently emphasized in the poem as the guiding principle of his behavior?" (255). Regardless of how one judges the severity of his "faute," or whether this fault is a "moral defect" (*MED* 4.a) or a wide range of offenses that the noun covers ("wrong-doing, misdeed, offense, transgression, sin, crime" *MED* 4.b), Gawain's extreme reaction, and regrettable tirade against women ruining great men for violating the terms of the exchange of winnings game, seems out of proportion, or demonstrates what Donald Howard calls an "excess of humility" in comparison to the judgement of the other characters in the poem (247). For the Green Knight, Gawain only "lakked a lyttel" (2366) and Arthur later "comfortes the knyght" (2513) in his apparent distress. Like the Green Knight had done at the Green Chapel, the court laughs (at him): "alle the court als / Laghen loude ther-at" (2513-14). Arthur's court adopts the sash as part of its livery, bringing honor, we are told, to all who wear it, and for Gordon Shedd, "making a parody of the knight's experience" (13).

Some readers suggest that Gawain's mortification arises from the threat to his honor in the sense of his public esteem or renown. For Stephanie J. Hollis, for example, "To Gawain, his identity is his reputation" (275), and Richard H. Godden suggests that "To fail in his oath is to jeopardize his good name" (165). But his reputation and good name appear intact, and his shame seems to have more to do with his concern about a more modern sense of honor: a "fine sense of, and strict adherence to, what is considered to be morally right or just" (*OED* 2.a). Indeed, Gawain tells the Green Knight that he has forsaken his "kynde" as a knight by failing in "larges and lewté" (2380-81) or generosity and loyalty (to one's word). "Kynde" can mean behavior befitting one's rank, station, or lineage, but it also refers one's "essential character" (*MED* 1.a), "natural constitution" (3.a), or "innate or instinctive moral feeling" (5.b). Gawain says that he will wear the sash as a sign of his "surfet" ("misdeed, transgression, crime; an error, a fault" *MED* 3.a) to remind him when he rides in renown of the "The faut and the fayntyse

of the flesche, crabbed / How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylthe" (2435-36); that is, the faults and frailty of the flesh, how vulnerable it is to the taint of sin. Gawain did not give in to sexual temptation, but he says that when he feels pride for his "prowes of armes" (2437) that the "luf-lace" (love lace) will "lethe" (humble) his heart (2438). That is, the weakness of the flesh in the sense of the coveting of one's life, and perhaps the coveting of his reputation through a courteous effort to please Bertilak's duplicitous lady, lead to cowardice in breaking his word and his loyalty to his ethical and spiritual sense of his "kynde." In an examination of the different connotations of "kynde" in the poem, Evelyn Reynolds says that in this context, Gawain uses the term to refer to both "courtly propriety" (44) and "identity" (43). His reputation appears unscathed, with the Arthurian brotherhood honored in displaying his green sash, but he has nonetheless betrayed his sense of his essential character as a knight.

This often doesn't make much sense to my undergraduates, although they can appreciate the sentiments as an example of the alterity of cultural ethics in the Middle Ages. Exploring with students the different connotations of the terminology used to describe Gawain's lapse or transgression reinforces rather than clarifies the complexities of the incident (and introduces students to the uses of the *MED* and *OED*). Gawain's word, his "trawthe"—a term that is also used conversationally in the poem and without ethical weight—was to exchange his winnings as part of a bargain or agreement with a player who has rigged the game. Loyalty in the form of keeping one's word regardless of the circumstances perhaps constitutes here the chief virtue of Gawain's sense of his "trawthe" or his integrity. But that one would be willing *die* in order to keep one's word or promise or oath, especially in the context of a game, makes less sense, even as an aspect of an archaic chivalric code. Lowery is able to show modern audiences what is at stake here.

The film appears to have the same point as the poem: the concern for one's physical well-being, and one might include here concern for one's material well-being, leads to the compromise of one's integrity—and ultimately one's happiness. It seems like the modern Gawain also sees that he has also betrayed his "kynde" or his essential character and natural temperament if he returns to court and is made a knight. He too, like the medieval Gawain, places a premium on loyalty—but chiefly *to himself.* When he is granted a vision of a future that honor will confer on him, he reconsiders. He no doubt covets the privilege and power that his position promises him. Gawain's guide in the original poem, who perhaps represents Gawain's thoughts, tells him to scarper and no one will know:

> Cayres bi sum other kyth, ther Kryst mot yow spede,
> And I schal hyy me hom ayayn, and hete yow fyrre
> That I schal swere bi God and alle his gode halwes,
> As help me God and the halydam, and othes innoghe,
> That I schal lelly yow layne, and lance never tale
> That ever ye fondet to fle for freke, that l wyst. (2120-125)

> Leave by some other land, for the love of Christ,
> And I shall get me home again, and give you my word
> That I shall swear by God's self and the saints above,
> By heaven and by my halidom and other oaths more,
> To conceal this day's deed, nor say to a soul
> That ever you fled for fear from any that I knew. (Boroff 2120-125)

Gawain responds that this would make him a cowardly knight, and that he could not be exonerated: "l were a knyght, kowarde; I myght not be excused" (2131). Similarly, in *The Green Knight* the fox, acting as a substitute for the guide in the poem, tells Gawain that he should "bear his shame happily" and turn away from his encounter with the Green Knight. No one will know. But while the modern Gawain can bear the shame, he cannot live happily. In spite of his weaknesses (he has a reticence for violence and a predilection for carnality), he will have to assume public authority and responsibility which entails conformity to military aggression and social decorum.

Unlike the original Gawain, Lowery's version relinquishes the green belt to the Green Knight *before* the last strike. He tells the Green Knight, "I'm ready now" to which the Green Knight responds, "Well done my brave *knight*" . . . "Now off with your head" (italics mine). Given the supernatural subtext in the film and the creepy precedent set by St. Winifred, one hopes that he will be able to live "head held high to end his song as he saw fit" as the fox suggests he do. But we are left to ponder, and Lowery's deviations from the poem (and final shot of a hewn tree trunk) don't offer us much consolation in this regard. Indeed, Lowery states, "I wanted to write an ending where his head gets chopped off, and that's a positive thing [. . .] That's a happy ending. He faces his fate bravely, and there's honor and integrity in that. But that doesn't mean that he's dead, he's killed. He received the blow that he was dealt, and all is set right within the universe of the film" (Robinson). The modern Gawain nonetheless gains honor, as suggested by the Green Knight, and *as conferred by the viewer*, by his loyalty to his own desires—or again, as my students put it, by being true to

himself. He rejects the "greatness" that Arthur wishes for him, and the privileged world that the aging king reigns over, with the expectation that he will produce suitable heirs and oversee its human and environmental devastation, and in the end, that he will die alone, his crown a toy for his daughter. Richard Brody suggests that "Lowery's underlying subject is martial valor, the test of violence that stands as a misguided model of manhood and which corrupts and ravages current-day society at its very core." Vinnie Mancuso, who sees the film as a "uniquely millennial morality tale," suggests that the film captures a "thoroughly modern aspect of the human condition—especially familiar to post-crash millennials and the TikTok generation who came after us":

> our tendency to grind and scrape and kill ourselves in pursuit of a self-fulfillment we couldn't even describe [. . .] It's only relatively recently that we've put a name to our various anxieties, but as *The Green Knight* demonstrates, imposter syndrome has been around since King Arthur literally pulled a sword out of a stone instead of seeing a therapist.

The original Gawain perhaps experiences the "imposter syndrome" in failing to live up to the impossible pentangle of perfection that adorns his shield, and we can only guess his feelings about the court adopting his livery of shame as a sign of camaraderie and "brotherhede" (2516). But Gawain will remember his inherent weakness—coveting his life—when he is showing off his "prowes of armes" (2437), his valor in combat. It's not that he lacks courage, but his fear of death will humble his "pride of life" in Donaldson's phrase (218). His court will see its own demise as the author and his readers or listeners of the poem knew, and as the markers of mutability, transience, and mortality throughout suggest: the Trojans' demise, the quick seasons, the brutal hunts, the contrast of the lovely lady and the old. Both the poem and the film remind us that "greatness"—Arthur's desire for the modern Gawain—perhaps brings fame, but "goodness"—Essel's desire for Gawain—should be enough since it is self-respect rather than worldly glory that brings some degree of self-satisfaction and happiness notwithstanding the relentless onslaught of green rot. That is, for the medieval Gawain, it is honor in the medieval sense of "moral or spiritual uprightness" (*MED* 4), and for the modern version, "integrity" (3.a) that can refer to the Lady's cryptic statement about that hue: "Green is what is left when we die." Austin Collins finds the "moral realities" addressed in the film timely and relevant, providing lessons "worth learning":

It's the question, the purpose of legend that Lowery seems to be after, with all its correlative questions of time and its vexations, the impermanence of life (as opposed to the duration of myth), the hard promises of death (as opposed to the felicities of what may come after). Essel asks the question aloud, but Lowery, we realize, has been asking it all along. Why greatness? Why is goodness — contra myth, and importance, and valor — not enough? It may just be a game, as King Arthur says. But Lowery's Green Knight seems poised, not unlike the poem's Green Knight himself, to make a man of its hero, rather than a hero of a man. In the end, if goodness has proven not to be enough, the Gawain of this film will most certainly wish that it had.

Notes

1. All quotations from the poem in Middle English are from Battles. All passages are cited by line number.

2. All other translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

3. For a helpful introduction to runes, see Elliott.

4. See, for example, Hendrikson, Whitley, and Sax.

5. See Morris.

6. Lowery suggests the scene is "an allusion to the film *Barry Lyndon*" (Robinson).

7. "Leuté" is variously defined by the *Middle English Dictionary* as "(a) Uprightness, honorableness, honesty; truth; justice, fairness (b) loyalty, faithfulness; (c) allegiance."

8. On the central thematic significance of "trawthe" in the poem, see (for example) Burrow and Blenkner.

9. On the significance of "covetyse" in the poem, see, for example, Ackerman, Smithers, Hills, and Evans.

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"Is This Really All There Is?": The Role and Representation of Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and David Lowery's *The Green Knight*

Drew Maxwell

David Lowery's 2021 film, *The Green Knight*, has garnered varied responses from medievalists and movie critics who have reviewed the film; some have been glad that it is not just another Arthurian action film, some have criticized the expanded episodes, some have disliked the film, some have been perplexed by the ending, and some have just overall enjoyed the film.[1] While David Lowery's *The Green Knight* contains some great cinematic qualities, uses beautiful landscapes, employs vegan costume designs, has great actors who all give brilliant performances, and includes additional female characters who play a part in the story (Essel and Winifred), the role and representation of women in Lowery's *The Green Knight* is troubling and merits consideration. However, in order to fully survey the changes that Lowery made in his adaptation of the original Middle English poem, particularly concerning the female characters, this paper will first review the role and representation of women in the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[2]

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight exists alongside three other poems attributed to the *Gawain*-poet, or the *Pearl*-poet, in a unique late fourteenth-century illuminated manuscript (Cotton Nero A.x.).[3] Large illuminated initials divide the poem into four parts or fitts, the Middle English term for a poem's divisions. These poems were written some time toward the end of the fourteenth century, somewhere in the English midlands by an anonymous poet. The poet provides a close examination of sin and temptation, of human nature, and of the strengths and limitations of chivalry as an ethical and practical system. Important themes throughout the poem are chivalry, trawthe (which, among many other meanings, encompasses both the keeping of promises and oaths),[4] and the role of women.

Scholars such as Geraldine Heng, Paul Battles, and others have convincingly shown that women are central to the plot of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[5] Heng argues that the poem's key players "are curi-

ously elusive, enigmatic women. Plans initiated by one woman are directed at another, performed by a third, and modulated by the actions of a fourth: read in this fashion, the romance is the theater of its feminine figures, a field in which forces of tension and filiation circulate within a feminine relay" (501). In the poem, Guinevere is integral to the plot, as she is the intended target for the Green Knight's intrusion, which is orchestrated by Morgan le Fay. Lady Bertilak and Morgan le Fay display both agency and ambiguity in the poem, and they are not simply in the narrative to serve the hero's progress. The Virgin Mary also has a role to play in the text, as Gawain's religious devotion is particularly linked to her, and he is under the apparent patronage of the Virgin Mary (Heng 501).

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain has a particular devotional interest in the Virgin Mary, and in the description of Gawain's shield (lines 619-65), the poet claims that Gawain is without sin (faultless in his senses), has never failed in prowess (his five fingers), takes the suffering of Christ as the foundation of his virtue, bases his battle-strength on the happy relations between the Virgin Mary and her son Jesus Christ, and displays a particular set of virtues (brotherly love, beneficence, pure mind and manners, and compassion). The description of the pentangle on Gawain's shield emphasizes the number five. Gawain's five senses are joined to his five fingers, which can be linked to the five wounds of Christ. The number five was commonly used in devotional literature and can be linked to the five joys of the Virgin Mary: The Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, and Assumption. During the temptation scenes with Lady Bertilak, the poet even tells us that "Gret perile bitwene hem stod, / Nif Maré of hir knight mynne" ("Great danger between them loomed / If Mary was not mindful of her knight"; lines 1768-69). The poet indicates here that Mary is guarding Gawain from the temptation of the lady. Therefore, the Virgin Mary is present throughout the narrative and plays a key role in the poem by providing Gawain with spiritual guidance and protection.

Lady Bertilak is portrayed as a very ambiguous figure in the Middle English poem, but she is not a passive figure, and she is central to the testing of Gawain. After entering into an exchange of winnings game with Lord Bertilak, Lady Bertilak visits Gawain in his bedroom for three consecutive days while her husband is out hunting. Lady Bertilak laughs and jokes with Gawain, and Gawain replies with jests of his own. However, the words spoken with laughter are words about the knight's imprisonment by the lady; she says he is "caught," and also that she is determined to hold him prisoner. After offering him several love tokens, on the third day, she offers him a green girdle, and she tells him,

For what gome so is gorde with this grene lace,
While he hit hade hemely halched aboute,
Ther is no hathel under heven tohewe hym that myght,
For he myght not be slayn for slyght upon erthe. (lines 1851-54)

For whoever is girded by this green belt,
While he has it neatly fastened about,
There is no man under heaven that might cut him down,
For he might not be slain by any means upon this earth.

After hearing her say this, Gawain readily accepts the lady's gift, and when Lord Bertilak arrives home that night, Gawain initiates the exchange and gives Bertilak three kisses; however, he does not give Bertilak the green girdle (lines 1934-37). Bertilak coyly teases Gawain about his "thre cosses / so gode" ("three kisses / so good"; lines 1946-47), and they move on to an evening of eating, drinking, and celebrating. Gawain's decision to keep the green girdle because he thinks it will save his life breaks his exchange-of-winnings agreement with Lord Bertilak, and, unbeknownst to Gawain, sets the plot in motion of how the events will unfold at his meeting with the Green Knight.

Throughout the poem, Lady Bertilak is portrayed as a complex and incredibly interesting character. As Battles points out, "The poem's conclusion makes clear that she is not a slave to her passion, nor is there any reason for believing that she is only passively carrying out Sir Bertilak's orders, especially since both she and her husband ultimately act at the behest of Morgan le Fay" (331). Unbeknownst to Gawain, Lord Bertilak and Lady Bertilak knew of Morgan le Fay's plans, so Lady Bertilak's supposed interest in Gawain was only feigned at the request of Morgan le Fay and Bertilak, and Lady Bertilak seemed to thoroughly enjoy toying with Gawain. After arriving at the Green Chapel to face the Green Knight, Gawain only receives a nick on the neck, and he finds out that his hosts, Lady Bertilak and Lord Bertilak, had played a game in order to test him. Gawain is told that he received a nick on the neck because he failed to return the green girdle to Bertilak in their exchange of winnings game. The Green Knight, aka Lord Bertilak, reveals that Lady Bertilak had no real interest in Gawain because she was acting at the behest of her husband. After hearing this, Gawain at first blames himself in lines 2379-88, but then shortly after this, he digresses into a speech about how the wiles of women have caused men sorrow, citing the biblical figures of Adam, Solomon, Samson, and David, but before doing so, he acknowledges the cleverness of his "honoured ladies." Gawain says,

I haf sojorned sadly; sele yow bytyde,
And he yelde hit yow yare that yarkkes al menskes!
And comaundes me to that cortays, your comlych fere —
Bothe that on and that other, myn honoured ladyes,
That thus hor knyght wyth hor kest han koyntly bigyled.
Bot hit is no ferly thagh a fole madde,
And thurgh wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorwe,
For so was Adam in erde with one bygyled, on earth
And Salamon with fele sere, and Samson eftsones
Dalyda dalt hym hys wyrde — and Davyth therafter
Was blended with° Barsabe, that much bale tholed.
Now these were wrathed wyth her wyles, hit were a wynne hugesince
To luf hom wel and leve hem not, a leude that couthe.
For thes wer forne the freest that folwed alle the sele
Exellently, of alle thyse other under heven-ryche
that mused;
And alle thay were biwyled––
With wymmen that thay used.
Thagh I be now bigyled,
Me think me burde be excused. (lines 2409-28)

I have stayed long enough; good fortune to you,
And may he bestow it to you fully that gives all favours!
And commend me to that courteous lady, your lovely wife–
Both that one, and that other, my honoured ladies,
That thus their knight with their scheme have cunningly led astray.
But it is no marvel if a fool behaves madly,
And through wiles of women be brought to sorrow,
For so was Adam on earth beguiled by one,
And Solomon with many various ones, and Samson thereafter–
Delilah dealt him his fate– and David thereafter
Was blinded by Bathsheba, that much sorrow suffered.
Since these were harmed by their wiles, it would be a huge gain
To love them well and trust them not, any man that was able.
For these were of old the best that enjoyed all good fortune
Without equal, of all these others under heaven
that lived;
And they were all deluded
With women that they had dealings with
Though I be now beguiled,
I think I should be excused.

Geraldine Heng notes that, "when the feminine sub-script is read to him, Gawain in self-defensive fury attributes all responsibility and power to women, in what is commonly cited as his 'antifeminist diatribe,' a tirade witnessing the belief that women dominate and shape the destinies of men" (501). Gerald Morgan also discusses this passage and claims that a modern reader "is liable to misconstrue the purport of these lines, but the supposition that Gawain is unsporting in defeat and at the same time filled with a hatred for the generality of womankind is more than unwelcome. It is entirely at odds with the argument of the poem as a whole and our sense of Gawain's humanity" (275). Morgan continues by stating, "his own experience, hard to credit in itself, is validated by the experience of others. It is only the very best of men who are vulnerable to women in this way. The point about Adam, Solomon, Samson, and David is precisely that they were the most excellent of men" (277). Morgan's argument is interesting, as it indicates that Gawain is simply aligning his experience with men from the Bible whom he deems to have been great but who were also tricked by women, so Gawain seems to take solace in the fact that he is not alone in his experience. Critics have been divided on how to interpret Gawain's speech, and Howell Chickering notes that "The main problem for critics has been how to fit this scapegoating outburst with his emphatic insistence on his own culpability at lines 2374-88 earlier" (22). Gawain never displays any sort of antifeminist notions at any prior point in the poem, so his speech seems out of character. Chickering claims that several interpretations from various scholars have been put forth in order to maintain Gawain's consistency of character. Some scholars have posited that Gawain is "half-jocular" or being "witty," others have argued that the outburst is comically exaggerated, or that it is "fine dramatic realism" with a "touch of comedy," while some have viewed it as a moment of Gawain's intense exasperation with himself (22). Even if Gawain did have a momentary lapse in character, and this was simply a furious rant, it does not seem likely that the poet feels the same antifeminist notions as Gawain, so this should not be read as the poet wanting the audience to condemn women. Gawain has failed his test by keeping the girdle, and no one else makes anything more of this small speech. This list of men from the Bible seems purposely ironic on the part of the poet because it does not seem strictly applicable to Gawain's situation, since he was the one who chose to conceal the girdle. While his speech contains antifeminist notions, it can be viewed in a variety of ways, and Gawain seems to blame himself more than the women, as he tells Bertilak that he will wear the green garter as a sign of his sin. Gawain says,

That wyl I welde wyth guod wylle, not for the wynne golde,
Ne the saynt, ne the sylk, ne the syde pendaundes,
For wele ne for worchyp, ne for the wlonk werkkes,
Bot in syngne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte,
When I ride in renoun, remorde to myselven
The faut and the fayntyse of the flesche crabbed,
How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylthe;
And thus, when pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes,
The loke to this luf-lace schal lethe my hert. (lines 2430-38)

That will I wear with good will, not for the precious gold,
Nor the girdle, nor the silk, nor the long pendants,
For riches, nor for honour, or for the fine workmanship,
But in token of my fault I shall see it often,
When I ride in renown, recall in remorse to myself
The flaw and the frailty of the wicked flesh,
How eager it is to attract blemishes of corruption;
And thus, when pride shall tempt me with prowess of arms,
The glance to this love-token shall humble my heart.

In fact, Gawain mentions his own blameworthiness by accusing himself of cowardice and covetousness several times in the poem (lines 2379-88, lines 2430-38, and lines 2506-12). Morgan comments on this and states, "If anything, to modern taste such self-accusation is overdone, but it would have been seen by Gawain's contemporaries as a willed displeasure for sin, and so fitting in a penitent sinner" (278). While Gawain seems to blame himself more than anything and views the unfolding of these events very seriously, none of the other characters in the text feel the same way as Gawain, and when he arrives back at Arthur's court at the end of the poem, the poet writes that Arthur and his court comfort Gawain, and they all,

Laghen loude ther-at, and luflyly acorden
That lordes and ladis that longed to the Table,
— Uche burne of the brotherhede — a bauderyk schulde have,
A bende abelef hym aboute of a bryght grene,
And that, for sake of that segge, in swete to were. (lines 2513-18)

Laughed loud thereat, and lovingly agreed
That lords and ladies that belonged to the Table,
Every member of the brotherhood should have a baldric,
A band obliquely around them of bright green,

And that, for the sake of that knight, they would wear it together.

Therefore, like Lord Bertilak, everyone at Arthur's court takes a more light-hearted view of Gawain's experience and finds his breach of trawthe forgivable, as he only kept the green garter because he thought it would save his life.

Before he leaves to go back to Arthur's court, however, Gawain is informed further of the power that women hold in the text. Morgan le Fay is revealed to be the one who transformed Bertilak into the Green Knight and orchestrated the entire plot through her desire to scare Guinevere to death and test Arthur's court. Morgan Le Fay is therefore revealed to be the mastermind and catalyst of the entire chain of events, and Gawain is merely a pawn who was drawn into Morgan's plot. Bertilak says to Gawain,

> Morgne the goddes,
> Therfore, hit is hir name.
> Weldes non so hyghe hawtesse
> That ho ne con make ful tame.
> Ho wayned me upon this wyse to your wynne halle
> For to assay the surquidré, yif hit soth were
> That rennes of the grete renoun of the Rounde Table.
> Ho wayned me this wonder your wyttes to reve,
> For to haf greved Gaynour and gart hir to dyye. (lines 2452-60)

> Morgan the goddess,
> Therefore, it is her name.
> No one has so great haughtiness
> That she can not make full tame.
> She sent me upon this way to your goodly hall
> For to test the arrogance, if it were true
> That what travels abroad of the great renown of the Round Table.
> She sent me this wonder to take away your wits,
> For to have frightened Guinevere and caused her to die.

This scene reveals Morgan le Fay's overarching authority and powers within the narrative. Since Morgan used her magic to transform Bertilak into the Green Knight in order to scare Guinevere to death and test Arthur's court, Gawain was not the initial target of Morgan's plan. Bertilak's admission of Morgan le Fay's role shows that he is not a master-manipulator; rather, as Heng argues, he is only a servant, and "Morgan's obedient creature" (508). S. L. Clark and Julian N. Wasserman point out that "Morgan dominates the poem, in that she

controls the action, in much the same manner as God exercises power over the characters in the *Pearl*-Poet's other poems" (58). Morgan's power is so far-reaching that she appears as an authoritative goddess figure in the poem. Women, therefore, have quite a bit of agency and power in the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

In his forward to a new edition of a translated version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by Bernard O'Donoghue, called *The Green Knight (Movie Tie-In)*, David Lowery himself acknowledges the strong female presence in the Middle English poem and mentions Heng's influential article, "Feminine Knots and the Other: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," to new readers of the poem, and he states, "Does the poem strike you as a model of early feminist literature? If it doesn't, know that it *can*" (ix). However, what occurs in Lowery's 2021 film adaptation, *The Green Knight*, is very different, and the plot of the story is changed in numerous ways. Amber Dunai discusses Lowery's forward in this edition by O'Donoghue, and she states,

> Indeed, even without the nod to Heng, it would be difficult not to read Lowery's representation of women in the film in terms of powerful networks (to name just a few examples: the role of Gawain's mother [Sarita Choudhury] and sisters in summoning the Green Knight; the choice to have the protective belt created by and gifted to Gawain by his mother and re-gifted later by the Lady; and the brilliant casting of Alicia Vikander as both the Lady and Gawain's lover Essel). (458)

However, Dunai's argument falls flat here, as these "powerful" networks all revolve around the character of Gawain, and the film itself is very Gawain-centric. While we can applaud Lowery's efforts to include more female characters with speaking parts, we can—and should—at the same time question and critique the ways these female characters are portrayed and used in the film.

In an online article in *The Sundial*, Usha Vishnuvajjala argues that the film turns "a narrative about a knight who fails to understand women into one about the women he fails to understand" ("Gender, Adaptation, and the Future in David Lowery's *The Green Knight*"). However, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* does not really seem to be a narrative about how Gawain does not understand women; rather, it is a narrative that shows how Gawain's pursuit of upholding "trawthe" becomes increasingly difficult for him as he encounters tests of his "trawthe" that do not involve the usual quests and chivalric combat, such as the bedroom scenes and the offer of the green girdle. Even Gawain's quest to keep his promise and find the Green Knight for his

return blow, thereby upholding his "trawthe," only happens because of Morgan's initial plot. Arguably, part of what makes the Middle English poem so interesting is the fact that the conventional chivalric, masculine questing is mentioned only in a mere few lines, where Gawain proves himself a formidable knight by fighting both real and mythical beings on his travels.[6] The typical masculine adventure quest, therefore, becomes subsumed within a complex drama whose main participants are women (Battles 342). In her online article discussing *The Green Knight* film, Vishnuvajjala also argues, "What the film does, then, is make the presence of women, so easily overlooked and forgotten by the male characters in the poem, visible to the audience throughout its narrative." However, the female characters are never forgotten by the men in the Middle English poem, as Gawain often prays to the Virgin Mary, Lady Bertilak is a key part of the testing of Gawain, and Bertilak is very aware of the power Morgan holds and her plans. While the female characters are certainly visible in the 2021 adaptation, Lowery's film is obsessed with the character of Gawain.[7]

While there are more female characters with speaking parts in Lowery's film, more does not necessarily mean better, as these female characters just fill the same sexist roles that we see all the time (mother, queen, virgin, slut), which is so disappointing for a film released in 2021. At least the original Middle English poem included women with intentions and objectives that were not solely related to Gawain (Morgan le Fay had no intentions for Gawain specifically; rather, she wanted to scare Guinevere to death and test the court, and Lady Bertilak was following her husband's and Morgan's directions, so she had no real interest in Gawain). In Lowery's adaptation, Gawain's mother is the one who creates or summons the Green Knight, and she seemingly only does this to spur Gawain into being more of a "man." The queen in the film is old and is essentially just an extension of the king.[8] Essel is a prostitute who is only concerned with becoming Gawain's lady. Winifred needs someone, in this case, Gawain, to retrieve her head. Lady Bertilak is either an illusion created by Gawain's mother, or she is, like Essel, sexually interested in Gawain.

In her paper for this edited collection, titled "Lowery's The Green Knight: Honor Reconsidered," Kathleen Forni discusses Gawain's mother in more detail, and Forni argues that Gawain's mother desires her son to have honor, and in summoning the Green Knight, she gives her son a push. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Lowery comments on his portrayal of the complicated relationship between Gawain and his mother in his film, stating, "It became a drama about a mother and a son in a way that I hadn't intended," and, "All of a sudden, I was writing about my own relationship with my mom, and the fact that I stayed, I

lived under her roof for far longer than I should have. I had failure-to-launch syndrome, and she eventually had to force me out" (Robinson). Therefore, the powerful and independent role of Morgan le Fay in the original Middle English text is seemingly just conflated into the character of Gawain's mother and showcases the tired and overplayed motif of the messy relationship between a son and his mother.

Instead of being young, like they are in the Middle English poem, King Arthur and Queen Guinevere are older in Lowery's *The Green Knight*, in much the same fashion as King Arthur is old in two other film adaptations of the poem by Stephen Weeks, *Gawain and the Green Knight* (1973) and *Sword of the Valiant: The Legend of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1984). While changing the age of King Arthur is not a new or unique approach to the poem, Lowery seems to have used the advanced ages of both Arthur and Guinevere to critique the monarchy of Arthur's court, and the roles of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere are meant to depict "sickly, waning monarchs" (Robinson). In his interview with *Vanity Fair*, Lowery states, "The only references to Christianity in the film are from King Arthur," and "The idea is that there's some rot at the heart of that court. At the same time, I really loved the goodness that Sean brought" (Robinson). Therefore, while Guinevere does have a small speaking part in the film, her portrayal in the film is not really meant to be a positive one, as she is meant to represent part of an older, Christian patriarchal order.

Essel, the prostitute in the 2021 film adaptation, is desperately interested in a more permanent relationship with Gawain. In the movie, Essel is only interested in becoming Gawain's "lady," and does not have her own independent role. After trying to convince Gawain not to leave the court in search of the Green Knight, Essel gives Gawain a love token before he leaves; however, after that, we never see or hear from her character again in the film, except for the flash-forward vision that Gawain has after his meeting with the Green Knight. In this flash forward scene, Essel gives birth to their child, and Gawain watches while the child is taken away from her to be raised by Gawain and his wife; this is a very disturbing scene, which showcases how easily women can simply be cast aside. In the flash forward scene, Gawain has a hardened expression, and seemingly approves of the child being taken away from Essel, which highlights how callous he might become if he inherits the throne after Arthur's death. However, the character of Gawain in Middle English romance is never seen taking away his illegitimate children from their mothers,[9] so this seems to be merely Lowery's adapted conception and characterization of Gawain for modern audiences. Essel, however, appears as a character who is meant to be used by the men in her life, and only exists as a way for Gawain's character to be

portrayed as still lustful of the "wrong" type of woman at the beginning of the film.

While it is initially interesting to see Saint Winifred mentioned in the film, Winifred's sole role is to be the lady awaiting a savior, someone who can fetch her head for her so that she can move on from being a ghost; this is again a female role that only serves the progress of the protagonist, as this scene simply shows that Gawain is at least able to perform some sort of chivalric deed. Even when Gawain does agree to completing the chivalric deed of fetching her skull from the spring, he asks, "If I go in there and find it, what would you offer me in exchange?" Winifred chides him for asking that, stating, "Why would you ask me that? Why would you ever ask me that?" Gawain seems clueless in understanding how and why chivalric deeds need to be completed; however, he does manage to get into the spring and fetch her skull for her. Once Gawain retrieves her skull, it is disappointing to see that Winifred seemingly just moves on to the afterlife and does not have a miraculous recovery like she does in her own legendary saint's life.[10] The scene in the film with the beheaded ghost Winifred seems to be a way to foreshadow what will happen to Gawain later; however, a more interesting role for Winifred in the movie would have been to see her perform some sort of miracle, perhaps saving Gawain from some threat, rather than simply being in need of Gawain's help and chastising him for not knowing how to act as a knight. While the film does not place any emphasis on religion, Saint Winifred could still have had a more powerful role, as any miracles performed could have had magical undertones. Instead of having a powerful and interesting female character, the viewers are left with a brief glimpse of a ghostly Winifred who needs help from an inexperienced Gawain. There is also something inherently misogynistic in portraying a revered medieval female saint as just another woman who needs saving.

Unlike the portrayal of Lady Bertilak in the Middle English poem, Lady Bertilak in Lowery's film seems infatuated with Gawain, and they have an awkward sexual encounter when she comes into his bedroom to give him the green girdle, which looks exactly like the one his mother made for him. The girdle his mother made for him was taken by the scavengers, so Gawain is understandably surprised when Lady Bertilak shows it to him and says that she made it herself. Lady Bertilak tells Gawain, "I have a gift for you . . . There's an enchantment sewn into its threads. Wear it and you will never be struck down." As she gets on top of him, she states, "I promise you, you will not come to harm as long as it is about your waist." In a direct and forceful manner, she asks him, "You want it? Huh? Do you want it?" This seemingly refers to both the girdle and her body/sexual pleasure with her. Gawain says,

"Yes . . . I want it," repeating "I want it" twice before quickly ejaculating. Because Gawain ejaculates so quickly, Lady Bertilak is offered no sexual pleasure in this scene, and her comment, "You are no knight," directly afterward, indicates her displeasure and judgement. This scene with their awkward sexual encounter is uncomfortable to watch, and it just fulfills the sexist expectation that the male character can get some sort of sexual gratification from the attractive woman.

Even Lord Bertilak in the 2021 film adaptation seems sexually attracted to Gawain, and he kisses Gawain very sensually in the forest. Lord Bertilak and Lady Bertilak seem to be portrayed in the film as a sexually frustrated couple who are happy to commit adultery because of their attraction to Gawain, or they are possibly characters orchestrated by Gawain's mother and her desire to make her son more of a "man," which further problematizes things. Tison Pugh discusses the possibility that Gawain's mother assumes the role of Lady Bertilak and states,

> *The Green Knight* interweaves an incestuous subtheme into its plot, hinting that Gawain's Mother assumes the role of the Lady who seduces him. When Gawain collapses after entering the Lord's castle, the next shot depicts him sleeping in a luxurious bed as his Mother caresses him, although he may be dreaming deliriously. Viewers then see the Lord (Joel Edgerton) applying a towel to his sweaty brow and telling him, 'You're among friends.' Later, the Lady enters Gawain's bedroom in the morning and asks him if he believes in magic. He says that he does, and she states, 'I have a gift for you,' as she holds forth the green girdle. Bewildered, Gawain asks, 'Where did you get that?'—recognizing it as a gift from his Mother. But the Lady replies, 'I made it. There's an enchantment sewn into its threads. Wear it and you will never be struck down.' Again, doubles and dualities cloud interpretive clarity: if this girdle is the same girdle as before, Gawain's Mother and the Lady appear to have been conflated into a single character, but, if it is not, it is a rather odd and narratively unexplained coincidence that two women in Gawain's life create identical green magic girdles to employ on his quest. (54)

Pugh's discussion aptly highlights the ambiguities in this section of the film and the use of the green girdle. Arguably, Lowery seems to leave this open-ended and up to the viewer to decide if Lady Bertilak and Lord Bertilak are real people in the film, or just a magical illusion created by his mother (Lowery has stated in one of the film's Blue-Ray DVD

extras, *Boldest of Blood & Wildest of Heart: Making The Green Knight*, that he came up with this idea for Vikander to play two roles because of Morgan Le Fay's ability to shapeshift in the poem). If they are just creations orchestrated by Gawain's mother, then their portrayal in the film just fits into the overplayed Oedipal theme, which takes away any of the agency that Lady Bertilak had as an independent character in the film.

In their review of the film, Susan Aronstein and Taran Drummond state, "*The Green Knight* tells a tale for readers and thinkers. It asks us to ponder the power of stories and to contemplate the human condition" (92). After watching *The Green Knight*, I did find myself pondering this film, and found myself, much like Gawain in his exchange with the Green Knight at the end of the film, asking, "Is this really all there is?" In response to Gawain's question, the Green Knight replies, "What else ought there be?" Arguably, there ought to be so much more in the representation and role of women in this modern adaptation. Given the fact that Lowery changed many elements in his version of the story, the role and representation of women could have been even more powerful and interesting than the original, but, instead, Lowery's adaptation misogynistically portrays women as having the sole purpose to serve the progression of the protagonist's story. The fact that the female characters in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* have some power and agency on their own terms, and the fact that Lowery's modern adaptation took away this agency that these female characters could have had in the story by making them fixated on Gawain or in need of Gawain's help, sheds light on how far we really haven't come in terms of addressing and dismantling sexism in our own society.

Notes

1. See, for example, Usha Vishnuvajjala, "Gender, Adaptation, and the Future in David Lowery's *The Green Knight*"; Susan Aronstein and Taran Drummond, "*The Green Knight* by David Lowery (review)"; Richard Fahey, "*The Green Knight: Another Medievalist's Review*"; Juan Barquin, "*The Green Knight Review*: David Lowery's Adaptation Fails to Capture the Greatness of its Source Material"; and Mark Olsen, Justin Chang and Jen Yamato, "Did you love or loathe 'The Green Knight'? Either way, you're not alone."

2. I am using Paul Battles' edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. All lines cited from the poem in the original Middle English are from Battles' edition. All translations into Modern English are my own.

3. For a detailed view of the illuminated manuscript, see: www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Nero_A_X/2.

4. For a more detailed discussion of this term and its various uses in Ricardian England, see Richard Firth Green's seminal study, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England.*

5. See, for example, Paul Battles, "Amended Texts, Emended Ladies: Female Agency and the Textual Editing of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*"; S. L. Clark and Julian N. Wasserman, "Gawain's 'Anti-Feminism' Reconsidered"; Geraldine Heng, "Feminine Knots and the Other: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*"; Gerald Morgan, "Medieval Misogyny and Gawain's Outburst against Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*."

6. In a mere few lines, Gawain faces real and mythical foes:

> So mony mervayl bi mount ther the mon fyndes,
> Hit were to tore for to telle of the tenthe dole.
> Sumwhyle wyth wormes he werres, and with wolves als,
> Sumwhyle wyth wodwos that woned in the knarres,
> Bothe wyth bulles and beres, and bores otherwhyle,
> And etaynes that hym anelede of the heghe felle. (lines 718-23)
>
> So many marvels in those mountains the man finds there,
> It would be too hard to tell of them a tenth part.
> Sometimes he fights with dragons and also wolves,
> Sometimes with madmen/wildmen who lived in the crags,
> With both bulls and bears, and at other times boars,
> And giants that pursued him up the high hills.

7. While the Middle English poem does treat Gawain as the main figure in the quest, he is not mentioned at the beginning of the poem, and the focus only shifts to him near the end of Fitt I. In Fitt III, Gawain is not even present for the long hunting scenes, and the point of view switches from Lord Bertilak to the hunters and even to the animals. There are also a few lines (1283-87) where Lady Bertilak has a moment of inner dialogue. In *Boldest of Blood & Wildest of Heart: Making* The Green Knight, Lowery states that he wanted the film to be solely from Gawain's perspective.

8. While they are never named, Lowery has stated that he made the characters recognizable through the Round Table and other scene additions, but he did not want the film to be beholden to the expectations of an Arthurian film (see his comments in *Boldest of Blood & Wildest of Heart: Making* The Green Knight).

9. See, for example, the various versions of *Lybeaus Desconus*. The knights of King Arthur's Round Table are never seen raising children, as this would be something that would take them away from their duties as knights and would be a direct change from the overarching Arthurian Legend.

10. According to accounts of her Saint's life, Winifred was beheaded by Caradoc/Caradog when she refused his advances. Her uncle, St. Beuno, prayed to God that she might be restored to life. God grated him his prayer, and Winifred was restored to life. A healing well sprang from where her head once laid, and she

performed many miracles. The site of her martyrdom is Holywell. In his note for line 700 in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Battles states, "The location of 'Holy Head' is disputed. There is a Holyhead on the west side of Anglesey, but editors and critics disagree as to whether this is the place referenced here. It is possible that this refers to Holywell, named after St. Winifred, who was beheaded; if so, this would be an uncomfortable reminder to Sir Gawain of what is to come." For further information on Saint Winifred, see, for example, Catherine Sanok, *New Legends of England: Forms of Community in Late Medieval Saints' Lives*, and *The Life of St. Winifred: The Vita S. Wenefrede from BL Lansdowne MS 436*.

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"A Knight Should Know Better": Sexual Integrity and the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy in Lowery's *The Green Knight*

Michelle Wolf

The tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has enthralled readers for centuries, yet the poem has remained underwhelmingly represented in the realm of film and television.[1] This changed with David Lowery's film adaptation, *The Green Knight*, in 2021. A film of size and scope, Lowery's vision was received with mixed reviews and a moderate return at the box office.[2] The film, however, accomplished something new in bringing Gawain firmly into the current age and allowing critical discourse surrounding the text to be merged with film studies, breathing new life into Arthuriana discussions. An undeniably critical aspect of the film is its portrayal of sexuality, both in act and morality. This paper focuses on Gawain's struggle with sexual integrity in the film, a divergence from the multifaceted moral struggles he endures in the text. In an interview with IndieWire, director David Lowery discusses the decision to include a "complex, erotic love triangle" in the film, stating that the story "needed to have a sort of red-blooded lustiness that reflects Sir Gawain and the journey he goes on as a character" (Kohn). While the aforementioned "love triangle" adds to the "lustiness" of the film, Gawain's struggle with sexuality and honor is best demonstrated through the Madonna-Whore dichotomy established between St. Winifred and Lady Bertilak. In establishing the juxtaposition of the two women through close readings of critical scenes and analysis between them, this essay demonstrates how the connections between St. Winifred and Lady Bertilak, and their interactions with Gawain, push the film to its climax, signaling Gawain's fall from honor.

A reading of the film necessitates contextualization of key aspects in regard to the source material, the original *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* poem. One of the key elements that drives both the Arthurian poem and the film is Gawain's relationships with the people around him; the emphasis on, and importance of, these relationships differs drastically. The nature of Arthurian relationships is well-established across medieval studies, and the *Gawain* poem is no exception. As Edward Donald Kennedy claims, the medieval author and audience

would have been "aware of the society in which the knight moves and of his relationships with others and remind[s] them of the blood ties and bonds of fellowship that were important in medieval romances" (144). That is to say, relationships in medieval texts are multifaceted and encompass different aspects of morality, demonstrating how it relates to the various social bonds in a close-knit community. In the text, Gawain's moral compass is guided by religious instruction as well as the societal mores of King Arthur's court; this is evidenced by the pentagram on Gawain's shield, representing the social virtues of generosity, love, purity, courtesy, and compassion (Kennedy 144). While these knightly codes of conduct certainly applied to male-female connections, complex iterations—such as those highlighted in the social virtues—were expected in homosocial circles and relationships as well, if not more. Consequently, the hierarchical dynamics between a king and a knight, the rankings of knights, and male familial ties are all at play in the text. The different aspects of Gawain's morality are tested throughout the text. According to Edward Donald Kennedy, Gawain's ultimate failing comes "after resisting temptations to commit the sins of lechery and avarice, he agrees to accept from Bertilak's wife the girdle that will save his life and thus does not keep his agreement to exchange his winnings with his host" (150). The emphasis is drawn away from the actual encounter with Lady Bertilak—illicit or otherwise—and instead shifts the focus to Gawain's lack of integrity to both his host and a lord; he has forfeited his integrity by means of honesty and social courtesy, rather than lechery.

The homosocial nature of medieval culture was diluted heavily in the film, with Lowery's interpretation instead focusing almost exclusively on sexual immorality in the forms of lust and adultery. This shift draws in a modern audience while simultaneously attempting to pay homage to the source material, highlighting Gawain's climactic relationship with Lady Bertilak and his ultimate undoing as an aspiring knight. This is achieved by the introduction of a new female character, St. Winifred. The insertion of St. Winifred causes a break in the original parallelism between Guinevere and Lady Bertilak, forging a new one by placing an aging Guinevere on the periphery and St. Winifred in her stead. The original text portrays Guinevere as youthful and healthy, while also making note of her beauty. Lady Bertilak is described similarly, allowing the two to be shown in competition with each other. Lowery actively chooses to drastically change Guinevere's appearance and health, which inhibits her from being Lady Bertilak's counterpart. The connection between Guinevere and Lady Bertilak is completely severed by the introduction of St. Winifred. This new juxtaposition forces Lady Bertilak to be compared with St. Winifred, rather than

Guinevere. This new connection is purposeful and twofold. First, it takes attention away from Gawain's other struggles with morality in relation to the Arthurian sociopolitical landscape; in other words, the film Gawain is once removed from Guinevere and so his character's moral journey is less concerned with those political aspects of knighthood, such as loyalty to his king and queen. This brings sexual integrity center stage as the predominant issue Gawain faces in the film. Second, the insertion of a paragon of purity in Guinevere's stead allows for the creation of a Madonna-Whore dichotomy, establishing St. Winifred as the figure of sexual purity and Lady Bertilak as the figure of lust and temptation.

For the purposes of this paper, I will define the Madonna-Whore dichotomy using its traditional Freudian context, which has been used in psychoanalytic discussions for over a century and is certainly critical to an approach of the film. A current film adaptation of a medieval text begs the question, and rightfully so—are the sexual morals discussed in the film medieval or modern? As David Lowery explains in an interview with *Variety* magazine, "the more sensual aspects of it all come from the text, which is . . . a very bawdy tale" and "[i]t surprised me how modern it felt in that regard" (Hailu). The establishment of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy is critical in the discussion of Gawain's sexual integrity—and devolution thereof—in the film. Gawain's struggles are being mirrored through the women who occupy either end of the sexuality spectrum, from virgin to seductress, and nary the two shall meet. By emphasizing Gawain's struggles with sexual integrity, which can be defined as sexuality or sexual conduct that adheres to societal norms, virtues, and morals, Lowery claims he "didn't want to make a movie that was erotic, so to speak, but I didn't want to shy away from that sensuality or that lustiness. So I tried to make sure there was a certain amount of . . . red-blooded vigor in the film" (Hailu). The "red-blooded vigor" is certainly present throughout the film, punctuating Gawain's struggles as an aspiring knight and as a man in a visually stark manner. Gawain's battle with sexuality in the film does not exist in a vacuum; instead, it is a necessity bookended by two female characters who bring Gawain's sexuality at first to attention and then into crisis. If we analyze the film through the lens of female sexual gradient—from Madonna to whore—and take into account the parsed down knightly codes of conduct represented in the film, we see that *The Green Knight* marries the two. Aligning knightly morality with female sexuality shows how Gawain's failures with sexual integrity are not only aligned with the original text, but also relevant to today's audience. The establishment of a dichotomy between St. Winifred as Madonna and Lady Bertilak as Whore is contingent on there being an actual con-

nection between the two women. The larger parallels will be discussed in greater detail, such as those between the more detailed aspects of various exchanges and the language regarding Gawain's knighthood (or lack thereof), yet there are some subtle points that connect the two scenes that help establish the connections between the two women as Madonna and Whore.

The introduction of St. Winifred in the film establishes the Madonna figure in two distinctly different ways. First, it places an inherently virtuous character—whose virtue is derived from her status as virgin—in between the previously mentioned female characters, all of whom have some moral failing. Second, it uses visual and narrative cues emphasizing the sexual purity of St. Winifred to highlight Gawain's own failings in this regard. Interestingly, St. Winifred's introduction and Lady Bertilak's final scene with Gawain both take place in a bedroom, with each woman acting as a voyeur to a sleeping Gawain. In their respective scenes, both St. Winifred and Lady Bertilak initiate contact with Gawain—St. Winifred by asking why he is in her bed (00:57:09-00:57-10) and Lady Bertilak asking why he never came to hers (1:30:59-1:31:00). This initiation therefore functions as an impetus to the narrative action in the scene, for both of them drive the narrative progression of the film forward, rather than the titular character. Both of these scenes ultimately feature an exchange, with the conditions set by each woman in question.

The inclusion of St. Winfred in the film is both strategic and intentional, with Lowery stating that "[i]t was a worthy step in Gawain's journey towards integrity" (Hailu). According to legend, Winifred was a Welsh woman who steadfastly refused the advancements of her suitor, Caradog, because she wanted to become a nun. In a fit of rage, Caradog decapitated her in front of a church, where her blood formed a spring of water that came to be called Holy Well. St. Winifred's story impacts the narrative of *The Green Knight* in two ways. First, it hearkens back to the initial game with the Green Knight while also foreshadowing Gawain's seemingly inevitable beheading. Secondly, it directly correlates to sexual virtue, and her story was recorded and transmitted "[d]uring the late medieval period . . . [when] many legends about saints emphasize the chastity and compassion of women saints" (Atkinson 251). While St. Winifred is not mentioned by name in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the poet includes a passage that describes how Gawain "fares over the fordes by the forlondes, / Over at the Holy Hede" (Battles lines 699-700). Gillian Rudd asserts that "Holy Head" more likely is in reference to "Holy Well," the site associated with the St. Winifred legend, and that "the association seems entirely in keeping with the spirit of a poem that blends history, myth, and con-

temporary landscape so seamlessly" (59). This sentiment is reiterated earlier in J.S. Ryan's analysis of the original text, noting the similarities in both Gawain's and St. Winifred's decapitations and the initial decapitation of the Green Knight. Ryan also notes that the legend "supports and reinforces both the theme of temptation to adultery or to unchastity and the explicit Christian morality of the fourteenth century alliterative poem" (54). When Lowery discovered "the myth of Saint Winifred [he] realized that it was worthy of a chapter in and of itself" (Hailu). Though Lowery's interpretation of St. Winifred's legend is far from canonical, the inclusion of her in the film affirms her as a woman of virtue since she lost her life—and her head—to preserve her sexual integrity. She also functions as a teacher or a moral guide who attempts to give Gawain a valuable lesson, a lesson he ultimately does not learn. Medieval accounts of St. Winifred also portray her as "a leader and authority figure, a saint who is Christlike in her teaching and preaching" (Atkinson 252). This is represented in the film in a subtle but significant way, with St. Winifred functioning as a figure who guides Gawain to the Green Knight. More importantly, the inclusion of her character signifies an important lesson on chastity. Since she comes from a longstanding historical tradition that emphasizes purity and chastity, she is imbued with the virtues that Gawain desperately needs but lacks.

The addition of St. Winifred as a fully developed character is a vast digression from the original text, yet as I have argued above, her inclusion in the film is critical in establishing the narrative of Gawain's struggle with sexual purity and temptation. St. Winifred is the epitome of a woman of virginal virtue, a figure of purity and victory over temptation who becomes a martyr instead of falling to sin. While the initial text places the female parallel between Guinevere and Lady Bertilak—drawing out the political aspects of virtue as well as the sexual—the film positions St. Winifred as a medial point between the two, allowing Lady Bertilak to be juxtaposed with her, rather than Guinevere. Guinevere herself is at severe odds with her literary counterpart, with Lowery choosing to portray "fading, sickly monarchs in order to imply some rot in the heart of Camelot" (Robinson 2021), a far cry from the regal, vital queen in the text. This change also illuminates a drastic divergence from the original text in that Guinevere no longer functions as a rival to Lady Bertilak; in being sickly and aging, she cannot compete with Lady Bertilak. This change makes St. Winifred's role more apparent and distinct, juxtaposing not only a figure of virtue between herself and Lady Bertilak, but one of purity between Guinevere and Winifred. By the film distancing the two original women and inserting Winifred between them, the new dichotomy therefore by necessity becomes between St. Winifred and Lady Bertilak. In creating this align-

ment, the burden falls on St. Winifred, through her character and her interactions with Gawain, to set the standard for female virtue as well the baseline from which Gawain must fall in his impending interactions with Lady Bertilak.

From the outset, St. Winifred is portrayed as an exemplar of the virtuous feminine figure, starting from the most obvious—her physical attributes in the film—to the more subtle, her interactions with Gawain. When the audience is introduced to St. Winifred, she is wearing a clean, white gown with a modest neckline and shape. She is also unadorned, lacking the excess that will appear later in the film with Lady Bertilak. While this is certainly also a matter of class, with Lady Bertilak being an upper-class woman of the nobility, an argument can be made that this is also a visual representation of modesty and humility. These characteristics are reinforced through her entire scene, particularly in her dialogue with Gawain. When Gawain reaches to touch her, St. Winifred tells him not to and that "a knight should know better" (00:58:21). While this phrase at first seems to be a chastisement to Gawain, it functions as so much more. In a simple sense, it functions as a means of foreshadowing his complete separation from grace, which will be discussed later in conjunction with Lady Bertilak. In stating that a knight should know better, Winifred is also bringing his internal battle with virtue to the forefront for both Gawain and the audience; Gawain should know better, but given that he is not truly a knight, he struggles with giving into physical temptation even in the presence of a figure that represents the polar opposite of seduction.

A similar instance occurs when Gawain agrees to retrieve Winifred's head from the spring. Gawain turns at the last second and inquires as to what Winifred would offer him in exchange, to which she replies "[w]hy would you ask me that? Why would you ever ask me that?" (1:00:41-1:00:50). On one hand, this sets up (or foreshadows) the exchange between the Bertilaks and Gawain, but it also brings into stark relief the beginnings of the erosion that chips away at his knightly virtue. In attempting to set up a transaction for services rendered, he is trying to devalue Winifred in a *quid pro quo* arrangement, rather than acting by the code of knightly honor. In this instance, St. Winifred turns into a damsel in distress character that Gawain should be obligated to help out of virtue rather than reciprocation. Gawain fails St. Winifred's test and she turns on him, showing both Gawain and the audience that Gawain truly is no knight. This also sets up an exchange that aligns St. Winifred with Lady Bertilak. In the case of St. Winifred, this exchange is very subtle. After bringing the skull out of the lake, it turns into a physical head and tells Gawain that "Now I can see thee. And I will strike thee down with every care I have for thee. The Green Knight is

someone you know" (1:03:07-1:03:16). Here, St. Winifred offers him a warning and a clue in exchange for doing what she had asked.

He is also showing his inability to resist temptation, as he clearly "learned nothing from his encounter with the scavenger about the dangers of bargaining for acts of kindness" and effectively "set up a sexual tension" that will come to fruition later on in the film, to quote Kevin J. Harty's close read of the film. Rather than growing and learning from his mistakes, Gawain continues to fall into the same old rut. Actor Dev Patel discusses his portrayal of the titular character as being at moral odds with his literary predecessor, stating, "[w]hereas in the old story, he's very chaste and honorable right from the get-go. He's less flawed, in a way. In this version, he's very much flawed and has a lot to prove" (Chang and Yu). His flaws are not only more numerous, but harder to expunge, a constant battle that he continually falls to, as evidenced in the meeting with St. Winifred. While St. Winifred is the paragon of female virtue, her counterpoint lies in the seductive Lady Bertilak.

With St. Winifred occupying the space of Madonna, Lady Bertilak fills in the other half of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy, similarly demonstrated in how she is portrayed visually and in her interactions with Gawain. Lady Bertilak functions—both historically and in the film—as a figure of sexual temptation. She represents the femme fatale who leads Gawain astray, pulling him off a path towards righteousness and into sexual immorality. Sultry and sensual, Lady Bertilak is a far cry from the chaste St. Winifred. She is temptation incarnate, a force of sexual nature that ultimately proves too strong for Gawain to resist. The costume design for Lady Bertilak is the exact opposite of St. Winifred's simple, white, modest attire. It was designed to be lavish, proud, and sensual. Her attire leaves little to the imagination, with a plunging neckline and figure-accentuating dress, bedecked in jewelry and luxury that drips of wealth and pride. While her clothing is also certainly a status symbol, it also shows both a lack of humility and an excess of sexuality, which is far from unnoticed by Gawain; to the contrary, he seems hyper-aware of it, and she manipulates that awareness. She uses her body in its sensual glory to draw Gawain into adulterous temptation, a temptation that would shatter his honor in two ways—first as a knight in succumbing to the advances of a married woman, and secondly as a man, in not keeping his end of the reciprocal bargain he forged with Lord Bertilak. In a subtle detail, Lady Bertilak's gown matches the sheets and drapes in Gawain's room in the castle, drawing an intimate and almost voyeuristic line between the two that will unfold in the climactic scene between the two of them.

An important feature in the film that defines and reinforces Lady Bertilak's roles as the Whore in the Madonna-Whore dichotomy is her

monologue in the latter half of the film. Lady Bertilak's monologue on the significance of the color green can be interpreted twofold—first that it reinforces sexuality as a theme of the film, and second in that it confirms her role as the aggressive sexuality. She equates green with both life and rot, two seemingly incompatible things that go so far as to negate the other. She goes on further to bring that idea of rot to include both the physical and spiritual, with such statements as "when it comes creeping up the cobbles, we scrub it out, fast as we can" and "when it blooms beneath our skin, we bleed it out" (1:25:58-1:26-09) being suggestive of lust; lust is a vice that occurs naturally, but virtue dictates that it must be overcome or removed. Lady Bertilak herself suggests this later on in the monologue in stating that "[w]hilst we are off looking for red, in comes green. Red is the color of lust, but green is what lust leaves behind, in heart, in womb" (1:26:46-1:27:04). In equating red with lust and green with life or rot, Lady Bertilak is telling Gawain that succumbing to the red (lust) will allow in the green (rot) while he is unaware, a corruption that has already taken root in Gawain. In following this analogy, when one is actively seeking out sexual desire it lets in that rot, the spiritual rot that leads to the erosion of sexual integrity. Toward the end of her monologue, Lady Bertilak leaves no room for misinterpretation in stating explicitly that "[t]his verdigris will overtake your swords and your coins and your battlements and, try as you might, all you hold dear will succumb to it. Your skin, your bones. Your virtue" (1:27:42-1:27:58). Lady Bertilak is clear with Gawain that not only his physical body but also his virtue will die with this green rot, his lust and inability to fight against it. Whereas St. Winifred sets the baseline for Gawain's level of integrity, Lady Bertilak dictates how far he will fall, and how eroded his integrity as an aspiring knight will become.

The cat and mouse game between Lady Bertilak and Gawain starts immediately, though presumably with low stakes. There are many exchanges between Lady Bertilak and Gawain during the course of the film; however, these escalate in impropriety and are immoral—he gains the green sash at the cost of his integrity and honor, both in his virtue as a knight and in his wager with Lord Bertilak. In giving a gift to Gawain—a book of love poetry—the Lady asks, "[s]hould not a knight offer a lady a kiss in thanks?" (1:20:17). This brings in intimacy between the two while also initiating the transactional relationship that will lead to Gawain being stripped of his virtue. It also hearkens back to the original text, playing on the second of three exchanges between Gawain and Lady Bertilak; it is critical to note that in the text, Gawain stands up to his reputation as a knight by exchanging his "winnings" (i.e. the kiss) with Lord Bertilak. Similar exchanges are set up in the

film, but with an inverse effect on honor. Following the gifting scene, she requests to paint Gawain's portrait, to which he obliges. Upon completion, it is revealed that the portrait is inverted and beaded with water via camera obscura, hearkening back to the earlier scene with St. Winifred and Gawain's retrieval of her head from the lake. In showing his head upside down, the portrait is visually showing that the virtue and integrity he possessed up until this point in the film has now also been inverted from the St. Winifred scene. The official break with sexual integrity comes to a head with the infamous girdle scene. In a scene that is uncomfortable and deeply unsettling, Lady Bertilak presents Gawain with the item—which had been stolen from him earlier in the film—and goads him with repeated taunts of "Do you want it?", with the "it" in question being both the girdle and an illicit sexual encounter with the temptress. The answer to whether or not Gawain gives in to temptation is shown seconds later on his hand and the sash, leaving no room to imagination as to what has transpired and "confronting viewers with a pornographic moment in a movie that is otherwise rather modest in its visual depictions of sexuality" (Pugh 41). This scene, while uncomfortable viewing, is important in that it marks the point where Gawain has officially lost his integrity and passed the point of no return; the fact that his emission is on his hand and the girdle shows in no uncertain terms the price he paid for his lack of resolve, as well as how far his devolution has truly gone. By the end of the scene, he has lost his sexual integrity with "the film's eroticism leav[ing] nothing to the imagination as it suggests that any semblance of vigilance on Gawain's part has given way to the licentious" (Harty 48). Lady Bertilak is the ultimate example of intense, predatory female sexuality and a temptation that proves too hard for Gawain to resist. In the words of Lady Bertilak, at this point "he is no knight" and has ultimately lost his battle with sexual integrity.

In essence, Lowery's film functions as a palimpsest that writes modern discussions of sexual integrity over ones from the original text. In both cases, the sexual integrity in question hinges on female sexuality as a catalyst that sparks the devolution into sexual immorality in the forms of adultery and wantonness. While the manifestations of these incidents may be uncomfortable for viewers in their graphic portrayal in the film, their messages are very much the same as in the original text they draw from. Gawain's fall from grace and his eventual restoration form the crux of the film and his overall journey. The impetus for this fall is multifaceted and complex, nodding to the earlier text. However, the film's heavy emphasis on sexual integrity and morality cannot be understated. This is ultimately achieved by establishing a connection between the figure of purity in St. Winifred and the figure

of immorality in Lady Bertilak and drawing parallels between them. The nuances of the film and its relationship to sexuality, gender and feminist studies, and power dynamics are extensive and beyond the ability of this—or any one—critical discussion to do it proper justice. The dynamics and relationships between St. Winifred, Lady Bertilak, and Gawain offer a snapshot into these topics of critical discourse, as well as offering insight into Gawain's lack of progression as a knight. Lowery's reimagining of the *Gawain* poem offers a version of the knight that is deeply human and morally compromised, a struggle that he continually fails to overcome. The clever crafting of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy between St. Winifred and Lady Bertilak solidifies Gawain's struggles with sexual integrity, both as a character and with the audience. After all, a knight should know better.

Notes

1. Director Stephen Weeks adapted the text to film in 1973 with *Gawain and the Green Knight*, and later remade the film in 1984 under the title *Sword of the Valiant*.

2. *The Green Knight* internationally grossed approximately $17 million against a budget of $15 million.

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James Agee, Frances Wickes, and *The Morning Watch* as Shadowy Autobiography

Joseph R. Millichap

A recent reconsideration of James Agee's complicated life, complex work, and the critical responses to both while writing a descriptive bibliography increased my appreciation for the writer's intriguing relationship with his sometime analyst Frances Wickes. Remembered now as an early Jungian theorist and practitioner in America, Wickes proves a fascinating figure in many ways, particularly in her lifelong engagement with writing and writers. Agee first read her psychological studies in the mid 1930s, and he later became Wickes's on and off analysand during the late 1940s. Her example as well as her analysis would have encouraged Agee's ongoing interest in writing an autobiographical novel, because she wrote and published one herself at that time, *Receive the Gale*, in 1946. Agee's major efforts at his fictive autobiography include *The Morning Watch* in 1951, *A Death in the Family* in 1957, a restored version of that novel in 2007, and a few fragments. These several fictions by both writers represent what I will call shadowy autobiography. This sort of recreated life narrative includes the unconscious elements of the inner self that Jung named the shadow, as well as the more conscious aspects comprising the persona or the public face of selfhood. A comparative reading of such autobiographical efforts by Wickes and Agee provides a better understanding of the complex relations found in their own individual lives and works, as well as of the complicated personal relationship between this engaging pair. I believe Agee's later fiction proves both intertextual with and influenced by Wickes's creative efforts, especially *Receive the Gale,* in particular the short novel that became the cornerstone of his shadowy autobiography as *The Morning Watch.*

In order to create the best focus for my consideration of *The Morning Watch*, I will reverse the order of my title and opening paragraph by defining shadowy autobiography, then considering Wickes's diverse sorts of narratives from this perspective, and finally reading Agee's short novel with these same psychological regards. My critical sense of shadowy autobiography has developed from widely varied sources,

but Robert Penn Warren provided me with the image itself. At the age of seventy-five, Warren wrote an "Afterthought" to his penultimate collection of poems, and in it he confessed that the volume advanced aspects of a shadowy autobiography (Millichap 1-2). These same terms could be assigned to most of Warren's sublime later poetry, if not to much of his canon. When Warren published *Being Here* in 1980, autobiographical theory was shifting its emphasis from the life recreated to the self recreating it. Much of the revision was realized by the relation of what Jung saw as the light of consciousness and the shadow of the unconscious, both of which must be integrated for individuation, or the realization of the self necessary for creativity (Olney 140). My readings of both Wickes and Agee will be set within this kind of theoretical framework, first considering Wickes's several books and next Agee's shadowy autobiography in *The Morning Watch*. My bibliographical review did discover that the Agee criticism is aware of Wickes, but it has not explored her life and work in close relation to his as fully as I do here. In fact, the only substantial biography, *James Agee: A Life* (1984) by Laurence Bergreen, does establish the significance of Agee's relationship with Wickes for his life and work. Since then Wickes has received only passing attention from Agee criticism, despite the development of other materials including five of his letters to her in the late 1940s and early 1950s that are intimate, affectionate, and generous.

Frances Bliss Gillespy was born in 1875 near Troy, New York, where her family was long and well established. She attended Emma Willard School, graduated from Columbia Teachers College, and taught English for several years before and after her marriage in 1902 to Thomas Wickes, a prominent lawyer and an older widower with grown children. A son, Eliphalet Wickes, was born in 1906, and they followed the by then disgraced and disbarred lawyer to Alaska in 1908 and to California in 1909. Wickes continued to teach during these moves, while also establishing herself as a publishing writer of children's literature. Her separation and divorce brought Wickes back to New York, where she discovered Jungian psychotherapy. In 1923, she took a certificate at the Jung Institute in Zurich, going on to publish psychological papers and to practice as a lay psychoanalyst. Her personal life was changed by the death of her son, then a rising senior at Yale, in a boating accident during the summer of 1926. She dedicated her first book to him in 1927, *The Inner World of Childhood: A Study in Analytical Psychology*, with a preface by Jung. Over these decades Wickes worked with Jungian organizations and publications, leading to *The Inner World of Man, With Psychological Drawings and Paintings* in 1938. Agee discovered her first book in 1935, but we are not sure when

he read her second book, though it seems likely he would have engaged it at some point during his relationship with her.

Agee was entering his thirties in the late 1930s, and he felt that his personal life and professional work were stifled. In particular, he could not finish the book on southern tenant farmers that he had begun in 1936 on a documentary sojourn in the cotton belt of Alabama with Farm Security Administration photographer Walker Evans. As Agee's biographer surmises, the writer again considered autobiographical fiction by turning to figures like Freud and Jung, the latter perhaps by way of Wickes's psychological works (Bergreen 152). Agee was impressed with Wickes's concern with the early confrontation of death by children, especially in the loss of a parent (*Childhood* 265-70). Her second effort in 1938 considers more examples of how the early death of parents shapes the adult lives of their children. Both of Wickes's studies were in several senses creative works, as she retold the lives of her patients (with their permissions), focusing on her analysis of their dreams. Such recreations were in a sense autobiographical as well, as Wickes often traced her own professional and personal relations with her subjects. An especially striking example is the new book's eleventh chapter, one that recounts how the early death of a father created ongoing difficulties for the son with his mother (*Man* 145-63). In terms of his unconscious, these tensions were played out by his anima and the animus, the Jungian archetypes of female and male personae. This subject's relations with women in his life were stifled by his unresolved problems with his mother and the shadowy image of the anima archetype, much the same as with Agee himself, as will become clear in my Jungian reading of *The Morning Watch*.

Wickes's writings might have stimulated Agee's own work as he plumbed his memories and his dreams for their autobiographical significance (Bergreen 153, Davis 209-12). Agee finished a few pieces from these efforts, notably "Knoxville: Summer 1915" in 1938, as well as finally publishing his hybrid classic with Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1941. Worth noting are the autobiographical aspects of this essentially documentary text. Although Agee's initial focus was on the cotton tenants, the impetus of his rewriting was an analysis of his personal and creative relations with them. In this way, his initial engagements with psychoanalytic theorists, including Wickes as well as Jung and Freud, aided the conclusion of Agee's single most significant text. The author's hesitation in the final revision of his drafts doomed *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* to initial obscurity, however, as national attention had shifted from Depression America to the world at war by the time the book appeared. Excused from military service for age and health, both Agee and Evans drifted among many personal commit-

ments and professional assignments during the war years. By 1945 Agee was physically and psychologically exhausted, and the atomic bomb brought on a personal crisis that led him to seek counseling. Recalling Wickes's books, Agee found her still practicing near New York City and sought her out (Bergreen 298). Wickes welcomed her relationship with him, as she had a penchant for artists and writers, counting many as friends, patients, or both–as with Agee.

Wickes quickly dug to the root of Agee's stunted psychological development in the unresolved problems of his parental relationships. These tensions were both conscious and unconscious, deriving from the early death of his father in his boyhood and the later distance of his mother during his adolescence. As Agee's biographer proposes, accurately I think, Wickes became a nurturing mother he never knew (Bergreen 298). In my view, Agee also became a surrogate son for Wickes, as he was about the same age then as her lost child and like him was endowed with considerable yet thwarted promise. According to Bergreen, Wickes offered Agee the choice either to talk things out in analysis or to write them out in fiction, but he decided to do both (298). Such treatments were open to Wickes as an analyst and a writer herself. During the first year of Agee's therapy, she finished her own autobiographical novel, *Receive the Gale* published by Appleton-Century late in 1946, with its title derived from St. Francis de Sales in a natural image of spiritual and creative inspiration. Her fiction was not as autobiographical as Agee's would become, however, as her protagonist is a male writer of about the same era as her lost son and of similar experiences as Agee. Much of David's life narrative replicates not male models, however, but her own younger self. The best part of the novel comes early on when David endures the frustrations of a difficult teaching experience, a loveless marriage, and a hard winter in Alaska. Wickes had suffered all of these same difficulties herself, while she cared for her two-year-old son and also began her literary work as a writer of children's books.

When young David returns to New York City, his personal life is marked by three failed relationships (including a marriage) and his professional work by dull assignments at a slick business journal significantly named *Success*. Wickes's protagonist has yet to come to terms with his father's untimely death and his mother's remarriage to a stolid Swiss businessman (*Receive* 228-33). Although the factual details elicited by Helena, David's intended second wife and de facto analyst may differ, the psychological import of these events prove so close to Agee's life at that same point as to require careful comparison. The connections likewise suggest a number of complex issues in Wickes's relations between her own animus and the males in her life: her son

and Carl Jung during the 1920s as well as her son's memory and James Agee in the 1940s. Such consideration raises a number of critical questions. Although the novel's publication page includes the usual note declaring that any resemblances to real people is accidental, such was surely not the case. Agee must have known that his analyst had published a well received first novel. As with the examples in her psychological books, Wickes would have asked Agee's permission to fictively speculate about his personal problems while also projecting her own imagined solutions to them. While these complications are certainly interesting in regard to Wickes's publications, their major import is for Agee and for *The Morning Watch* in 1951.

Agee's new venture into shadowy autobiography during the late 1940s provides an opportunity to trace his factual biography until then. Born in 1909, Agee grew along with his hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee as it became the largest city in Appalachia. The determining event of Agee's youth was the untimely death of his father in 1916. His education later expanded outward from Knoxville public schools to St. Andrews School in Sewanee, Tennessee, to Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, and finally to Harvard University. After graduating in 1932, Agee joined the recently launched *Fortune* magazine in New York City. The young writer had recreated his own life narrative in literature as early as the poetry that comprised his first book, *Permit Me Voyage*, from the prestigious Yale Younger Poets series in 1934. On a sort of sabbatical from *Fortune* in 1935, Agee made his first notes toward an autobiographical novel (Bergreen 148). His inability to progress on the project over the next few years led him to his initial readings in psychological theory, by way of Wickes's early books, among others. He made little progress on the project while finishing *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, however, returning to it only sporadically during the war years. One result of Agee's off and on analysis with Wickes from 1945 to 1951 was a new beginning of and a renewed commitment to his autobiographical fiction. This new start was focused by Agee's increased understanding of the tensions that had always existed between his conscious memories of actual family dynamics and his unconscious sense of gendered parental archetypes in the development of his own individual selfhood. Typically for him, Agee made ambitious plans and outlines for his autobiographical opus on a grand scale that recalls his fellow Appalachian fictionist Thomas Wolfe. Like him, Agee began his outline with his ancestry, and he then included his childhood, adolescence, Harvard, *Fortune*, the book (*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*), his three marriages, and everything since, or up to the renewed writing of his shadowy autobiography during the late 1940s and early 1950s that would lead to the publication of his short novel (Lofaro 579-80).

Agee did not follow this chronological order, however, in either the composition or the publication of the initial parts in his shadowy autobiography. Rather he began with his adolescence in *The Morning Watch*, a text he started in the late 1940s, finished in 1950, and published in 1951. His initial development proves appropriate, as the short novel seems to me his text most influenced by Jung's psychological theory as well as by Wickes's psychoanalytic practice in regard to these major transitions of Agee's own life narrative. Adolescence is one of the significant periods in the evolution of the individualized self, of course. Roughly equivalent to the teenage years, this pivotal time span sees the child mature toward adulthood, especially in terms of the physical and psychological changes that form gender identities and sexual relations. Jung theorized a good deal on adolescence, and Wickes's practice often focused on it, so that her psychological publications reflected her clinical experience with adolescents. An early example is found in *The Inner World of Childhood* from 1927, the fifth chapter of which is titled "Adolescence," and which Agee first read in 1935. Wickes's chapter is focused by a brief theoretical introduction stressing the significance of the adolescent years to successful individuation and followed by several case studies drawn from her psychoanalytic practice. Wickes presents eight examples in this chapter, exploring the tensions of gender in the relations of adolescents to their parents and often employing dream analysis. All of them are informed by Jung's theorizing of the gender archetypes in the unconscious, or the anima and animus, that came into prominence with adolescence.

Wickes's second book, *The Inner World of Man* in 1938, did not bear as directly on childhood and adolescence, but many elements prove similar to her first by again emphasizing the developmental significance of the parents and their own gendered archetypes to those of their adolescent children. After two chapters of theoretical introduction, the book's third chapter, "Parental Images," presents illustrative cases drawn from Wickes's practice. As in her chapter on adolescence in *The Inner World of Childhood*, several of these examples suggest the sort of developmental difficulties Agee had experienced as a preadolescent and would recreate in *The Morning Watch*. The writer's actual therapy with Wickes had swiftly established that his personal problems derived from the early loss of his father, and that they were exacerbated by the resulting absence of his mother. Laura Agee's initial reaction to the death of her husband was to insulate six-year-old James and three-year-old Emma from the shock of their loss by isolating them from further changes. Although Wickes was describing other women in these case studies, like them the widow Agee was becoming the devouring mother, a collective Jungian image for the thwarted anima (*Childhood*

108-109, *Man* 42). These Jungian stereotypes revealed the mother smothering her child's psychological growth while simultaneously neglecting her own. As is often the case with such irrational reactions to trauma, Agee's mother soon veered to the other extreme, taking her eight-year-old son and five-year-old daughter with her on a sudden move to St. Andrews, an Anglo Catholic boarding school in Sewanee, Tennessee. Once there, she established residence close by James, yet kept her distance, hoping that he would be more influenced by the male presences of the priestly Fathers and of the other boys (Bergreen 27). Such are exactly the difficulties of development that Agee's protagonist faces in *The Morning Watch*, ones that he finally deals with during a psychological quest rife with Jungian archetypes and symbols that were also represented in Wickes's written works.

The Morning Watch appeared as a single volume in 1951, so it is most often referred to as a short novel, yet its publication in full by two literary periodicals in that same year suggests that it may be considered as a long story. In either case, the work is generally judged as a tour de force, a literary effort tightly focused and powerfully realized. *The Morning Watch* has received scant critical attention in the three quarters of a century since its publication, yet the criticism that does exist proves to be solid work from traditional approaches. Most of it follows a general pattern of adolescent development similar to my critical approach, but without my Jungian analysis of the protagonist's personal evolution. For one example, a very early reading traces the parallel structure between the protagonist's life and the Christian liturgy during Easter (Ramsey 494). When more recent examples prove psychological at all, then they are decidedly more Freudian (Doty 28, Folks 69-70). A more recent article makes a strong case for the power of ritual violence as the structuring principle for the narrative (Crank 275 ff.).

Agee's two other books of prose published in his lifetime, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and *A Death in the Family*, demonstrate similar power but lack this focus, at least in my view. In some senses, then, *The Morning Watch* can be seen as a transitional work between Agee's earlier and later literary works, as well as his initial entry into a shadowy autobiography. This narrative reveals the developmental significance of a night and morning in regard to several personal realizations. Agee's narrative is set during Holy Week at a boarding school like St. Andrews, specifically on Maundy Thursday with its Morning Watch rites commemorating Jesus's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. The spiritual suffering of Christ becomes a dark night of the soul in Christian regards and a night journey under the sea in Jungian imagery. Like Agee, Jung and Wickes developed in traditional Christian backgrounds; his father was a Lutheran pastor, while her sister was an

Episcopal deaconess. Christ's Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane was understood as a human and thus psychological night journey in works by both of them (Jung 398-401, Wickes, *Choice* 18-20).

Agee's recreation of his preadolescent experiences at St. Andrews begins in the dead of night but extends beyond the dawn to the morning anticipated in his title as well as in the Lenten ritual from which it derives. This diurnal movement divides the narrative into three parts, each headed by Roman numerals. Part I takes place in deep night as the protagonist is awakened in his dormitory to join the ritual of the night watch. The second part transitions from dark to dawn as Richard keeps watch in the school's chapel. In part III, he plunges outward into the dawning light, the burgeoning spring, and the unfolding world of nature beyond the school grounds. The three parts differ in length, as the second is more than twice as long as the other two put together. Part II also is divided into nine smaller unnumbered sections, while the first and third parts are not subsectioned at all. The first part serves as the introduction to Agee's protagonist, and the final part concludes his transition begun in the much longer and more complicated middle part. These individual changes are artificial and spiritual at first, yet in their development they become ever more natural and psychological. In part I, the protagonist's tensions are found within a personal framework, while part II shows the spiritual scaffolding of his preadolescent persona. His psychological realization takes place in part III, and the three parts of his narrative combine as shadowy autobiography.

Although Agee names his protagonist Richard in *The Morning Watch,* the character is clearly a variation of the more obviously autobiographical Rufus (Agee's own middle and nickname) in his other personal fictions. Aside from this name change, the protagonist proves a mirror image of Agee in preadolescence, particularly in terms of his spiritual and psychological development up to that point in his life. Although the pious boy had vowed to keep the night long watch, he fell asleep and awoke sharply "aware of his failure and of the night" (Agee 403). His consciousness is divided between contemplation of Christ's "Agony and Bloody Sweat" and awareness that "he had wet the bed" (403, 404). Rufus in *A Death in the Family* likewise suffers this embarrassment, much like Agee himself, one that Wickes assigned to developmental regression (*Childhood* 82-83). Richard then muses on Maundy Thursday as a day with a special sense like that of other ones, "of his birthday, and of Christmas, and of Easter, and it was still more like the feeling" (406). Moreover, it is also like "the morning just after he learned of his father's death and during the day he was buried" (406). Analogies emerge between his young life and the Christian mythos, his birth and Christmas, as well as his father's death and Good Friday.

The absence of his father is now reemphasized by a separation from his mother. While in the school chapel for his part of the Morning Watch in part II, Richard recalls "watching his mother's cottage . . . relishing the fact only he knew of the miserableness of that watch" (422). His mother "would sharpen his unhappiness into agony by her idea of a sensible explanation why this senseless cruelty had to be law" (422). These tensions between Richard's conscious spiritual devotion and his unconscious psychological evolution are extended within part I into part II.

Part I concludes as Agee's protagonist and two other boys leave the dormitory for their place in the Morning Watch, while part II begins as they enter the side door of the chapel to change places with those watching before them. The transition between the first and second parts is filled with realistic aspects of preadolescence, including profane exchanges between his companions and those already at the chapel. Richard is more concerned with the religious details of Lenten observance, however. As seen in the second subsection, the chapel is prepared for Good Friday observances, and it reflects the suffering and death of Christ. All decoration is "choked in black," and "the tabernacle gawped like a dead jaw" after the eucharist has been removed (Agee 413). All of these changes leave only "the skeleton of the Church," an image that has a profound effect on Richard, as "it seemed at once more sacred in dishonor, and as brutally secular as a boxcar" (413). Such is exactly the youngster's existential situation on his own morning watch, finally facing the devastating loss in his father's death as seen from contesting religious and psychological perspectives. Part II reinforces this tension in the contrast of sacred and secular images and symbols. Divinity does not die, as shown by the promise of Easter with its white vestments and spring flowers, both of which Richard calls to mind in the darkened chapel. Yet at the same instant he recalls his dead father in a casket lined with dark silk and surrounded by fall flowers. "Dead, the word prevailed; and before him, still beyond all other stillness, he saw as freshly as six years before his father's prostrate head and, through the efforts to hide it, the mortal blue dent in the impatient chin" (414).

The third short section of part II begins Richard's movement from the early disappearance of his father to the more recent absence of his mother. Although the dormitory was an entirely masculine preserve for the boys and the Fathers, the chapel, especially the Lady's Chapel with its secondary altar dedicated to the Blessed Mother, is open to female archetypes as well. During this watch, Deaconess Spenser devotes herself to prayer and to discipline for the boys kneeling ahead of her. This spinster prefigures Richard's mother, who is living in a nearby cottage

that he is forbidden to visit (Agee 422). Both seem closely based on Laura Agee, who would later become a Deaconess herself before her remarriage to one of the more eligible Fathers (Bergreen 30). Clearly the protagonist's bitterness towards his mother recreates Agee's own maternal tensions. In particular, Richard recalls his mother piously instructing him "that it is only through submitting bravely and cheerfully to unhappiness that we can learn God's Will, and how truly to be most good" (422). Richard, like Agee, cannot accept such submissive acceptance of the great losses in his evolving life narrative, precisely because such would wrongly define his own gendered archetypes. Earlier in this same subsection, Richard's emotional contemplation of Christ's Holy Wounds then evokes a decidedly naturalistic vision of birth as well as of death. His subconscious associations evoked by the pallid images of the Five Wounds in Christian iconography range from his reading in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* to his "rawly intimate glimpse" of his Knoxville neighbor Minnielee Henly (418). His conscious devotions give way to shadowy images and symbols deriving from the anima and animus in his unconscious.

Later in part II, these same tensions reveal themselves in Richard's elaborate fantasies of his individual development that are suggested by Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, and the Morning Watch. Naturally enough, the confused boy wonders if he may have the vocation to become a Father himself, a priestly stand-in for the risen Christ. More extravagantly, Richard rehearses a favorite vision of himself as the penitent thief, literally crucified beside Jesus, if only tied rather than nailed to a rough cross. Still, his personal sacrifice would become "the most courageous thing that had ever been done by a boy in this School," he imagines "Father McPhetridge, the Prior" saying as the priest gazes up at him in awe (426). Indeed, this fantasized fourth subsection of part II involves the complete admiration of both men and boys, whereas Richard's actual relations with them during his two hour stint in the chapel are indifferent if not openly scornful or hostile. He finally daydreams of the way that word of his feat would spread across his home state back to Knoxville as part of the "STRANGE RITES AT MOUNTAIN SCHOOL," as the exaggerated headlines in Tennessee newspapers would announce on Easter weekend (427, emphasis in text). In the second half of his watch, Richard is focused again on the progress of Holy Week, in particular Good Friday. So he ends his watch, a sort of spiritual dark night of the soul by recalling Christ's Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Likewise, he accepts the universality of suffering and death—his Savior's, his father's, and inevitably his own. "A strange and happy sorrow filled him. *It is finished*, his soul whispered" echoing Christ's final words on the cross (447, emphasis in text).

Part II ends as Richard and his two fellow watchers leave the chapel, and part III begins when they emerge into "perishing darkness" of Good Friday dawn (448). As the pale light unfolds above them, the three students flee the school grounds for the nearby woods where Richard experiences his own psychological night journey under the sea. In terms of the naturalistic narrative, this change begins when one of his companions suggests that instead of going back to their dorm that they trek to a deep swimming hole a mile away down the woods path. Known locally as the Sand Cut, this spring-fed pond supplies a water tank along the branch line railroad that skirts the school to connect with the rest of the state. Like part I, part III is not subsectioned, yet it naturally divides itself in thirds, each piece as long as the entirety of part I. The truant trio move briskly from the school to the Sand Cut, then skinny dip in the dark waters, and finally make their way more slowly back to campus and inevitable punishment. At first, Richard seems reluctant to risk the wrath of the Fathers, especially during Holy Week, but the challenges from the others evoke his innate masculine pride. His sudden assertion emerges from an unconscious male archetype, Jung's animus, impelling him to rebel against the order of the institution that is keeping him a child. Richard's psychological evolution begins at a religious and sectarian institution, but unwinds against its rural and natural background. At first light, a rooster crows, a second rooster answers, and "the cry of a third rooster, shining sprang, speared, vibrated . . . in the centers of their flesh" (448). Such obviously masculine imagery not only reveals the secular nature of Richard's transition, but it also asserts his movement away from a religious explanation of his individual development. If Agee's autobiographical protagonist first believed that his late night doze had betrayed his Savior, then these barnyard notes punctuate his escalating shame by recalling the Apostle Peter's shame at denying his Savior thrice during Maundy Thursday evening (Mark 14:30).

The focal images and symbols of Richard's journey to the Sand Cut pond suggest his growing sense of natural evolution and of psychological naturalism. As the forest emerges into the new light, like a developing "photograph," the seasonal flourishes recall the cut flowers seen earlier while hidden in the chapel awaiting Easter (450). A vision of "a dogwood dilated ahead of them, each separate blossom enlarging like an eye . . . likewise blind clumps of unawakened laurel" (450). Moving away from the confinements of the campus, all three are drawn into the natural freedom of rebirth in the forest. Even the dark trunks reappear multicolored with the dawn. "Some were blackish, some were brownish, some were gray and gray green, and silver brown and silver green" (450-51). Richard also observes the many textures of their bark: "rugged,

mosaic, deeply ribbed and satin sleek" (451). In this study, he discovers the focus of this symbolic immersion into nature: "a locust shell, transparent silver breathed with gold, the whole back split" (451). With spring, the locust must molt its hardened exoskeleton that impedes its continued growth into maturity. Of course, this detritus becomes the perfect symbol of Richard's own evolution from a confining spiritual vision of his world to one more natural, and thus one more secular and psychological. Agee's description of the abandoned shell, like "the face of a human embryo" includes a suggestion of Easter as rebirth, but his imagery is essentially naturalistic and evolutionary (452). So it seems to him "primordial, as trilobites . . . Dinosaurs . . . a pterodactyl . . . Silurian, Mesozoic, Protozoic, Jurassic" (452). Although Richard first separates the empty shell from the bark, as if to possess it, he then religiously replaces it instead. "With veneration, talon by talon, he reestablished the shell in its grip against the rigid bark" (452). Seemingly, Richard is not yet prepared to accept this naturalistic symbol as he has not progressed from his childhood into his adolescent selfhood.

In his preoccupation with the locust shell, Richard has fallen behind his fellow truants, who have sprinted ahead to the railroad track, the Sand Cut, and the nameless pond that fills the wooden water tank. At the object of their truancy, all three of them suddenly realize the implications of their choices. The spring morning is colder than they anticipated, while the "water was motionless and almost black" (453). All three are having second thoughts, Richard in particular, yet none will express the fears they all feel. Instead, they each strip naked, an act Agee's protagonist dreads as much as his cold plunge to follow. These masculine rituals conclude when the boldest of them, a boy the others believe to be part Native American, "grabbed at his testicles with one hand . . . his nose with the other to leap with a spangling splash into the water" (454). Richard follows this masculine bravado, feeling "the fateful exhilaration of a falling dream"; instead of bobbing to the surface like the other two, he feels compelled "to dive deep as he could go . . . downward into most deadly darkness" (454). At last reaching "the deepest trench at the bottom, his belly foundering in ooze," the preadolescent considers death once more in harshly naturalistic terms before rising to the surface. "I could have died, he realized almost casually" (456). Such is his Jungian night journey under the sea, a sort of baptismal immersion into adult knowledge represented by the darknesses of this depth and of death. This deepest ooze that Richard embraces at the pond bottom recalls the primordial world he envisioned in the locust shell and evokes the Darwinian primordial ooze that once was the very basis of evolution, naturalism, and the secular psychology of Freud and Jung.

Having now established some evidence of their masculinity, all three young men quickly don their clothes again. Suddenly on a sandstone ledge nearby appears "a snake more splendid than Richard had seen before" (456). Snakes, serpents, and dragons are very prominent archetypes in Jung's psychology, complex ones drawing on complicated Christian, Darwinian, and Freudian traditions. For the most part, Jung addresses them only in dreams as varied aspects of the unconscious. Wickes does so as well, frequently reporting such dream visions in her case studies. Agee's resulting acquaintance with snake dreams and interpretations, including his own as detailed in the letters to Wickes introduced above, may have influenced Richard's struggles with his shadow self in *The Morning Watch* (Davis 210). Agee's protagonist instantly realizes the snake "had just struggled out of his old skin and was with his first return of strength venturing his new one" (Agee 456-57). Like the locust, the snake's molting is necessary for it to continue in its growth, in another natural rite of spring that once again suggests Richard's own evolution. His sense of the creature's new colors stills him in admiration, but not so his adolescent companions. One flips the snake off the ledge with a long branch, while the other assaults it with a large rock. As they close in to torment and kill it, Richard seizes a smaller stone and crushes its skull in an act more of mercy than masculinity.

Just as the other two had admired his deep dive earlier, they now "respected him" for this violence without understanding his actual motivation (Agee 458). Elated by their new feeling for him, Richard hesitates to cleanse his hands of his own blood or of the snake's "slime," as both now become proud badges of his new found masculinity (458). At last he throws the stone into the pond, "just about where I dove in he realized upon reflection," and thrusts his arm into the cold water, so that "the veins stood out on his forearm almost like a man" (459). Richard refuses to handle the snake again, however, so the more aggressive of the other pair totes it back to the school on a broken branch, only to toss both into the hog pen once there. On that slow walk back, Richard again lags behind, relocates the locust shell, "detached it gently, and with great care . . . settled it in the breast-pocket of his shirt" (462). Perhaps he is preserving it as a sacramental of his transition from childhood to adolescence by accepting life and death in naturalistic terms. Agee's narrative ends as Richard recalls his mother's words revealing the death of his father, while his hand involuntarily rises to touch the empty shell that rests against his heart (464).

As the initial text of Agee's shadowy autobiography in the order of both composition and publication, if not in that of his actual life narrative, *The Morning Watch* becomes its very cornerstone in my view.

His autobiographical work of this psychological sort turns toward the unconscious elements of the self, or the Jungian shadow, as well as the more conscious persona or public face of the self. Agee's short novel was written and published during the years when he was most engaged with Jungian psychology, and his initial effort at such shadowy narrative seems intertextual with and influenced by the varied efforts of Frances Wickes. As an early Jungian disciple and practitioner in America, Wickes is a fascinating figure in many ways, especially in her considerable professional and creative writing. As I have traced this development here, Agee read her psychological studies in the mid 1930s, engaged her as a psychiatrist in the mid 1940s, and remained her personal friend until his death in 1955. Most intriguing within their long relationship was the publication of her novel *Receive the Gale* in 1946, with its complexly autobiographical protagonist sharing her own and Agee's life experiences and personal qualities. I trust my reading of several works by both Wickes and Agee yields new understanding of the complex psychological relations between their lives and works, especially in Agee's shadowy autobiography that he realized initially in *The Morning Watch*.

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Out of Sight: James Dickey's Challenge to Vision's Dominance as a Sensory Descriptor

Jerry L. Rumph, Jr.

Creative writers often hear some form of the refrain: "write using all of the senses." This advice to engage all five senses likely emerged to encourage the creation of more robust scenes as writers tend to rely primarily on visual description—unsurprising, given vision's dominance in various aspects of our lives. For example, a linguistic study revealed that vision is the dominant sense in English (Majid 11370, 11373). In addition, Fabian Hutmacher discussed the disproportionate amount of research on vision over all other senses in the fields of cognitive psychology and sensory studies (1-10). Yet, vision's dominance in literature may be waning. In "Sensory Representation in Literature," Frank Nuessel discussed the importance of addressing the five senses in literary work to create a psychosomatic connection for the reader, and he provided specific examples of how various authors have succeeded in representing each sense in literature (101-11). In "Reflections on an Aesthetics of Touch, Smell and Taste," Mădălina Diaconu refutes the argument that the three title senses, what she references as "the lower senses," do not have artistic value (1-10). While Majid, et al., found vision was the dominant sense expressed in English, they also found that "mapping language onto the senses is culturally relative" (11374). For example, they discovered that taste had a higher degree of codability in Lao and Farsi than does vision (11375). Krishna, et al., found that the sense of touch was the dominant sense for persons suffering from visual impairment, including blindness (631-39). Recognizing this, Nuessel gives a different reason for engaging all of the senses in creative writing: the writer "will not know the preferred sensory system of the anonymous reader" (102).

Beginning with a close reading of some of James Dickey's early poetry, I will show how he pioneered the challenge to vision's dominance as a visual descriptor. I will carry this into a discussion of his first novel, *Deliverance*, demonstrating how Dickey intentionally placed the novel's characters in situations of diminished eyesight, requiring them to rely on other senses to navigate their environment. The ar-

ticle culminates with an analysis of Dickey's penultimate novel and magnum opus, *Alnilam*, which has a blind protagonist. The discussions of *Deliverance* and *Alnilam* highlight how Dickey incorporated and repurposed elements of his poetry, and poetics, into his prose and demonstrate how this, coupled with concentrating on non-visual sensory descriptions, formed the essence of his aesthetic practice of merging his readers with his speakers or characters and of merging both with aspects of his works' literary environments.

As a poet and novelist, James Dickey demanded an engagement of all the senses in his writing to serve his aesthetic of "merging." According to Casey Clabough, this "merging" was paramount to Dickey's aesthetic because Dickey wanted "to know the essence of things" (5, 31). David Elliott said that this is exactly what Dickey did in his work—entering "the consciousness of animals [. . .] or merging his consciousness with [. . .] a tree or plant" (148). This leads to "what Dickey calls 'exchanges,'" which are "interactions between man and nature so profound or intense that normal human consciousness is exchanged for one that is blended with the environment or part of it" (148). Dickey desired this merger for his readers as well. Citing a 1974 *Playboy* article, Clabough quotes Dickey as saying, "I should like the reader to be able to become a horse, a pine tree [. . .] a rattlesnake [. . .] a revivalist in a tent in midsummer." For Dickey, the reader is not exterior to the work but should come to it and "complete it" (19-20). He wanted the reader to experience the work as he did. Only by allowing the reader to experience his characters and settings fully could Dickey accomplish this merging. Dickey does this not only by writing with non-visual descriptors, but by intentionally reducing or removing a speaker's or character's vision altogether.

Dickey's poem, "The Lifeguard," exemplifies this merging of the poem's speaker, reader, and setting in the following lines:

> I hung head down in the cold,
> Wide-eyed, contained, and alone
> Among the weeds,
>
> And my fingertips turned into stone
> From clutching immovable blackness. (*Poems* 51)

This "immovable blackness" indicates an absence of sight. Dickey's own words support this reading when he recounted that some of the poem's imagery came from his experience of diving for the body of a drowned man where "[w]e didn't have any lights and all we could do was *grope* around for the body. My fingertips *did* turn into stone, and it

was awfully cold" (*Self-Interviews* 102). Along with the tactile imagery of being upside down, the feeling of cold, stone fingers, and clutching "immovable blackness," Dickey employed sonic imagery, as found here:

> [. . .] I leapt upward
> Exploding in breath [. . .]
>
> I call softly out, and the child's
> Voice answers through blinding water. (*Poems* 51-52)

Even when it seems that Dickey relied on visual imagery, he challenged it as shown in these lines:

> With my foot on the water, I feel
> The moon outside
> Take on the utmost of its power.
> I rise and go out through the boats.
> I set my broad sole upon silver,
> On the skin of the sky, on the moonlight,
> Stepping outward from earth onto water
> In quest of the miracle. (*Poems* 51)

Dickey merged two natural features, the moon and the lake, into "the moon's reflection on the lake surface" (Guinn 90). The moon's reflection on the lake creates the image of a solid surface to allow the lifeguard to walk on it. In becoming a solid surface, the moon's reflection represents a lack of sight by blocking the speaker from seeing exactly where he wants to see: under the lake's surface, as revealed in these lines:

> Beneath me is nothing but brightness
> Like the ghost of a snowfield in summer.
> As I move toward the center of the lake,
> Which is also the center of the moon,
> [. . .]
>
> He rises, dilating to break
> The surface of stone with his forehead. (*Poems* 52)

Matthew Guinn touched on the concept of "merging" found within "The Lifeguard," stating that by "acknowledging the supremacy of the natural world" the individual can "achieve fusion with his surroundings, rekindling a vitality lost by his separation from nature" and that

"the primitivism reclaimed by [Dickey's] naturalistic approach facilitates a transcendent vision of connection" (89, 99).

In another poem, "Fog Envelops the Animals," Dickey not only shunned vision, but he largely reduced or removed all of the senses, as in the following lines:

> Not one can be seen, and they live.
> [. . .]
>
> Soundlessly whiteness is eating
> My visible self alive.
> [. . .]
>
> And streams of untouchable pureness
> [. . .]
>
> And now, one by one, my teeth
> Like rows of candles go out.
> [. . .]
>
> Silence. Whiteness. Hunting. (*Poems* 62-63)

Considering the idiom "seeing is believing," the speaker's knowledge, or faith, that the animals exist absent his ability to see them heightens the speaker's and reader's connection with the animals. Throughout the course of the poem, the speaker becomes like the animals and merges with the animals by becoming invisible like them, with "whiteness eating [the speaker's] visible self alive." Of this, Daniel Cross Turner asserted that the fog causes the hunter *to begin* to merge with the animals as he too "feels the pull of the primal demand for survival as the fog reduces him to his elemental state of being" (26-27). The speaker "stand[s] with all beasts in a cloud." Even his (presumably white) teeth become invisible as the fog consumes him. Ultimately, the same substance, the fog, makes the speaker and the animals invisible to each other. The title, "Fog Envelops the Animals," furthers the work of merging in the poem because the speaker is enveloped with the animals. In other words, the speaker is one of the animals, almost. It is not just the invisibility that connects the speaker with the animals, as the speaker becomes invisible like the animals "soundlessly," and there exists an "untouchable pureness" in the poem's setting.

There are a couple of exceptions to the lack of sensory imagery in the poem, as the speaker says, "My hands burn away at my sides [. . .] / My arrows, keener than snowflakes / Are with me whenever I touch

them" (*Poems* 62-63). While the speaker's hands may have the look of being burned away, one imagines the tactile sensation of burning when reading the passage. The additional tactile sensation of touching his arrows, coupled with the speaker's assertion that the animals are not aware of him "in this life," demonstrate that the speaker and animals never completely merge with each other, even if they are merged with the same foggy environment. This almost-merger between speaker and animals creates an almost-merger between the reader and animals by highlighting a similar separation between the reader and speaker, strengthening the connection among all of them.

As in his poetry, Dickey created a number of scenes in which a character's sight is limited or absent in his first novel, *Deliverance*, facilitating mergers there as well. In *Deliverance*, four friends (the protagonist Ed Gentry, Lewis Medlock, Drew Ballinger, and Bobby Trippe) embark on a canoeing trip down a North Georgia river just prior to the damming of the river. The trip goes awry when Ed and Bobby become separated from Lewis and Drew and two men capture and rape Bobby while holding Ed at gunpoint. Lewis and Drew find Bobby and Ed during the rape, and Lewis kills one of the rapists with a bow and arrow. The other rapist escapes. After the men bury the dead rapist, they try to escape down the river, with Drew being killed and Lewis severely injured. Ed resolves that to hunt and kill the surviving rapist provides the only means of escaping the woods and the murder of the first rapist.

Deliverance's publication followed the publication of the poems discussed previously by nearly a decade. Yet, Dickey did not abandon these poems or their techniques when he switched literary genres, as demonstrated in the portion of the novel in which Dickey repurposes "Fog Envelops the Animals." The protagonist, Ed Gentry, goes hunting in the morning fog (*Deliverance* 79). Ed notices the fog running with the river's current, not coming "out of the buried earth." Similarities between the poem and novel appear when Ed says, "[I]n its silence I realized that I had been waiting for it to make a sound [. . .] I looked at my legs and they were gone, and my hands at my sides also; I stood with the fog eating me alive" (79). This resonates with the poem's lines of "Soundlessly whiteness is eating / my visible self alive" (*Poems* 62). The fog consuming Ed gives him the idea to go hunting while the others sleep, and as he does, he tries to merge with the environment by "concentrat[ing] on getting into some kind of relation to the woods under these conditions; I was as invisible as a tree" (*Deliverance* 79). Unable to see, Ed turns to tactile imagery in these lines:

> carrying a bow [. . .] in one hand and fingering the bowstring with the other. It tingled like a wire in my right-hand fingers,

> giving off an electric current that came from the woods and the fog and the fact that hunting and pretending to hunt had come together and I could not now tell them apart. (80)

Henry Lindborg argued that *Deliverance* involves a "rite of passage" and in this "rite of passage, fantasy becomes reality [. . .] when Ed stalks a deer and finds that 'hunting and pretending to hunt had come together,' and that he 'could not [. . .] tell them apart" (87). It could be further argued that it goes the other way, with reality becoming fantasy, because Ed "could not [. . .] tell them apart" because they had merged. Either way, this interconnectedness comes from Ed's tactile impression of how the bowstring "tingled," not from how he visually interpreted the fog or the landscape. The tingling created what Ed felt as an "electric current that came from the woods and the fog and" the merger of "hunting and pretending to hunt." This merger of fantasy and reality represents a merger of Ed's psyche with his external world and a merger of the reader with both.

Dickey does not rely solely on his poetry to effectuate his aesthetic of merging in *Deliverance*. The merger of Ed with his environment and of fantasy with reality materializes most effectively just over halfway through the book. With Drew dead and Lewis having suffered a severe leg injury (127-29), Ed resolves to climb a cliff after nightfall to hunt the surviving rapist. He tells Bobby to stay with Lewis and depart with him in the canoe at first light (131-36). The scene starts with the plan of action, the fantasy about things to come, when Ed tells Bobby, "'We can do three things' [. . .] and some other person began to tell me what they were" (131). Into the plan, Bobby says, "I don't want to die," and Ed responds, "If you don't, help me figure. We've got to figure like he's figuring, up there. Everything depends on that" (132). Not only does Ed realize that he and Bobby need to fantasize about their plans, but he also realizes that their plans require them to fantasize about the rapist's plans to kill them, creating somewhat of a meta fantasy.

All of this planning happens as the characters' eyesight diminishes with the onset of darkness. Ed says, "I looked up and could barely make out his face" (128). As they go through the planning, Ed is glad for the darkness, stating, "It was a good thing that we couldn't see faces. Mine felt calm and narrow-eyed, but it might not have been. There was something to act out" (130). Continuing his appreciation for lack of sight, Ed "liked hearing the sound of [his] voice in the mountain speech, especially in the dark; it sounded like somebody who knew where he was and knew what he was doing" (131). All of this focus on sound and feeling emphasizes the fantasy Ed develops and allows him

to merge fantasy with reality by implementing the plan to kill the surviving rapist.

Before he starts climbing, Ed "put[s] a hand on [the cliff], as though I might be able to *feel* what the whole cliff was like, the whole problem, and hold it in my palm. The rock was rough [. . .]" (138) (emphasis added). Continuing the tactile imagery, Ed puts his cheek against the cliff "and raised both hands into the darkness, letting the fingers crawl independently over the soft rock. It was the softness that bothered me more than anything else; I was afraid that anything [. . .] would give way" (138). As he climbed, the cliff shuddered in Ed's face and against his chest, and he "became aware of the sound of [his] breath, whistling and humming crazily into the stone" (140). He leaned his mouth against the cliff, "feeling all the way out through my nerves and muscles exactly how I had possession of the wall at four random points in a way that held the whole thing together" (141). Exhausted from climbing and having urinated in his pants, Ed finds a crack in the cliff, in which he inserts both palms, and "strength from the stone flowed into [him]." He "wedged" himself into the crack "like a lizard" and rested in "the crevice" (142-45), literally merging with his environment.

Mustering the resolve to continue his climb, he recalls a conversation with Drew:

> Where was Drew? He used to say, in the only interesting idea I had ever heard him deal with, that the best guitar players were blind men [. . .] who had developed the sense of touch beyond what a man with eyes could do. (147)

Ed associates himself with these blind master guitarists, stating, "I have got something like that [. . .] I have done what I have done, I have got up here mostly by the sense of touch, and in the dark" (147). In these lines, Dickey explicitly tells his readers that he placed Ed in a situation of reduced eyesight on purpose so that he must rely on other senses to merge with his environment, to bring his fantasies to life, and to survive.

Just because Ed's fantasies and reality begin to merge through aspects of his life in and out of the woods does not mean these fantasies have vanished. He explains that his plan is settled "as things in daydreams always are, but it could be settled only because the reality was remote. It was the same state of mind I had had when I had hunted the deer in the fog" (149). Ed summited the cliff while it was still dark, and he sought a place in a tree to position himself to shoot the rapist with an arrow, saying "Among the trees, which held the [moon]light from me, I could tell nothing except by touch" (157). Ed establishes a

place in the tree where, when he shot the arrow, he would be "looking down a short, shaggy tunnel of needles," which "seemed to help [him] aim" (158), meaning that even when he could see, having some form of obstructed vision aided his mission. Dickey heightens Ed's connection with the environment through touch and taste, writing:

> All the time I was clearing, I was aided by a totally different sense of touch than I had ever had, and it occurred to me that I must have developed it on the cliff. I seemed able to tell the exact shape and weight of anything at first touch [. . .] Being alive in the dark and doing what I was doing was like a powerful drunkenness, because I didn't believe it [. . .] I felt the bark next to me with the most intimate part of my palm, then broke off a needle and put it in my mouth [. . .] It was the right taste. (158)

Even after the sun rises and Ed shoots the rapist, he experiences imagery other than visual when he states, "There was no path into the woods where I was going. It was dark there, but I could see blood, and when I couldn't see it I could feel it, and, in some cases, smell it" (169).

Tactile, sonic, olfactory, and gustatory imagery fill nearly the entire experience of Ed's merger of fantasy and reality and of his merger with the environment. Ed seems to realize that he has to draw on all of his senses as well as the entirety of his life experience for fantasy to merge with reality and for him and his friends to survive their ordeal. Dickey's use of non-visual imagery and the removal of Ed's sight create a visceral experience for readers as well, allowing them to merge with Ed and *Deliverance*'s environment.

Dickey took the ultimate leap in his next book, *Alnilam*, making the main character, Frank Cahill, blind, with his only visual experiences coming through his memories prior to his blindness and through the perceptions of other characters. Yet, Dickey's imagery portrayed through Cahill is as vivid as the imagery of his sighted supporting characters, with the very first page bringing the sounds of the wind and Cahill's dog rising from and crossing the floor as well as the tactile sensations of cold air and Cahill's dog's breath on his face (1).

As with *Deliverance*, Dickey incorporated certain poetic practices in his second novel, *Alnilam*. Although published in 1987, seventeen years following the publication of *Deliverance*, Dickey worked on *Alnilam* for a much longer period than *Deliverance*—nearly twenty years longer (Clabough 67). Despite *Alnilam*'s period of development that preceded *Deliverance*, it incorporates structural elements from Dickey's poetry published after *Poems 1957-1967*, the poems repurposed in *Deliverance*.

Particularly, it relies most on "The Eye-Beaters," published in *The Eye-Beaters, Blood, Victory, Madness, Buckhead and Mercy*. The poems collected in *The Eye-Beaters* represented a transitional period for Dickey's poetry, during which he turned from what he called "commentary-on-life" poetry to "magic-language" poetry (Autrey 3). Robert Kirschten noted that critics did not receive the poems in *The Eye-Beaters* as favorably as they had those collected in *Poems 1957-1967*, mostly because of the structural form of the poems (130). Kirschten responded to the criticism by stating that in *The Eye-Beaters*, Dickey

> [E]xperiments in two basic areas, form and diction, open[ing] a number of technical, poetic doors [. . .] In *The Eye-Beaters*, Dickey still kept his eye at times on a classical sense of narrative [. . .] however, he also began to highlight word groups that radically altered his techniques of telling and gained him especially dramatic entrance to the world of darkness and terror that strongly unsettled [the critics] [. . .] Dickey's best poems in this book [. . .] are intricately constructed forms generated by a mode of thinking that is rooted in anthropological and mythopoeic criticism, namely contagious magic. (131)

"The Eye-Beaters" involves a person visiting a children's home in Indiana in which some of the children are blind (*The Eye-Beaters* 50-55). The Visitor observes the horror of the blind children beating their eyes, and in an effort to process the images, he attempts to merge his psyche with that of the children (50-55). Regarding form, "The Eye-Beaters" contains a bifurcated, or two-column, structure, similar to the marginal gloss found in the 1817 version of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In the left column, a limited omniscient third-person speaker narrates a summary of events he or she observes in the method of a journalist. The words are in smaller font than those in the right, lyrical column, and they are always italicized. The right column contains the lines as said by the poet-speaker, and some of the words or lines in the right column are italicized, though most are not. Taking both columns together, the first lines of the poem appear as follows:

A man visits a Home for children in Indiana, some of whom have gone blind there.	Come something come blood sunlight come and they break Through the child-wall, taking heart from the two left feet Of your sound: are groping for the Visitor in the tall corn Green of Indiana. You may be the light, for they have seen it coming

(*The Eye Beaters* 50)[1]

Although Dickey separated the content into columns of different content and sizes, this does not minimize the importance of the left, narrative column's function. To the contrary, it provides critical information to understanding the lyric of the poem's main body. Particularly, the above-quoted lines in the left column inform the reader that the "Visitor" is "a man." The lines convey that "they" are children living in "a Home" in Indiana. The lines relay that some of the children "have gone blind there," i.e., in the home. Without the perspective provided in the left column, the reader would be left to decipher this information from the body of the poem and possibly not be able to decipher all of the images or appreciate the full context that the speaker intends. At the same time, it seems that Dickey minimized the narrative column so as not to overwhelm the non-visual imagery and circumstances occurring in the lyrical column.

In the next lines of the left column, the narrator-speaker says, "A therapist / explains why / the children / strike / their eyes" (50). The poet-speaker, in the role of the therapist, tells the Visitor:

> [C]hildren turn to
> go back [. . .]
> turn their heads without comment into the black
> magic
> Migraine of caves. Smudge-eyed, wide-eyed, gouged, horned, caved-in, they are silent: it is for you to guess what they hold back inside [. . .] (50)

In other words, the Visitor and reader are left to merge with the children from the successive external images presented. The Visitor does just that as the narrator-speaker states, "The Visitor / begins to / invent a / fiction to / save his mind" (50). This bifurcated technique allows Dickey to help the reader merge an external perspective, the third-person narrator's perspective of events, with the multi-faceted internal perspectives occurring within the body of a poem focused on non-visual imagery. Building on Eugene McNamara's analysis, Ken Autrey contends, "The bifurcated form of the poem [. . .] supports the image of a dualistic world. It can be rural Indiana in a home [. . .] and at the same time a place where raging blind children beat their eyes" (9). At the poem's conclusion, the narrator-speaker advises that the Visitor "leaves / the Home," and the poet-speaker confirms the exchange, or merger, of the external and internal worlds when he says, "I merge, I pass beyond in secret in perversity and the / sheer / Despair of invention" (55). Through this merger, Autrey states, "The Visitor is finally

transformed by his experience when he says, "Therapist, farewell at the living end. Give me my spear" (9).

Alnilam takes place during World War II. Superficially, it tells the story of a blind father, Frank Cahill, who travels during winter from his home in Atlanta to an air base in Peckover, North Carolina, to learn the details of the mysterious death of his estranged son, Joel Cahill, while Joel was training to be a pilot in the Army Air Corps. Specifically, Joel flew his plane over a wildfire and crashed on a farm (*Alnilam* 48). After initially being rescued by the farmer, Joel ventured off into the wildfire, never to be physically seen again (48). The word "Alnilam" refers to the star in the center of the constellation Orion's Belt (Walker 62), and a cult formed by Joel and certain other cadets co-opts "Alnilam" as their group name and symbol (Clabough 64). Ultimately, *Alnilam* is a multi-themed, complex narrative and represents a stylistic departure from *Deliverance*, just as the poems in *The Eye-Beaters* represented stylistic changes in Dickey's poetry. Like *The Eye-Beaters*, *Alnilam* was not well received by critics (Clabough 65). At 682 pages, it is nearly three times the number of pages as *Deliverance*. The novel's complex layers contributed to its lack of critical acclaim, and Dickey seemed to recognize *Alnilam* would face a difficult reception (Clabough 65-66). Complicating *Alnilam* further, Dickey intended to publish a sequel titled, *Crux*, but never did, so *Alnilam*'s story remains incomplete (Clabough 64). In spite of its lack of commercial success, Dickey said he "would not change a word" (Clabough 66).

Alnilam contains a complex, bifurcated structure, similar to "The Eye-Beaters." This structure appears in largely the following format, with Cahill's perspective in the left column, labeled "**DARK**," and the sighted perspective in the right column, labeled "**LIGHT**":

DARK	**LIGHT**
The porch opened him, and he sensed it as solid with invisible landscape. No stars now, or the last ones. He was supposed to be among hills.	A step below Cahill and Zack, Tim steadied his eyes on the low forms of the hills close about them, holding snow in patchy forms.

Instead of making one column smaller than the other, Dickey bolded the text in the left column, as if to always emphasize Cahill's non-visual perspective. Quoting Dickey, Sue Brannan Walker states that *Alnilam* is unlike any other novel in its construction, with two parallel planes of observation and interpretation (61-62). In fact, this

unique construction not only heightens the effects of the non-visual images in the book, but it also pushes it into the realm of speculative fiction. Dickey possibly experimented with constructing his prose in columns to resemble how a poem's stanzas separate different aspects of the poem, such as a transition in perspective. Although the columns do not read across each other, they at times provide a point and counterpoint, similar to the operation of a contrapuntal poem.

As with "The Eye-Beaters," Dickey employs the bifurcated structure in *Alnilam* in an effort to merge the blind Cahill with sighted readers and sighted characters and to merge reality with fantasy. Joel Cahill represents the greatest fantasy in *Alnilam*. Walker states that he "is a figment" of Cahill's imagination and attributes Dickey as calling him "an invention" (70). Walker quotes Dickey, who stated one of the greatest obstacles he faced in *Alnilam* was the creation of Joel, "a character of potentially major dimensions who is never *seen*, who is a non-being projected by means of his posthumous effect on other people" (83-84; emphasis added). Dickey offers a taste of this struggle through Cahill's thoughts:

> [H]e waited, shifting this way and that, one face after another floating in front of him: Shears, the colonel, Spain, Harbelis, as he had made them be. And his son as well, as personally real, as much imagined, as much made up as any of the rest of them. (*Alnilam* 663)

To form his image of Joel and in an effort to merge with him, Cahill travels around the airbase and the town of Peckover, North Carolina, conversing with various characters about Joel and his accident (*Alnilam* passim). He gathers various items related to Joel, such as Joel's broken goggles, which are given to Cahill by the airbase's commanding officer, Colonel Hocleve, in the following lines:

> "I have one item here with me. Something you might like to have." He [. . .] placed a folded object in Cahill's hand. "He left these behind; they were found on the floor of the farmhouse after Joel disappeared."

Cahill weighed the object in his hand. Two chill curves faced each other, and gritted lightly when he moved them.

He ran his thumb over the bulging surfaces; one of them held a shape of cracks. With his free hand, Cahill touched a lens of his dark glasses. "Are these— You mean he had these—"

"Yes; those are the goggles he had on, regular Air Corps issue." (49-50)

By touching his own glasses with one hand while holding and rubbing Joel's goggles with the other, Cahill attempts to merge with his son, neither of whom can now see through the items. Cahill comes closest to merging with Joel as his contact with the Alnilam group and experience with aviation increases. At these times, Cahill's merger with the external world and his psyche are greatest as well. This is likely because, as Clabough has argued, Joel merges with the air through his mastery of it and through the "dynamics of his personality, which allow him to capitalize on his mystical talent" (64). In a scene of mostly bifurcated text spanning over thirty-five pages, the current leader of the Alnilam cult, Malcolm Shears, explains Joel and the other cadets' vision for Alnilam, by telling Cahill the meaning of the group's name (407), quoting from Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* as contained in a book kept by Joel (404), and describing the fantasy world they seek to inhabit ("A huge field, where there's nothing—well, there are two fields, actually: a field of electricity and a field of flowers. One visible, and the other invisible, and both of them right there together [. . .] a world of nihilism and music") (407-13). When Cahill asks where the world is going to be, Shears responds, "Partly in the mind, partly outside. We'll make outside come to us; it has certain things we need" (409). To demonstrate, Shears has Cahill sit in a chair while holding a broom and directing him through various motions that mimic the flight pattern the group will use to get to their fantasy world as follows:

"Rise," Shears commanded. "Right hand. Right hand rising. Look up a little. Lean back. Remember: right hand rising. Then forget."

He lifted his chin. He could do nothing with his right hand; he could not remember it. He was certain that the

floor or whatever it was under him, had changed, was changing.

With a strange and excited sense of accomplishment, of acting with terrible secret and exact rightness, Cahill brought his chin down and eased his upper body little by little forward, until all distances over and beneath him equaled out, became each other. There was a riding satisfaction now, a [. . .] peace, a stay at the center of a fabulous hurtling, a [. . .] precarious, momentary, prolonging.

He rode and did not breathe, maintaining steadily.

A long, low sound came from the cadets, leaning forward as in a huddle listening to the quarterback [. . .]

"Level now," said Shears. "You want to be level, straight and level. You want to be level, level as a bubble. The plane doesn't know you. Nobody knows you. Nobody else knows what 'level' is [. . .] you are level. Level. Level." (413-18)

As Shears continues with his directions, Cahill's senses become more deranged as he goes deeper into his own psyche. Cahill's column reads:

> **Deep in him, in a hidden location near or the same as the most hidden of his sexuality, something shifted, and it might have been that at the same time a kept heaviness, the water in his bladder, swung one way. All of balance shifted; he swam in a curvature, in a lengthening bent soaring, a sustained, sustaining portion of a necessary round.**
>
> **With some dim notion of towers rising [. . .] he trued once more; the dreaminess of the curve left him, the exhilaration of stability returned [. . .]**
>
> **He rode; he was riding. The direction was absolute. (417-18)**

In his psyche, Cahill is completing the maneuvers, and he is forming images in his mind of the world around him based on the sound of Shears's voice and his body's response to that voice. Shears brings Cahill out of the trance, but Cahill does not want to return to reality. For example, Cahill has trouble relaxing when Shears tells him, "That's it [. . .] It's our main approach" (418). Cahill asks Shears, "Am I not gonna get to land this thing," and Shears says, "Like I say, no need [. . .] you'd do just as well airborne as you did on this floor." Cahill responds, "What floor? I been up yonder, at any altitude [. . .] You said so yourself. And the next time I get a broomstick on my hand I'm liable to take off again." Cahill resists having the broomstick taken from him as he continues, "And I bet I *could* land it, too" (418). This presentation of non-visual imagery in the bifurcated format allows the reader to experience the external world's non-visual impact on Cahill's psyche and merge with Cahill and the external world at the same time.

Not long after this scene, McCaig sneaks Cahill into one of the planes and takes him up at night, even allowing Cahill to fly the plane as the narrative bifurcates into columns (465-88). At first, Cahill uses his sense of touch on the controls and the sound of McCaig's voice to fly the plane gently and steadily (488-93). When Cahill relinquishes the plane's controls to McCaig, McCaig performs a maneuver called an "outside loop," the forces of which cause Cahill's eyes to begin hurting:

> **from behind, as though pushing for their freedom: freedom to burst forth [. . .] or just burst [. . .] The pain in his eyeballs increased beyond what he thought might ever be possible [. . .] Another kind of redness was beginning to fill them: a sick and violent color [. . .] a color beyond all color darted and renewed [. . .] the whole of his head was more and more one out-thrust of bright agony, a fire in which something lived.** (494)

Like the blind children in "The Eye-Beaters," Cahill "**screamed with violation and helplessness and pounded on his goggles, holding the glass down to keep his eyeballs from being pulled out of his face [. . .] lost in the crimson darkness**" (494). In the pain caused by the forces of the plane's maneuvers, a demonic figure "materializes" in Cahill's mind (495).

> **Cahill started for the fire, calling. The face there came at him like the sun, like a thorn-haired devil, like a pile of nails in the sand. Cahill climbed and screamed toward**

> **it with tremendous muscular strength, and unguessed human energy, a vision worth the pain.** (495)

Vis-à-vis the continued pain and other bodily sensations caused by the "outside loop," the external and internal worlds connect, and Cahill enters deep into his psyche, into a memory of when Cahill could still see. In doing so, Dickey enlists a paradox, similar to those paradoxes found in "The Lifeguard," when he says Cahill "watched on three levels—from memory, from the first imagination of his blindness, and from the aircraft" (496). Cahill is not "watching," i.e., seeing, at all because all three instances of "watching" occur in his imagination, in fantasy. A sudden return to reality causes Cahill to retake control of the plane and send it into a "death-dive" (497-98), with the narrative bifurcating for nearly fifteen pages. During this dive, Cahill shares these feelings:

> **There had never been a spinning of the brain like this, the body thrown leaning against the left straps, the head cramped face up, the stick in his lap banging at him [. . .] quivering pitifully, his right foot down and unbroken. I'm giving the devil this airplane, he said; he may just already have it.** (499)

Cahill returns to his psyche, recalling a series of sonic memories—those of "voices [. . .] of matching numbers [. . .] [i]n the coins and dark hairs [. . .] musical wood [. . .] the book and the margin [. . .] the stars moving the numbers [. . .] the self-destruction hidden in the cylinder" (499). He recalls the memory of girls playing dodgeball, and "[h]is chest was the sound of a coring-drill; in his belly, it massed with the unbroken sullenness of organ music" (499). All the while, in the right column, McCaig screams at Cahill, battling in his own cockpit for control of the plane (498-501). Just before McCaig wins complete control of the plane, Cahill, in his "dark" column, progresses through his memories to Joel:

> **And now there was his boy, who existed only in descriptions, only in what other people had said about him, but the *being* of whose face he could not *feel*, could not *image*, or know what shape his knees and ankles and backbone were; had been. Joel was three times gone: once before he was born, when Florence had left, then by the years he had lived in the world without *image* Cahill could draw on with his eyes, and last by his disappearance at a place**

> **somewhere over which, in the grip of himself, his father was now spiraling down**. (501)

Even before blindness struck him, Cahill could not "image," i.e., see, his son. These lines demonstrate Cahill's attempts to merge with the fantasy he has of Joel, a fantasy formed of non-visual images. Cahill's desired merger manifests in the ultimate way—flirtation with suicide and homicide—by attempting to crash the plane, with McCaig in it, into the same area where Joel had crashed. They also indicate Cahill's merger with the plane through touch when Cahill equates himself to the plane in the phrase, "in the grip of himself." In other words, Cahill says he is gripping himself by gripping the plane's control stick.

Because Dickey never finished *Alnilam*'s sequel, readers are left to wonder whether Cahill ever completed his merger with his son. In a letter he wrote to Angelin Brewer, Dickey leads one to believe he did when he writes that by the end of the book, Cahill "is a little more humanized, and less fanatical, and because of this he may possibly come to understand his enigmatic son in ways not possible before" (Walker 70).

Throughout his poetry and prose, the parallels and distinctions between visual and non-visual perceptions concerned and informed Dickey's aesthetic (Walker 62), meaning his aesthetic of merging. Dickey furthered this aesthetic by incorporating his poetry and poetics into his prose. Edward Doughtie examined the influence Dickey's poetry had on *Deliverance*, stating:

> It may be possible now to stand back from *Deliverance*, to see it less as an ostensibly realistic narrative by Ed Gentry and more as an artifact by James Dickey the poet. The novel may then be seen as a kind of extended metaphor for the poetic process. (179)

Yet, Dickey did not just recycle his poetry into prose: he used it to refine and drive his prose's narrative. This culminated with *Alnilam*, which expanded on the bifurcated structure of "The Eye-Beaters" to serve the narrative of a blind protagonist. The unifying aesthetic of *Alnilam*'s structure becomes evident even from its title as Alnilam is the star in the center, i.e., the buckle, of Orion's Belt, merging everything in the novel's universe, and Dickey's aesthetic, together. Clabough went so far as to argue that the merging in *Alnilam*, coupled with its bifurcated structure, operates as a model for the very act of reading (63-64). Taking this further, *Alnilam*, along with Dickey's prior works, functions as a model for writing—writing that engages all of the senses.

Notes

1. Due to formatting constraints, line breaks, spacing, and the like in the quoted text do not always exactly mirror the original text.

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The Price of Honor and "Evental Truth": Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*

Ubaraj Katawal

Honor ranked above everything else, above the sacred vows of matrimony, above the divine injunction against cold-blooded murder, above decency, above culture, above life itself.

-Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown*

The violence of beast on beast is read / As natural law, but upright man / Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.

-Derek Walcott, "A Far Cry from Africa"

Introduction

Analyzing the importance of global interconnections, even in case of violence and terrorism, Roshan Lal Sharma argues, "[Salman] Rushdie [in *Shalimar the Clown*] does not adhere to the locale-specificity in an absolutist sense which is why one place either approximates or points toward the other" (66). This phenomenon is made resoundingly clear in the novel by the way the storyline weaves through different historical times and locations, including Kashmir, India, France, and the United States. However, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has made clear in her works, interconnectedness among people and places in the present does not necessarily mean the insignificance of specific locales from which events originate to affect multiple peoples and places. What I am arguing in this article, following Spivakean analysis of representation and subalternity, is that one's location plays an important role in shaping and reproducing a worldview in people that will in turn define their relationship with others. Whereas Shalimar's upbringing in a traditional social context instills in him the importance of a man's honor over other considerations, such as mere life and inclusive human community, Max Ophuls's experience as Other in World War II reproduces in him a warped, elitist mentality that is fit to prey on unsuspecting victims of capitalism such as Boonyi Kaul Noman.

Examining Rushdie's work through the question of one's location and specific historical experiences becomes significant in the backdrop of a recent attack on Rushdie at Chautauqua, New York. As Jay Root, et al. write in *The New York Times*, many people, including Rushdie's attacker, harbor a grudge against the author for how they believe him to be dishonoring their religion. Despite the undercurrents of location and historical experiences in determining characters' relationships with other characters, the novel also suggests the possibility and emergence of future community in Yuvraj's and India's transnational love-relationship.

As *Shalimar the Clown* demonstrates, total disregard to one's community values results in another cause for violence, such as the killing of Maximilian Ophuls, a fictional character also known in the novel as Max. Using Spivak's analysis of the dynamics between the subaltern and the elite, this article demonstrates the suffering of subaltern voices such as Boonyi Kaul Noman in her relationship with Max Ophuls. Max Ophuls was one of the makers of the modern world, and was knifed to death in broad daylight on the doorstep of his illegitimate daughter, India, by his Kashmiri Muslim driver, an uncanny figure known as Shalimar. It is important to note that Max Ophuls is a man full of contradictions: at once a Resistance hero and an architect of the modern capitalist world order, a terrorist-turned-counter-terrorism chief. For this reason, readers need to analyze the characters of Max Ophuls and Boonyi Kaul Noman and what they represent in order to understand Shalimar's rage and the attendant deaths and destructions. Rushdie suggests that in the backdrop of personal interests and goals that have their origin in specific geographical and cultural contexts, one must also envision an alternative and more inclusive human community.

Max Ophuls, Boonyi Kaul Noman and the Subaltern Subject

To understand Shalimar's self-destructive fury that eventually leads to the downfall of other characters such as Max Ophuls and Boonyi Kaul Noman, it is important to understand the relationship that plays out between Max and Boonyi, two characters whose backgrounds in activism—whether it is at public level as in the case of Max or personal level in the case of Boonyi—eventually take an ironic twist. In what follows, I will discuss these characters' activism based on specific sociohistorical and cultural contexts to then focus on how the events take a destructive turn, leading to their ultimate demise.

Max Ophuls's activism in *Shalimar the Clown* involves the World War II Resistance Movement, a movement that was against fascism, against a disposition to construct and deploy "separating names" (Badiou, *Rebirth* 92). "A *separating name*," Alan Badiou writes, "refers to *a particular way of not resembling the fictive identitarian object*. It enables the state to separate certain groups from the collectivity, who therefore call for particular repressive measures" (92, emphasis in the original). During the War, Max Ophuls had fought along with other Resistance fighters to defy the Fuehrer's identification, location, and persecution of the European Jewry. He and his parents were hunted down by the Nazis simply because they failed to conform to what the German State at that time deemed as the German national identity. Max Ophuls revolted against the Nazi's categorization of the European Jewry by actively participating in the Resistance Movement that aimed at undermining all the state strategies to render a non-Aryan race a non-entity; it appealed to rebels around the world insofar as it aimed at challenging the violence of the German State.

Interestingly, Max Ophuls, who once fought against the European identitarian epidemic that labeled him as a terrorist later becomes not only a maker of the capitalist world order but also a US counter-terrorism chief. It makes readers wonder, what might have caused Max Ophuls the rebel during the European Resistance Movement to become Max Ophuls the hunter of Muslims, anti-capitalists, and the people of color later in life. Max Ophuls's transformation, if there is one, begins after he moves to the United States from London in 1944. It is no accident that Rushdie moves his character from London to the United States toward the end of World War II when the center of hegemonic power was shifting from Europe to the United States; the hegemonic power largely involved, and continues to involve, policing the world while protecting international capitalism, as Frantz Fanon calls it (*Wretched* 38). Subsequently, Max Ophuls becomes the U. S. ambassador to India, thanks to his formidable intellectual ability and experience in the Resistance Movement.

While working in the Resistance Movement, Max Ophuls forged documents so that people could escape Nazi atrocities, an act that necessitated him to have an intimate relationship with Ursula Brandt, assistant to the director of a Gestapo "antenna" in Clermont-Ferrand, in order to steal intelligence information. However, he always believed in the global capitalist institutions: "He tried to believe that the global structures he had helped to build, the pathways of influence, money and power, the multinational associations, the treaty organizations, the frameworks of cooperation and law whose purpose had been to deal with a hot war turned cold, would still function in the future that

lay beyond what he [Max Ophuls] could foresee" (*Shalimar* 20). A one-time professor of economics at the University of Strasbourg, Max Ophuls also had faith in the peaceful and well-organized world order. According to the structures that Max Ophuls envisioned for the world, rich people in the West would have the prerogative to use human populations in the Third World as "bare life" in Giorgio Agamben's sense of the term. While living a bare life (*zoē*), people do not have the political power (*bios*) that protects them against injustices (Agamben 126-27). They live an "objectified existence," to quote V. Vidya (69). It is through his internalization of the objectification of the othered people that emboldens Max Ophuls to deal with Boonyi Kaul Noman the way he does, namely to dump her once she loses her physical beauty.

In fact, Max Ophuls is no stranger to life reduced to the most minimal state, as he experienced during the German invasion of Europe. His parents, the "wealthy, cultured, conservative, [and] cosmopolitan" Strasbourgeois who refused to leave their home when one hundred and twenty thousand fellow Strasbourgeois became refugees (*Shalimar* 141), suffer violence at the hands of the Germans, and are used as human fodder in the instrumental production of knowledge. Max Ophuls was able to narrowly escape the capture since he was away from home at the time of his parents' capture, seeking out possible escape routes for himself and his parents. The memory of the "civilized" barbarism that visited his parents would stay in his mind for the rest of his life.

Yet, it is not hard to see that to Max Ophuls what happened to his parents and millions of Europeans during World War II was not a norm of the capitalist world order but an exception. Even during the Resistance, he advocated France's protectorate status to the U. S., a proposition outright rejected by the exiled General Charles de Gaulle in London. Not that de Gaulle turned out to be a better advocate of people's human rights, as shown by his efficient suppression of the May 1968 demonstrations and strikes in Paris by holding "organized elections which resulted in a *chambre introuvable* of reactionaries" (Badiou, *Rebirth* 58). It is true that Max Ophuls is not particularly fond of the U. S. hegemony, and he argues for an economic alliance among developing nations such as China, India and Brazil to counterbalance the Western monopoly in the world market. However, his critique of American dominance is part of same mindset of liberal intellectuals, artists, and journalists "whose positions at home are progressive and full of admirable sentiments, but the opposite when it comes to what is done abroad in their name" (Said xxiii). Or as Badiou puts it, "Contemporary cosmopolitanism is a beneficent reality. We simply ask that its partisans not get themselves worked up at the sight of a young veiled woman, lest we begin to fear that what they really desire, far

from a real web of shifting differences, is the uniform dictatorship of what they take to be 'modernity'" (*Saint Paul* 11). Put differently, Max Ophuls's progressive agenda does not extend beyond the borders of Western nation-states.

To further explain Max Ophuls and his mindset, it is important to invoke Spivak, who examines the interesting relationship between Subject and subject in her seminal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Radical poststructuralists such as Michel Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari, Spivak argues, take for granted the West as Subject even when they seek to dismantle the Western grand-narratives on sexuality, insanity, policing, and power. In fact, in the very attempt at dethroning the West as Subject, they reaffirm in their discourse the West's hegemony in the global division of labor, all the while rendering transparent any meaningful representation of the "oppressed as subject" (Spivak 27).What even the so-called radical Western thinkers forget is, Spivak suggests, that they are not only constitutive of the hegemonic division of labor in which the West is always an implicit or explicit Subject, that is *the* central signifier, but they further push the "Others" into the background even or especially when they speak against Western hegemony (Spivak 24).[1]

If the traditional Hindu patriarchy assigns a subordinate position to a woman, colonialism recognizes them as mere life in need of protection. The situation of a woman as a subaltern has not changed even after colonialism. In other words, globalization is merely colonialism in a different guise, which continues to exploit subaltern subjects even more ruthlessly than would patriarchal subjugation because the calculative and disembodied power of global capitalism renders even the basic forms of affect in human relations unnecessary.

Rushdie's Boonyi Kaul Noman is exemplary of subaltern subjects rendered voiceless and objectified by patriarchal and state violence. To use Spivak's articulation of the dynamic between the subaltern and the elite to read Boonyi's predicament, one can argue that even though she is vocal in her own way in resisting gender roles and patriarchal social expectations, either "her Speech Act [is] refused" or "she [is] made to unspeak herself" (Spivak 40). A gendered-subaltern subject speaks, however, in their own forms both within and outside of elite discursive practices.[2] Boonyi, like her husband, Shalimar, was born two months after the partition and independence of India in 1947. She grows up in a single parent household, since her mother, Pamposh, dies while giving birth to her. Her widower father takes care of Boonyi with help from the villagers of Pachigam, especially from Pamposh's old friend and Shalimar's mother, Firdaus Noman. Boonyi grows to be a beautiful but fearless and assertive young lady by the time she is thirteen. She

dances for the local club of traveling artists, or bhand pather, in which Shalimar flaunts his skills in rope walking. Boonyi is discreet and careful in choosing her future husband; she rejects suitors whom she does not like. When a middle-aged Indian Army Colonel makes a pass on her, for example, she does not pull any punches and tells him what she thinks of the likes of a man who calls himself Colonel Kachhwaha or "Colonel Turtle." As Rushdie writes, "Fuck off, she told him [Colonel Kachhwaha], and fled, into the woods, along the stream, anywhere but where he stood on the outskirts of Pachigam with the embankments crumbling around his soul" (101). Colonel Kachhwaha becomes powerless at Boonyi's rejection of his move even though he is the commander of a unit of the occupying Indian Army. As Stephen Morton explains, Boonyi's rejection of Colonel Kachhwaha is allegorically Kashmir's rejection of the violent occupation of the land by the Indian-state (13).

In what might seem like an act of defiance to a conservative mindset of Pachigam, Boonyi, a Hindu, is in love with Shalimar, a Muslim. She not only shows the audacity to defy religious taboos, which would normally forbid a union between a Hindu and a Muslim, but she also makes love to him before marriage. When Shalimar refuses to make love to her, she makes him do it: "'You think that's going to put me off?' she gasped between the sobs of laughter, and pulled him down on top of her. 'Mister, you'll have to try a lot harder than that to get yourself out of this'" (61). If she is rebellious on religious and sexual matters, she possesses precocious intelligence of others, such as in seeing through people's wicked intentions, especially in people who are her relatives. One day, when her father's cousin, Pandit Gopinath Razdan appears at their house she can immediately tell that the man has some mischief up his sleeve. Even before her father has the chance to meet his cousin, she tells Razdan, "You must be looking for someone somewhere else. There is nothing here for you" (102). Boonyi's instinctual fears prove right when one day Pandit Gopinath Razdan spies on her secret dates with Shalimar and tells the Pachigam about what the two lovers are up to. Of course, the whole village comes to their senses and defends the young lovers and chases off Pandit Gopinath Razdan, who in secret works as Colonel Kachhwaha's spy.

Razdan was chased out of Pachigam in 1961, the year when Boonyi gets married to Shalimar the Clown at the age of fourteen. However, Boonyi is able to ward off malicious agents such as Razdan only for a short time. When her nemesis appears four years later in 1965 in the guise of Max Ophuls, the new U. S. Ambassador, she is defenseless. Even her husband cannot do anything to save her because Boonyi does not tell him what she has on her mind when she boards a bus to New Delhi to perform at the U. S. embassy. What does Boonyi, who earlier

so courageously deflected the assaults of Colonel Turtle and Pandit Gopinath Razdan, find in Max Ophuls that incapacitates her in total? After all, she is still in love with Shalimar even though she finds her married and village life stifling. Why does she fall prey to the trap set up for her by Max Ophuls' procurer, Edgar Wood? And what does her trap involve? To understand this conjuncture in the figure of a gendered subaltern, it is imperative to examine the ideology behind progress, freedom, development and so on which is packaged and supplied to the unsuspecting victims through various forms of culture industries, including media outlets. Unfortunately, even people in a traditional village such as Pachigam have access to information that comes to them as *pharmakon*, that is, a medicine that could also kill.

Long before he physically lands there, Max Ophuls arrives in Kashmir through the glamorous depiction of life under capitalism that was produced and naturalized by its emissaries, such as colonial administrators and media outlets. One vivid impact of the capitalist approach to life, marked by its instrumentalism and classification, takes place in Kashmir in its partition between Indian and Pakistani sides. Kashmir, as we know through *Shalimar the Clown,* was already rife with a sort of cold war between, on the one hand, the two villages (Pachigam and Shirmal) and, on the other, between Hindus and Muslims before the arrivals of Pakistani and Indian armies. The capitalist approach to life—that is, an approach grounded on such binary oppositions as good and evil, developed and undeveloped, friends and foes, profit and loss—rigidifies easily mendable/bendable social divisions into absolute divisions. It further widens the already existing divisive lines such as the ones between "us" and "them," and "pure" and "impure," and then naturalizes such separations by endless reiteration through various mechanisms such as the media. The world framed in the capitalist worldview is thus divided perennially between developed and undeveloped, rich and poor, city and country. In fact, capitalism not only consolidates these divisions through repetition, it also focalizes such divisions by glamorizing the "developed," which mostly means those who are Western, the "rich," and the "city" for example, while ridiculing and demonizing the "underdeveloped," the "poor," and the "country."

Such classificatory narratives of the capitalist approach to life reverberate even more the farther they travel from their place of origin, namely Europe and North America. By the time they reach the nooks and crannies of the world, such as Pachigam in Kashmir in *Shalimar the Crown*, they attain an incontestable influence over people like Boonyi, who feel stifled within their village life. The comfort she has with a loving husband and caring family members suddenly becomes not enough for her. She begins to want more, to be part of the images

and success stories she is bombarded with on a daily basis. At the very least, she wants to feel the taste of city life, which for her means freedom from the small village where she has lived her whole life. For Boonyi, Max Ophuls could not have arrived at a better time; he materializes to her as an epitome of a successful life, and she is ready to do anything to be a part of it. She thinks he has everything: money, power and knowledge. To recall Spivak's sentence regarding a triangular relationship between the white colonizers, the colonized, and the gendered subaltern, Max Ophuls is a white man willing to "save" a brown woman from brown men. He knows precisely what Boonyi wants, but he still orders his interpreter to ask Boonyi (*Shalimar* 185).

On the day when she leaves her village to perform at the U. S. embassy in Delhi, she smiles at her husband, who is not included in the troupe this time, but who has come to the bus depot to see her off: "She gave him her best, brightest smile and he lit up in return, as always. This was how she would remember him, his beauty illuminated by love" (190). As soon as the bus turns the first corner, she begins to think about her future. Rushdie writes, "*What do you want*, the ambassador had asked her. She knew what he wanted. He wanted what men want. But to have an answer to his question was important. To know exactly what she wanted and what she was prepared to offer in return" (190, emphasis in the original). Of course, what she wants is to become a better dancer, and, consequently, to live a better life in a city. As soon as the conditions are laid out and the deal is struck, she offers herself to Max Ophuls: "My body will be yours to command and it will be my joy to obey" (192). It does not take long for Boonyi to realize that her newly offered freedom in the city was in reality worse than her life in Pachigam. Rushdie writes, "*My old life like a prison*, she told herself savagely, but her heart called her a fool. She had it all upside down and backward, her heart scolded her. What she thought of as her former imprisonment had been freedom, while this so-called liberation was no more than a gilded cage" (195, emphasis in the original). Sure enough, all promises that appeared so genuine only months before turn out to be hollow.

Boonyi's "liberated" imprisonment leaves its imprint on her mental and physical form. Cooped up in a one-bedroom apartment all day and alone, she cannot help wishing for her free life in Pachigam. Max Ophuls's nocturnal visits begin to be more rare, pushing her to develop the habit of over-eating. Fortunately for her, all her expenses are still paid in American dollars by Edgar Wood on behalf of Ophuls. Ultimately, Boonyi begins to take drugs. Before the end of the second year of their contract, Boonyi has lost all her physical beauty, and, *ipso facto*, any real value to Max Ophuls: "Max went on visiting her for a

considerable time after she had passed what Edgar Wood privately called the point of revoltingness. It must be like sleeping not only on but with a stinking foam mattress, he thought with a fastidious shudder: *yeuchh*" (203). Eventually, when the ambassador completely stops visiting her, Boonyi uses her last weapon reserved for the moment which she knew would come sooner or later. She lets Edgar know that she is pregnant with Max Ophuls's child, and would like to see him to discuss it. For Max Ophuls, who has remained childless with his wife, Boonyi's weapon has some effect, but only for a short time. It only slows the inevitable; one could even argue that Boonyi's weapon makes her situation worse.

Max Ophuls leaves India for the United States after his affair with Boonyi becomes public. Boonyi, on the other hand, has yet to deal with Ophuls's wife, Margaret Rhodes Ophuls, also known as the Grey Rat. Margaret, who was engaged in "philanthropic works" in India, such as looking after its orphans, comes with a vengeance to oversee the birth of the child, whom she snatches from her mother as soon as she is born. Margaret names Boonyi's child India Ophuls and makes an arrangement to drop her mother at Pachigam. To Boonyi's helpless protest, Margaret callously responds, "Let's look at the world as it is, shall we?—I can't have a baby. That's clear. More than one reason now. Biology and divorce.—and you?—You can't keep this little girl. She will drag you down and she will be the death of you and that will be the death of her.—You follow?—Whereas with me she can live like a queen" (212). Of course, Margaret is only speculating because India's—or Kashmira Noman's, as Boonyi had called her as soon as she was born—life would be anything but that of a queen in London, which is where Margaret retires with Boonyi's child after she leaves India. Like her biological mother during her captivity in New Delhi, India would have to resort to taking drugs in order to make her life with Margaret bearable until a timely intervention by her father, Max Ophuls.

Boonyi's quest for freedom comes full circle after she is returned to Pachigam without her daughter. The absence of her baby weighs heavily on her already enfeebled body. During her "liberation" years in New Delhi, the villagers had performed her death rituals as soon as they knew that she was the ambassador's concubine in New Delhi. Upon her return, nobody dares to speak to this ostracized daughter of Pachigam, let alone help her in any way. Only her father, who has never stopped loving his only daughter, utters three words, *nazaré-bad-door* (Evil eye, begone). In fact, he was suggesting that she find shelter in an empty cottage at the outskirt of the village in which another ostracized woman, long dead now, known to the villagers as Nazarébaddoor, lived decades ago. Her husband once again appears at the bus stop where she

had last left him two years ago, but this time not to welcome her home but with a concealed knife (222). He does not use the knife on her right then because, one, his father and father-in-law stand in between him and his wife, and two, he has promised to them following a "*mritak* plan"—according to which one cannot decapitate someone who is already dead—that he would not hurt her as long as even one of them was still alive (237).

Following her father's suggestion, Boonyi finds a shelter in the Nazarébaddoor's abandoned cottage and begins her exiled life in her own village. Other than her father and Zoon Misri, another othered girl in the village, Boonyi also finds company in her husband, who talks to her telepathically, and her mother, whose spirit visits her in her waking dreams. She knows that her husband will come for her as soon as her father and father-in-law are both dead. But for the time being, even death would not come to her soon enough. The quest for more comfort and freedom brings nothing but loss and separation to Boonyi's life. Before meeting Max Ophuls, she had known nothing but love and care, even though she was not fortunate enough to get both parents' love growing up. However, the village women, especially Firdaus Noman, had made sure that she got proper care and advice from them. When the capitalist approach to life presents itself to her embodied in Max Ophuls, she experiences nothing but violence on her body and mind.

An Assassin's Rage

Noman Sher Noman, known by people as Shalimar the clown, was merely an entertainment artist, a rope-walking man married happily to Boonyi Kaul before he becomes a cold-blooded killer. He comes from a specific socio-cultural background that guides his future actions regarding his role as a betrayed husband. He had not been a social person, but he still entertained the crowd with his ropewalking prowess. Additionally, he had been a loving husband. The questions that beg to be asked are, what happens in this man's life that forces him to turn into an assassin? What is the main source of his rage?

Immediate riot, Alain Badiou argues, is "unrest among a section of the population, nearly always in the wake of a violent episode of state coercion" (*Rebirth* 22). Badiou is speaking of a type of popular violence that happens in the immediate aftermath of a state violence that people perceive as blatantly wrong. However, we can extend Badiou's examination of immediate riot to analyze immediate violence at an individual level. No animal breaks from its normal course of life unless there is a real or perceived threat to its existence. In the case of a human animal,

its existence involves not only its physical self as in other animals, but also social, economic, political, and cultural selves. As Shalimar bears witness, the psychological stress brought about by one's loss in social standing, for example, can trigger a cycle of violence, especially if the victim feels humiliated in front of his friends and family. Shalimar takes it hard when his wife, Boonyi, leaves him for another man. He cannot act normal when he knows that something has happened in his life, and he is humiliated by it. The matter becomes only more complicated because Boonyi leaves him for a Jewish American man, who is not only old enough to be her father (Boonyi is eighteen while Maximilian is fifty-five [193]), but is also someone from outside their community. Shalimar feels that an outsider comes to his village, sees his beautiful wife, and takes her simply because he has money and power.

We cannot fully explain Shalimar's destructive rage that follows his wife's infidelity if we do not at the same time examine Shalimar's "habitus," a concept popularized by the French sociologist and cultural historian Pierre Bourdieu. The habitus, as Bourdieu explains it, refers to acquired structures of familial, social, and psychological behavior of an individual. It is "a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception" (Bourdieu 190). The habitus helps a society to be continuously functional by having its members or institutions reproduce practices through which a system of domination and subordination is established as a norm. Marriage is an example of the institutions that recreate the habitus. Other examples of institutions that maintain and nurture the habitus of an individual include schools, religious centers, and culture industries (190). Once a system of practices is naturalized through repetition, Bourdieu argues, it acquires the aura of an unchallengeable authority. Thus, through the habitus a hegemonic group controls the members of society. With the help of marriage, for instance, men, who are the more dominant group in relation with women, will see to it that every established code of honor that serves the interests of the dominant group is strictly observed. For example, the wife must remain loyal to her husband, even though the reverse is not always true. The habitus acquired through matrimonial practices inculcates in both the wife and the husband a false consciousness that they are bound to each other for life. In a capitalist society, the habitus involving marriage is reinforced through a separation between the public and the private space, in which family matters fall in a private space. However, in a pre-capitalist society such as Pachigam, the private domain is also a public domain, and it is the

whole community that is involved in reproducing institutional practices such as marriage.

Shalimar's habitus encourages him to believe that as a husband he has the duty to avenge the death of his wife, who dies for him the moment he learns of her infidelity. He knew how, as a faithful husband, Pandit Pyarelal Kaul, Boonyi's father, never remarried after his wife passed away in the childbirth. His understanding of acceptable and unacceptable social behavior is shaped by how Pachigam functions as a social structure. To reinforce his habitus, the villagers perform a death ritual for Boonyi when she is still alive. As her father, giving consent to the villagers' judgment on Boonyi, reflects, "Bhoomi [Boonyi's original name] my child has chosen the path of death in life. Once she has so chosen I must not cling to her. I choose to let her go" (235). To Shalimar, as to the rest of the villagers, Boonyi becomes dead the moment she begins her adventure with Max Ophuls, and he takes the task of avenging her violator. Toward the end of his long quest for revenge, after he is apprehended and jailed for the murder of Max Ophuls, he reflects in a California State prison, "My life was going to be one thing but death turned it into another. The bright sky vanished for me and a dark passage opened" (60). The traditional institution of marriage has instilled in him the idea that a married woman has no choice over her own body.

True to his vow, and confirming Boonyi's foreknowledge, he comes to her at her cottage one day when Boonyi is forty-four. Soon after murdering his wife in cold-blood, he sets out to find Max Ophuls and Boonyi's daughter. In an ironic twist of fate, Shalimar's journey to America is made possible by one of Max Ophuls's international agents, Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, a Filipino revolutionary, who had fought with the Afghans and al-Qaeda against the Soviet Union, thanks to the U. S. arms and intelligence support (269). It is also Janjalani who informs him about Max Ophuls's new position in international affairs, including in the Philippines: "In seventies big war. One hun'red thou, hun'red twenty thou die. Then peace deal, then MNLF split, MNLF-MILF, then fight again. Hate Filipino government. Hate also U. S. A. US secret ambassador [Max Ophuls] comes to the Base to give weapons and support. I hold my fire but in my heart I want to kill this man" (269). Janjalani provides Shalimar with Max Ophuls's exact home location in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles (*S*320).

Shalimar kills Max Ophuls in front of his daughter India's apartment in 1991, and would have considered his mission accomplished except that India or Kashmira is still alive. If Shalimar has become a demon himself in the process of avenging his lost honor, there is India waiting for him as well. India is able to stop Shalimar, finally closing a cycle of violence that began when Shalimar decided that he must go

after his enemies and reclaim his honor. To him, honor "ranked above everything else, above the sacred vows of matrimony, above the divine injunction against cold-blooded murder, above decency, above culture, above life itself" (258). In the end, it only proves that the price of reclaiming honor through immediate violence can be too high. Following his elder brother Anees Noman, who fights against the occupying Indian army, Shalimar could have channeled his energy to challenge the oppressive practices, including the decolonization of Kashmir from the Indian government. Instead, he chooses his personal ego over the well-being of his entire Kashmiri people.

Rushdie's Vision for a Future Community

Against the backdrop of immediate violence that Shalimar resorts to, which is often rooted in his specific socio-cultural environment, Rushdie also tries to imagine a form of human relationship that provides hope for a community to come. This hope is located in a transnational relationship that India Ophuls a.k.a. Kashmira Noman develops with Yuvraj Singh, a Kashmiri businessman. India meets Yuvraj during her first visit to Kashmir after her father's assassination in Los Angeles. After the news of his assassination breaks out, his estranged wife, Margaret Rhodes, appears at India's apartment to tell her about her biological mother. Until then, India was kept in the dark by both her father and Margaret about her past and how she was first Kashmira Noman before she became India Ophuls. Rushdie writes, "The weight of the word [Kashmira] was too much for her to bear. Kashmira. Her mother was calling to her from the far side of the globe. Her mother who didn't die. Kashmira, her mother called, come home. I'm coming, she called back. I'll be there as fast as I can" (354). Kashmira's biological mother is, of course, dead now. Not knowing that her mother's story has already ended, Kashmira flies to India in search of Boonyi. It is in this process that she meets Yuvraj.

Yuvraj's father, Sardar Harbans Singh, was well-known for his reconciliatory works in Srinagar. A retired Sikh cultural administrator and celebrated horticulturalist, Sardar Harbans Singh was an old ally of Abdullah Noman and a great admirer of art. He "had supported the bhand pather throughout his career and, in retirement, had persuaded his young successors—who were as impatient with the old crafts as the youth of Pachigam—to give old stagers the occasional break" (*S*280). For this reason, Sardar Harbans Singh was a big obstacle in Colonel Kachhwaha's way "to crack down on the miscreants [of Pachigam] by whatever means necessary" (290). Yuvraj Singh himself was "a strik-

ingly handsome young man whose modernizing inclinations were trumpeted by his shaven face and lack of a Sikh turban" (281). When India arrives at Srinagar seeking help to track down the whereabouts of her mother, Yuvraj is reminded of his father's last words to him before he died only ten days before India's arrival: "I don't care how full your warehouses are or how fat your bank balance is. A full *godown* and a bulging wallet do not excuse an empty bed" (357). Yuvraj takes India's arrival as God's gift to him for being a good son to his now deceased father.

Yuvraj tells India about his trade not from the perspective of a capitalist, whose only raison d'être is to make profit, but from one who puts collective efforts and well-being above individual success: "So many artists together make every piece, the final work is not one man's alone, it is the product of our whole culture, it is not only made in but in fact made by Kashmir" (359). Soon after meeting each other for the first time, they are already half in love. India tells Yuvraj on their way to Pachigam from Srinagar that his home and garden are beautiful. Yuvraj confesses to her that in his childhood Kashmir was heavenly: "But now Kashmir is no longer heavenly and I am not a gardener like my father. I fear the house and garden will not last, *without a woman's touch*" (361, emphasis in the original).

Love is, as Badiou reminds us, what brings the living-dead back to life (*Saint Paul* 87). It opens up rooms for universal human relations, which can happen only when we first love ourselves by being constructively critical about unjust laws, scriptures and traditions that shape our habitus. Love, following Badiou, makes possible for an "event" to take place, and it is an event that heralds the beginning of something natal and life-affirming. An evental truth is "offered to all, or addressed to everyone, without a condition of belonging being able to limit this offer, or this address" (*Saint Paul* 14). Rushdie imagines this evental truth in *Shalimar the Clown* through the depiction of the relationship that develops between India and Yuvraj. Love not only brings these unlikely friends together, but it also becomes the condition of possibility for a future community, predicated not on legal or customary laws, but on an evental truth. Badiou writes, "If a truth is to surge forth eventally, it must be nondenumerable, impredicable, uncontrollable" (*Saint Paul* 76). An evental truth is a combination of thought and action a subject deploys in the formation of an alternative community based on affect. It is in this kind of alternative community that a Sikh businessman living in Srinagar is able to form a meaningful relationship with an Indian-American film-maker living in Los Angeles.

It would be a pipe dream to believe that if one just wished, all the barriers preventing meaningful human relations would dissolve. Nor

is it practical to imagine that one could suddenly change the way one views the world in the manner of Saint Paul: "[W]hile travelling to Damascus as a zealous Pharisee in order to persecute Christians, Paul hears a mysterious voice revealing to him the truth and his vocation" (Badiou, *Saint Paul* 17). For an ordinary human being, truth and vocation come not suddenly as an epiphany but through a habitus, developed in an individual over a period of time by way of family, education, tradition, and habits. As *Shalimar the Clown* bears witness, however, an individual is also responsible for the path that he chooses and the commitment he makes for himself and his community. In the same family, two siblings, Anees and Shalimar, follow two distinct paths: Anees's authentic path for the liberation of his people by means of a principled revolution as opposed to Shalimar's inauthentic path of violence to satisfy his own personal ego.

Rushdie presents the readers with two contrasting pictures of human relationships. The first is one in which a relationship is taken to serve one's personal goals. The relationship between Shalimar and Boonyi on the one hand and between Boonyi and Max Ophuls on the other exemplify this type of relationship. Between Shalimar the clown and Max Ophuls, Boonyi becomes a voiceless subaltern subject even when she appears outspoken in front of them. She becomes caught between her traditional role as a wife, and a disposable human toy for capitalist modernity. Between tradition and capitalist modernity, there is no space for Boonyi to speak. In the end, she is not even allowed to live an exilic life.

The second picture involves a relationship in which there is more than personal interests and goals at stake. This relationship builds on faith, love, and hope. Differences still exist between those involved, but the differences are overshadowed by a mutual care. The relationship between India and Yuvraj speaks to this kind of relationship. Even though they live in two different continents, distance does not stop them loving each other. True, there are many problems for their relationship to be perfect, but "in spite of the problems of an intercontinental love affair, and in spite of the fact that she seemed to dodge the subject of marriage whenever he tried to raise it, in spite of her gently pushing aside the box with the ring inside that he put on the table when he took her out for dinner on her thirtieth birthday, they were for the most part content with each other" (392). Whether or not this kind of relationship will thrive in the world still steeped in identitarian predicates is beside the point. The important thing is a relationship such as the one between India and Yuvraj reminds people that there can be alternatives to both traditionalist and capitalist conceptions of human relationships.

Notes

1. Using a Freudian analysis of the sentence, "A child is being beaten," Spivak constructs a sentence that speaks to the predicament of women trapped between Western colonialism and Indian patriarchy, "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (48). Spivak further argues that women in this power relation are rendered voiceless even when they are idealized as heroic and loyal to their tradition. In their abolition of *sati* practices in traditional Hindu culture, colonial Britain thought it was doing a favor to the Indian women by rescuing them from life-negating practices such as *sati*, imposed on them by brown men. It never occurred to the colonizers to ask the Indian women for their opinions on the matter. Their voice was thus rendered transparent, meaning that they were assumed to be unable to have any voice. Much like global capitalism now, colonialism treated them as mere lives at the mercy of the supposedly "cruel" native men. The native men had their own version of interpretation regarding the self-immolation of the widows on the pyre of their deceased husbands, namely that the widows willingly sacrificed themselves in order to protect their honor from the colonizers, who often violated their bodies as expendable objects. In both narratives, women are subalternized, and never given a space from which to speak. Spivak further contends, "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development" (61).

2. For a more detailed discussion on how the subaltern speak, see Ubaraj Katawal, "In Midnight's Children, the Subaltern Speak!" *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2013, pp. 86–102.

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Publishing the Black Arts Movement: Editors, Anthologies, and Canonization

Joshua Cody Ward

After the Harlem Renaissance and before the period of the Black Arts Movement (BAM), there was a commercial lull in the publication of Black authors by large American publishing houses, especially of anthologies of Black poets. In *The Black Arts Enterprise and the Production of African American Poetry,* Howard Rambsy notes that after the publishing boom of African American poetry anthologies in the 1920s, there was a drastic decline in their production throughout the 1930s and 40s (51). By the 1950s, only a handful of African American poetry anthologies were being published at all. This paucity of anthology material in the 1950s means that those editors who did publish anthologies in that decade, and in the early 1960s before the BAM was underway, may have had an inordinate influence on the poets included in later anthologies through intertextual sharing of poems and poets between anthologies. This essay will provide a comparative analysis of two anthologies by White, Dutch editors from 1962—Rosey E. Pool's *Beyond the Blues: New Poems by American Negroes* and Paul Breman's *Sixes and Sevens: an anthology of new poetry*—to a series of anthologies from Dudley Randall's Broadside Press in the mid-60s to early 70s. Through an editorial theory lens that positions anthologies as key texts in the canonization process of twentieth-century African American poets, this analysis will demonstrate the potentially problematic role of White editors in the establishment of the BAM canon.

Intertextual Rapport

In "Chapter 2: Platforms for Black Verse, The Role of Anthologies," Rambsy explains that anthologization was a key factor in the canonization of specific poets for the BAM. He writes, "anthologies operated as central forces in the formulation of a canon of Black poetry" (76). Older poets like Robert Hayden and Gwendolyn Brooks had their work featured in dozens of texts, which helped to establish them as old guard poetic masters, while younger writers such as Nikki Giovanni were similarly favored by many anthologists and became part of the

BAM canon in the process. Rambsy describes how anthologization of poets, and specifically the role of signature poems, helped to centralize figures such as Giovanni, Margaret Walker, Hayden, and Brooks in the developing canon. For Hayden and Brooks this meant that every anthology needed its "Runagate, Runagate" or "We Real Cool," respectively, while for Giovanni her signature poem became "Nikki-Rosa" throughout the period. These works were like calling cards for the poets that simultaneously functioned as advertisements for anthologies that could not do without big names and signature poems. For editors and publishers, the creation of signature poems and poets was a marketing tool to make money. For poets, the anthologies were career and legacy development tools.

Unfortunately, the power of anthologies in the canonization process creates a problem when White editors—like Pool and Breman—create their own anthologies of a minority literature. These editor-anthologists actively choose which poems to include in their anthologies and thereby contribute to the canonization of poets that they deem estimable. Rather than following the lead of Black anthologists or of the African American community in poet and poetry selection, these White anthologists may make selections based on their own aesthetic inclinations, political values, or personal connections. In *Beyond the Blues,* for example, Pool chose to incorporate the writings of older poets like Claude McKay and Langston Hughes whose poetry had a profound personal effect upon her in the 1920s when she first read them (*Beyond the Blues,* "Introduction"). For younger poets, Pool mostly selected writers whom she had met or developed correspondence with while in the United States for her 1960 Fulbright Tour of African American Colleges and Universities.

Despite the ideological problems of White anthologists' poetry selection choices and their contribution to the African American poetry canon, however, there is no practical problem if scholars cannot demonstrate an influence of these early anthologies on later Black anthologists' poetry selection: if Black anthologists chose poets without the influence of White anthologies, then this would demonstrate little White interference in the development of an African American poetic canon. Thus, it now becomes necessary to compare these White anthologies with the efforts of Black anthologists in the BAM. The Broadside Press was an early and influential Black owned and operated publishing house of the period. Its founder, Dudley Randall, was one of the many poets featured in Pool's anthology *Beyond the Blues*. One gets a sense from Randall and Pool's personal correspondence that Randall developed an interest in publishing through his frustrations surrounding *Beyond the Blues*'s marketing and distribution failures. For example, in

a letter to Rosey Pool from November 22nd, 1962, Randall writes, "This review ["a book review by local Negro weekly"] will add to the demand for the book here, which can't be filled because even the poets have not received their copies yet." Later, in the same letter, he discusses his work with Margaret Danner establishing the Boone House literary collective in Detroit, as well as his developing interest in archiving his own corner of the BAM for posterity. Due to the personal and inspirational relationship between Pool and Randall, Randall's anthologies may be a good place to begin an analysis of intertextual rapport between the anthologies of Pool, her protégé Breman, and the anthologies of the BAM.

Pool's *Beyond the Blues* and Breman's *Sixes and Sevens* contain poems by fifty-six and thirteen poets, respectively. Of the thirteen poets included in *Sixes and Sevens*, eight of these poets are also in *Beyond the Blues*.[1] Although neither anthology includes the exact same set of poems by any one of these eight poets, there is some overlap between the poems included in the texts. This overlap either indicates that the second publication was aware of the first publication (though which was published first in 1962 is difficult to ascertain without more archival research) or that Breman and Pool were creating their anthologies at roughly the same time and had similar correspondence-pools. It is also possible that one anthologist used recommendations from the other to begin the process of poet and poetry selection for their own anthology. Nonetheless, the two anthologies share a significant number of writers between them and thus have a strong intertextual rapport.

When one compares Randall's 1967 anthology, *For Malcolm: Poems on the Life and the Death of Malcolm X,* to these two anthologies from 1962 some interesting parallels emerge. *For Malcolm* shares twelve poets in common with *Beyond the Blues*[2]: older, canonical poets like Gwendolyn Brooks (b. 1917) and Robert Hayden (b. 1913), but also newer poets like LeRoi Jones (b. 1934; later Amiri Baraka) and Julia Fields (b. 1938). In *For Malcolm,* Randall includes the writings of forty-three poets, which means that the twelve poets in common from *Beyond the Blues*'s fifty-six poets is significant (the percentage of these twelve poets in the anthology's total poet count is larger in *For Malcolm* [28 percent] than in *Beyond the Blues* [21 percent]). In contrast, only two of the poets in *Sixes and Sevens* (Raymond Patterson and Conrad Kent Rivers) are also included in *For Malcolm.* It is noteworthy that these two poets' writings were also included *Beyond the Blues,* which may signify that Dudley Randall was using *Beyond the Blues*, and not *Sixes and Sevens,* as a guiding anthology for the selection of poets in his own first anthology.

When one compares Randall's 1969 anthology supplement, *Black Poetry: A Supplement to Anthologies Which Exclude Black Poets,* to *Beyond the Blues* the results are even more dramatic. In Randall's short supplemental anthology, he includes the poetry of twenty-five different poets, and again, twelve of these poets are also found in *Beyond the Blues*.[3] Whereas the twelve common poets in *For Malcolm* constituted about twenty-eight percent of the text's poets, the twelve common poets in *Black Poetry* constitute approximately forty-eight percent of that text's total poets. If Randall did use Pool's anthology as a source text for the development of his own anthologies, then this high percentage of commonality would make a lot of sense. However, because Randall's supplement was an attempt to provide schoolteachers with a text including the most important figures in Black poetry of the past and the present, one could also expect a fair amount of overlap with an anthology like Pool's, which probably relies upon older anthologies like Alain Locke's *The New Negro* for its selection of older, culturally relevant poets. There is also an overlap of five poets (Brooks, Danner, Hayden, Jones-Baraka, and Margaret Walker) in the twelve common poets between *For Malcolm* and *Beyond the Blues* and the twelve common poets of *Black Poetry* and *Beyond the Blues*.

What one senses here in the common presence of older poets like Brooks and Hayden is the developing canonization of pre-BAM poets through Pool's anthologization of their works and her influence over Dudley Randall's poet selection for Broadside Press anthologies. By demonstrating the common presence of LeRoi Jones, or Amiri Baraka, in these anthologies, we begin to trace his literary ascent into the pantheon of great Black writers through White and Black anthologists' efforts. When we compare *Black Poetry* to *Sixes and Sevens,* we find, once again, that there are only two poets in common between the anthologies: specifically, Ray Durem and James Emanuel. Since Durem is also in *Beyond the Blues,* there is only one novel, shared poet between *Black Poetry* and *Sixes and Sevens*: Emanuel. The comparison between Randall's and Breman's anthologies once again demonstrates very little intertextual rapport and instead allows us to continue to prioritize the rapport between Randall's and Pool's anthologies.

Finally, one can cross-reference Randall's 1971 anthology, *The Black Poets: A New Anthology,* with *Beyond the Blues* and *Sixes and Sevens.* In *The Black Poets,* there are poems representing forty-four different poets. Seventeen of these poets are also included in *Beyond the Blues.*[4] This means that approximately thirty-nine percent of the poems in *The Black Poets* are also included in Pool's text, which is a significant percentage of common poet selection. In contrast, there are only four common poets between *The Black Poets* and *Sixes and Sevens*: namely,

Durem, Emanuel, Thompson, and Conrad Kent Rivers. Of these four poets, only Emanuel is not included in *Beyond the Blues,* which provides even more evidence that Randall's primary shared text is *Beyond the Blues,* and not Breman's *Sixes and Sevens*.

Among all three of Randall's early anthologies, and Pool's *Beyond the Blues,* Brooks, Hayden, Danner, Walker, and Jones-Baraka all emerge as common figures who are anthologized consistently from 1962 through 1971. Additional poets common to *Beyond the Blues, Black Poetry,* and *The Black Poets* (but not to *For Malcolm*) include Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen, Durem, Langston Hughes, Naomi Long Madgett, Claude McKay, and Dudley Randall himself.[5] This process of anthologizing the same poets across numerous anthologies illustrates the selection choices of anthologists such as Pool and Randall. The specific analysis of Broadside Press's anthologies when referenced against Pool's *Beyond the Blues* demonstrates the latter's influence over the former. Insofar as Broadside Press was a culturally relevant institution with a central role in canon formation of twentieth-century African American poetry and poetry of the BAM, it can be concluded that Pool's editorial and anthology efforts played an important role in this canonization process as well.

Thus far, this analysis illuminates only a small portion of the development of a BAM poetic canon or a twentieth-century African American poetic canon, however. A more complete analysis would require cross-comparisons of intertextual rapport between many more anthologies. To determine the influence of White, Dutch editors and anthologists such as Rosey Pool or Paul Breman on BAM anthologists, the following pre-BAM texts should be studied further: Rosey Pool and Eric Walrond's *Black and Unknown Bards: A Collection of Negro Poetry* (1958); Pool and Breman's *Ik zag hoe zwart ik was* (1958) and *Black All Day: American Negro Poetry* (1960); and Pool's *Ik ben de nieuwe neger* (1965).

Editorial theorists have hitherto spent very little time analyzing these anthology texts' intertextual rapport to earlier New Negro Renaissance anthologies as influence-texts or to later BAM anthologies as influenced-texts. Furthermore, the role of White anthologists of African American poetry does not end with the beginnings of the BAM in 1965 but continues throughout the period. In fact, Rambsy writes, "the editing of African American anthologies by White men was more common. Daniel Walden, Kenneth Kinnamon, Abraham Chapman, and Arnold Adoff all edited or coedited anthologies featuring African American writings" (56) in the period of the BAM. What this analysis, as well as cursory examinations of other texts, seem to elucidate is that the African American poetic canon was formed under the influ-

ence of anthology texts by White *and* Black anthologists and editors. Therefore, the twentieth-century African American poetic canon may be less of a Black creation than a hybrid construction, or an ideological miscegeny, of multiple voices selected from different racial and national perspectives. However, another important question is: are Black voices (the poets) on an equal footing with White ones (editors) in this historical literary context?

White Authentication and Aesthetic Limitation

In *Black Writers, White Publishers: Marketplace Politics in Twentieth-Century African American Literature,* John Young extended editorial theory to the kinds of minority literature that scholars in the field often ignored in favor of analyses of canonical Western texts by White authors. Young explains that editorial theorists often privilege the first edition of a text because this edition preserves most of the social field that produced it. The argument is that an author, such as William Faulkner for example, may have had a specific intent in mind for an aesthetically transgressive passage in a text. Faulkner's editor Albert Erskine may have changed certain passages of the text, while his publisher Random House could have chosen to excise certain other sections with Faulkner's approval. Therefore, what results in the first edition of a Faulkner novel or book, then, is the product of multiple authors and social forces. For editorial theorists, this hybrid text with many *authors* might be more interesting than a prior copy-text by the principal author alone, even though that copy-text may preserve the author's original intent entirely.

Young argues that for minority authors, and for African American authors especially, this privileging of the first edition in editorial theory can often mask "a marked power imbalance between white editors and publishers and African American authors" (3). In his book, Young provides the reader with a history of these unequal power dynamics between Black writers and their White publishers to demonstrate the need for an editorial theory that is amenable to radical openness in textual privileging. By privileging the first edition, many scholars have unwittingly supported the illusion of textual stability in minority texts that are radically unstable and hybrid. Furthermore, nineteenth and twentieth-century White editors and publishers often provided forewords and afterwords to authenticate Black texts as genuine, while editing them to remove aesthetic complexity or political ruminations. The latter efforts worked to present these Black texts to a liberal, White

readership without challenging their inherent biases and stereotypes of Black people.

In *Beyond the Blues,* Pool as editor and publisher functions as a voice of White authentication for Black poetry. At times, she also practices the kinds of "unauthorized collaboration" (29) that White editors and publishers have historically done in the American literary context. Through an analysis of archival correspondence (the bibliographic code) and close textual comparison (the linguistic code), this section of the essay will investigate the ways that Pool collaborates with a specific poet, Charles "Chuck" Anderson, to portray his poetry in a specific manner that denudes it of much of its political and aesthetic force. The aim of this section will be to demystify future readers of *Beyond the Blues* from the illusion that the poems presented therein are faithful representations, preserving the intent of the poets whom they are attributed to.

In 1960, Charles L. Anderson published *Frustration: A Negro Poet Looks at America,* a small twenty-two page poetry book through El Grupo Literario at the United Nations School in Puebla, Mexico where he was teaching English. Five of the six Charles Anderson poems in *Beyond the Blues* come from this document. However, the Anderson poems in *Frustration* are significantly different in name and form from their counterparts in *Beyond the Blues.* In their correspondence from late 1961, Pool and Anderson discuss the upcoming anthology and the poems they hope to include therein. After Pool requests some specific information such as an updated bio and some recent, unpublished poems, Anderson responds by sending back all of the information requested and more: "To answer your questions: 1. biographical notes are okay. 2. I will enclose copies of FINGER POPIN' [*sic*] and SWEET AND TENDER GWEN. Also, I will attempt to finish two other poems I am working on. 3. I will write Ray Durem today!" Their correspondence begins in a jovial manner and Anderson is helpful, responding quickly to Pool's requests for information and documents.

In Pool's response, she writes, "I'd like to include: Question of Enemies. Request: May entitle it plainly: QUESTION. I feel that hits harder. The enemy idea comes forward so strongly that the word in the title would weaken the impression. I hope you can agree." This editorial suggestion, amongst others in the letter, are difficult for Anderson to accept: "I agree to your proposed changes but painfully." The poem is about the absurdity of America sending its Black youth to war "for freedom" when they have little freedom at home: "if I live through this war / Can I carry some home to Alabam?" (*Beyond the Blues* 39). Pool wants the poem to speak for itself and thus argues that "of Enemies" should be excised from the title because this element makes it too confronta-

tional a poem from the start. Yet, Anderson was an openly Communist political activist who engaged in anti-fascist action in Puebla, Mexico and throughout California during his life. The titles of his poems were meant to be openly confrontational. Thus, removing the antagonistic openness of "Question of Enemies" is a discursive operation that weakens the poem's oppositionality to American policies on race.

Pool's second major editorial decision in the handling of Anderson's poetry was to present much of it in truncated form: "The major request: I'd very much like to print in that anthology a number of single verses from your poems and call them: Stanzas.... I suggest: No other title than 'Stanzas' and a short line of ..... between each stanza." Despite Pool's promise to indicate that these truncated poems are merely stanzas of longer poems, in *Beyond the Blues,* there is no indication that the poems presented are not the full poems written by Anderson. In fact, the poems are titled individually after the first line of each stanza so that "Prayer To The White Man's God" becomes "I Know Jesus Heard Me," "Conversations" becomes "What I Need, Is A Dark Woman," "Blues of A Lost Horn" becomes "Blow, Man, Blow," and "Father" becomes "Cracker Man" (*Beyond the Blues* 41). The only time Pool uses the ellipsis to indicate that something may be missing from one of the poems is at the end of "Cracker Man" (even though there is no content after the ellipsis in the original poem!). By discussing and authorizing specific editorial decisions with Anderson, Pool establishes an editorial relationship with him only to then change much of the plan, apparently without his consent or knowledge. Through these changes, Pool transitions from an editor to an unauthorized collaborator in Anderson's writing.

Pool's selections of stanzas from Anderson's poetry decontextualize the text, presenting it much differently from how it was originally intended. For example, in *Beyond the Blues*, "I Know Jesus Heard Me" is an almost aphoristic condemnation of the Christian religion, presumably from the perspective of a questioning Black poet who interprets Christianity as a cultural product of White Europeans that is complicit with the evils of racial injustice:

> I know Jesus heard me
> 'Cause he spit right in my eye
> Said—Go'way, boy,
> Don't want to hear you cry. (41)

However, in *Frustration*, the full poem "Prayer To The White Man's God" includes an eleven-line orison before this stanza, which recounts the cries of African Americans in bondage "for centuries." These cries have

fallen on deaf ears of the "Lord" who delays emancipation because he is "for the White man." The poem, in its full context, portrays Christianity as a herd morality that has been imposed upon African Americans by White masters to keep them subservient and docile. In *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature,* William Maxwell notes that this poem was considered "a characteristic Black Arts text" (129) by the FBI literary critic tasked with analyzing Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka's anthology *Black Fire* for subversive content. Pool's variation of the poem, with its viscerally weakened, provisional title, never garnered the same kind of scrutiny from the powers that be, evincing the extent of Pool's watering down of the poem.

In "Cracker Man," Pool's editorial decision to change the title completely alters the meaning of the poem. In *Beyond the Blues*, it reads as follows:

> Cracker man
> Don't call me Sam
> My name's Tom
> Remember?
> You knew my mom ... (41)

The sense of the cracker man's relationship to Tom is unclear in this decontextualized stanza. The mere fact of the cracker man knowing Tom's mom, even in the biblical sense, denotes very little. The cracker man could have been a boyfriend of his mother's and is not necessarily Tom's father in this version of the text. When we compare this version with the identical poem in *Frustration* titled "Father," the relationship between the cracker man and Tom becomes clear. The overtness of the title "Father" gives away everything, which was not poetically effective enough to Pool. However, Pool did not analyze the textual meaning of the poem without the original title and therefore did not foresee the semantic shifts from a clear interpretation in "Father" to an open-ended interpretative field in "Cracker Man." This shift is major, and by making it without Anderson's approval, Pool drastically repositions the poem's meaning and brackets its poet's [Anderson] agency. To the Shakespearian adage "What's in a name," this example demonstrates, everything!

Pool's "What I Need, Is A Dark Woman" is comprised of the last three lines of Anderson's "Conversations." It reads:

> What I need, is a dark woman
> With a vicious American past
> And a Red future. (41)

As it stands, "What I Need, Is A Dark Woman" contains the poet-narrator's desire for a woman who is not innocent to the evils of American society, and is in fact a woman with Communist, or Red, sympathies. What the poem is missing is nine lines included before these three in "Conversations." Those lines recount the drudgery of the poet-narrator's daily life. They mention the quotidian happenings of the narrator's life, "business deal [*sic*]" and "the office," alongside more upsetting features of life such as "juvenile delinquency" and "marriage counselors" before leading up to an indictment of this kind of American life: "Tomorrows All Mess." When the final three lines arrive in "Conversations," the desire for a politically engaged woman becomes a desire for a reflection of the narrator's resigned self. Once again, by taking lines out of their larger context, Pool presents Anderson's poems in a limited sense with a discursive openness they do not have in the original.

Finally, Pool presents her audience with the shortened Anderson stanza-poem "Blow, Man, Blow:"

> Blow, man, blow
> Drown out that hurt
> Blow, man, blow!
> They say we're dirt! (*Beyond the Blues* 41)

Pool's presentation of the poem is one that requires just a little bit of cultural knowledge to understand that the narrator is referring to a jazz musician. Through performance, this musician is working to "drown out" the hurt and psychological wounds of the African American community they play to. He or she is likewise demonstrating through the creation of art that this community is not "dirt" and can create beautiful works by exteriorizing their pain through creation. In the original poem, "Blues of A Lost Horn," this musical atmosphere is more clearly portrayed. There, Anderson writes that "the trombone wails" to "hip studs delight." He characterizes the trombone's wail as not a hard bop line or a swing movement, but as "cool but cool in minor key" and relates that there is "much soul in his horn." These extra lines may not shift the meaning of the text as much the extra lines of previous poems did, but they do they shift the perspective of the poem. Beyond the calls of "Blow, Man, Blow," the portraiture of the player in "Blues to A Lost Horn," as well as the title itself, shifts the perspective of the scene toward the man laying bare his heart on the stage. It also incorporates the delight of the crowd and thereby presents the scene as a tableau and not just the portrait of a man yelling to the player on stage, as in Pool's shorter selection.

"Editorial scholarship," Young writes, "is most often a study of the trace: the lingering elements of variants in published editions and the residue of the social processes through which texts pass on their way to publication" (23). Through an analysis of the textual differences between Charles Anderson's poetry in his book *Frustration* and these same works in Rosey Pool's *Beyond the Blues,* this essay has applied the methodology of editorial theory to the linguistic codes of these works to demonstrate the ownership that Pool could sometimes take over the poetry of Black writers in her anthologies. In the case of Anderson, not only did Pool suggest edits to the titles and to the presentation of his poems in her anthology, but she also practiced "unauthorized contribution" to their development by editing poems beyond previously agreed-upon editorial decisions. For well-known poets such as Langston Hughes or Gwendolyn Brooks, whose poems could be cross-referenced to their presence in more popular solo editions or anthologies, this operation of wresting away the poet's agency over their material in a new anthology would not be quite as pernicious as it was with Anderson (or with other lesser-known poets) whose solo poetry volume was printed in very limited numbers.[6] Many scholars of the BAM today may only know Anderson from anthologies like *Beyond the Blues*, *Black Fire*, or *Sixes and Sevens*, which demonstrates the importance of anthologies for preserving cultural memory, especially of minor figures in the emerging BAM canon. Pool, Breman, Baraka, and other anthologists' editorial decisions regarding Anderson's poetry frame his work in specific ways and create lasting impressions of how that work appears and how it might be interpreted for generations.

This essay has also engaged in editorial theory's application to the bibliographic code of *Beyond the Blues*, *Sixes and Sevens*, and Dudley Randall's early anthologies for the Broadside Press. By illustrating the influence, or intertextual rapport, between Pool and Randall's anthologies quantitatively, this essay has begun a line of research that investigates the role of White editors and anthologists in the canonization process of BAM writers. Together, Pool's often-problematic editorial process and her anthology's influence over the Broadside Press paint a portrait of a White editor and anthologist whose work was instrumental in the development of the BAM canon and in the vexed presentation of lesser-known poets to larger audiences. I would suggest that future analyses of BAM anthologies trace similar histories of intertextual rapport and editorial decision-making. A meta-analysis of these kinds of studies may eventually provide scholars with a fuller picture of the degree of influence of White editors and anthologists in this process, as well as the kinds of editorial decisions typical of specific actors or groups (i.e., the differences between editorial decision-making pro-

cesses of European and American editors, of male and female editors, or of Black and White editors). Further, as a quantitative and comparative method, establishing the intertextual rapport of associated anthologies provides scholars with a novel way to trace the evolution of canon formation generally. Just as corpus linguistics offers invaluable qualitative insights into the writing habits and associated beliefs of writers—to name just one of its many scholarly benefits—quantitative mapping of intertextual rapport may provide powerful insights into the ways in which texts are co-constructed and how these webs of texts construct modern understandings of canonicity, laying bare the lineaments of national or regional habiti surrounding the shared cultural perception of books and their authors.

Notes

1. These poets are Charles L. Anderson, Ray Durem, Calvin C. Hernton, Percy Johnston, Audre Lorde, Raymond Patterson, Conrad Kent Rivers, and James W. Thompson.

2. These poets are Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Danner, Mari Evans, Julia Fields, Bobb Hamilton, Robert Hayden, Ted Joans, LeRoi Jones, Oliver LaGrone, Raymond Patterson, Conrad Kent Rivers, and Margaret Walker.

3. These poets are Arna Bontemps, Gwendolyn Brooks, Countee Cullen, Margaret Danner, Ray Durem, Robert Hayden, Langston Hughes, LeRoi Jones, Naomi Long Madgett, Claude McKay, Dudley Randall, and Margaret Walker.

4. These poets are Arna Bontemps, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sterling A. Brown, Countee Cullen, Margaret Danner, Ray Durem, Robert Hayden, Frank Horne, Langston Hughes, LeRoi Jones, Naomi Long Madgett, Claude McKay, Dudley Randall, Conrad Kent Rivers, A. B. Spellman, James W. Thompson, and Margaret Walker.

5. Dudley Randall's efforts to anthologize and thereby canonize his own work is another intriguing line of research that could be pursued.

6. Even today, used copies of Pool's *Beyond the Blues* are readily available online for purchase, while Anderson's *Frustration* is virtually impossible for private collectors to purchase, and most extant copies are owned by academic libraries.

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Someone's Kid Is Dead

Landon Funk

I knew Rob was dead the moment my mom told me he was missing. It was Mother's Day 2020, and my parents' porch pavement was wet from the storm the night before. Twigs and leaves from the oak in their front yard stuck to the bottom of my shoes as I approached the front door. I let myself in and walked to the backyard where my mom was sitting in a lawn chair reading a People magazine.

"Happy Mother's Day," I said as I bent down to give her a hug.

"Thank you, Tootsie." She kissed my cheek before flipping one of her magazine's glossy pages. "Oreo texted me to say Rob is missing."

I scrunched my face as she continued, "He was supposed to come home for Mother's Day. It was going to be a surprise, but he never got on his plane from L.A."

I glanced down at my thumb and noticed a piece of dead skin begging to be picked.

"Your dad is making calls to see if we can locate him." She licked her thumb before flipping to another page.

I knew immediately that Rob had overdosed, but I'm not quite sure my mother even thought that was a possibility. My stomach sank as sadness seeped into our conversation, and a flood of memories flashed through my mind.

It's close to seven thirty p.m. in 1998 when my dad picks up the brand new cream cordless landline next to my parents' bed. I hear him say, "Hello...this is her dad...Why do you want to talk to her?... You know it's almost her bedtime... Alright. Here, she is." He hands me the phone and huffs, "It's some boy from your class." But he is not just some boy. He is Rob, one of my first friends that I made at my new school that week. He had gotten the kindergarten directory in the mail earlier that afternoon and was so excited about having his friends' phone numbers that he was calling all of us one by one until his parents finally made him go to sleep.

It's the summer of 2005, and our families are vacationing together in Panama City Beach, Florida. Rob and I are thirteen years old and can barely stand to be in the same room together. He no longer sees me as a friend but as a nerd who won't break any rules. I spend most of my time that week with his sister who is two years younger than us - not necessarily because I want to but because one of the first things Rob did that

week was hang out with me for a few minutes before ditching me for some of our "cooler" friends who were vacationing in a condo complex across the street.

It's late September 2012, and my parents are visiting me in college. At dinner, my mom says, "I need to tell you something about Rob." I shrug and continue eating. "He had to drop out of Tennessee after only a few weeks to go to rehab," she whispers harshly across the table in the way that all mothers do when they are talking about something sensitive in the middle of a restaurant. I am no longer hungry, so I put my fork down and wait for my mom to continue. She tells me Rob is addicted to heroin and that his problem is out of control. He has been using since high school and was introduced to the drug by one of the same kids who he ditched me for back in 2005.

Forty-five minutes later, my mom's iPhone lights up. Oreo, our nickname for Rob's mom, is calling, but, when my mom picks up the phone, she hears Rob's sister's voice. "What happened? Libby, tell me what happened!" Her voice started to tense as her legs began to pace. I watched my mom wail and crumple to the ground, my hunch confirmed. Rob was dead.

He never liked flying, so he scored a Xanax from one of his friends to help him make the four hour flight from LAX to BNA. He popped the pill as the plane started boarding and went to take one last restroom break before having to use the inevitably small and smelly airplane bathroom. His Xanax was laced with fentanyl, and Rob collapsed in that LAX bathroom, never getting the chance to surprise his mother.

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In the middle of the day on a Saturday in January of 2020, my dad called me. His voice was constricted as he mumbled, "Mary Landon, I need to talk to you."

I quickly scanned through everything he could possibly want to talk about. *He and my mother were getting a divorce. Their dog had been run over by a car. He had lost his job.* I never guessed that he would sit me down in their living room with red, puffy eyes and say, "We had to pull Sam out of college and put him in rehab."

My little brother had been recreationally using drugs since he was in high school. I knew he smoked weed, had tried cocaine, used acid on the weekends with his friends, and was "so high on Xannies" the last time he watched *The Mandalorian*. I was and still am a recreational marijuana user who has dabbled in cocaine and tried psychedelic mushrooms, so I thought his experimentation with drugs was normal. He would brag to me about how high he got one night or the "crazy

shit" he would get into when he was high. I would laugh and share my own stories. Never did I think his drug use was a problem.

As our conversation continued, my dad, a hunched heap of shame and sadness, could not bear to look at me. I watched his heart try to be strong while we talked even though it was already shattered into a million pieces. "Sam was failing his classes."

"What?" I would never tell Sam this, but he is so much smarter than me. He could do the bare minimum and still make an "A." For him to be failing a class was an anomaly.

"He hasn't turned in most of his work," my father continued. "Your mother found a full bottle of Xanax in his backpack while she was driving him back to campus."

It was only that past Thanksgiving when he told me about being high while watching *The Mandalorian*, but Sam was smart. I thought he knew when to stop because I always knew when to stop. Only Sam wasn't me, and he couldn't stop.

***

The day my parents decided to pull Sam out of college was what they describe as "the scariest day of their lives." After speaking with admissions, my parents packed Sam and his belongings into my father's black Cadillac and drove back to Nashville. They were tired and exhausted when they pulled into their driveway around eight that night. Sam got out of the car and silently slunked up the stairs and to his room at the opposite end of the house. My mom heard the shower turn on and waited ten minutes after he got out to go into his room and talk to him about what she and my father had decided would happen the next morning.

My mother has a way of speaking in which she matter-of-factly tells you what is going to happen and how you should feel about it, and, if you do not feel the way she wants you to feel, she starts to get defensive. She does not yell, per se, but everyone who has ever lived with her feels like she is taking a hammer to their ego and demanding that they never stand up for themselves. And in this moment with Sam, there is no doubt in my mind that this was the exact way he heard and she delivered her message. Sam broke down and wept, but he was also angry and felt unbelievably alone. He screamed, "I am going to kill myself because of you."

Tears welled in her eyes, but he didn't care. She had hurt him, and he wanted to hurt her.

"I am going to move across the country and never speak to you again. I hate you," he spat at her.

As she got up to leave, Sam kept going, twisting the knife in further, "You ruined my fucking life. I am not going to your fucking rehab." He stood up and made a fist with his right hand before making his way over to the wall where his numerous high school debate medals hung. He banged incessantly against that wall, not caring as his medals fell to the floor.

For the only time in her life, my mom was scared of my brother. She ran to her bathroom, locking the door before crumbling to the floor. It was my dad's turn to put on a brave face, and, by some miracle, he convinced Sam to get in his car. They went for a drive, ultimately pulling into the parking lot of the rehabilitation center an hour early. The vibration of the car mixed with the adrenaline comedown lulled Sam to sleep. For a brief moment, everyone was safe, sound, and still.

Sam successfully signed-in to rehab that morning, giving away his rights to an institution he did not know. As he walked away with an orderly, my dad exhaled and started to cry. *What happened to his son? Why didn't he stop this from happening? Was he a bad father?*

Sam, a prisoner locked away with limited privileges, was only allowed to phone one person per week. He called me once on a Tuesday at eight forty-three p.m. I was working my second job as a sales associate at the Fabletics in our local mall. It was only the sales lead, assistant manager, and me on the floor when the phone rang. I looked down at my watch and saw that it was Sam calling from rehab, and I panicked.

"Can I please take this call? My brother. He is in rehab, and he only gets one call a week. Can I please answer it?" I managed to squeeze out in one breath while making simultaneous eye contact with my two colleagues.

Maybe they saw my urgency. Maybe they knew what it was like to have a loved one be in a place where they only get one phone call a week. Whatever it was, they said, "Yes -- go to the backstock and take it!" with just as much hurry and desperation in their voice as I had in my eyes.

I walked to the back and sat on the cold, gray ground surrounded by shelves of yoga pants and answered, "Hello?"

"Tootsie? It's Sam," he breathed into the other line, and my heart heaved a sigh of relief. He sounded healthy. He sounded good.

***

The day he was given his freedom back, Sam relapsed. My parents thought about Rob and how they saw the endless grief of their friends as they mourned their dead son. Sam's addiction meant that he could also end up on the floor of an airport bathroom on Mother's Day. They

dropped everything they were doing that day and flew to him. They loved on him as he kept saying he was sorry through wet tears. He needed help, he said. He did not want to die. In that moment, my parents finally realized that Sam needed to address his demons, demons that they had given him, in order for him to heal.

It's the fall of 2013, and Sam is six weeks into eighth grade. He is at what some would say is the best school in Tennessee, and the pressure for him to do well there is enormous. Not only does the school require excellence from its students to pass, but my parents require him to make straight As. My mom sits Sam down at the head of their granite kitchen table and asks him to pull up his grades. Sam's heart stops, knowing what will come next. This is a weekly yet random activity. My mom goes line by line and asks why he made an 87 on his science test and a 66 on his three question pop quiz in history. She neglects to acknowledge the countless 100s he has made in these classes and his others.

It is September of 2015 when my dad and I pull into a two-pump gas station off the side of I-40 while on our way to Los Angeles. My mother calls, and she is livid. She was going through Sam's iPhone while he was in the bathroom and saw that he had a tab open in his web browser that contained a video entitled, "Two Hot Soccer Sluts Suck Dick In The Backseat." She confronts my brother and demands he never watch porn again. It is vile, she says, and my dad agrees. He asks me if Sam's actions upset me and keeps repeating the name of the video over and over again. I look at him with shocked eyes and say, "He's a fifteen-year-old boy. Of course he is watching porn. Why would you yell at him for that?" My dad shakes his head while muttering the name of the video one last time, and we do not talk about it ever again.

It is February of 2018, and I have moved home only a few weeks before. I am in the kitchen when I hear my dad raise his voice at Sam upstairs, "ARE YOU GOING TO KILL YOURSELF? DO YOU NEED TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL? LET'S GET IN THE CAR BECAUSE IF YOU ARE GOING TO KILL YOURSELF, THEN WE NEED TO TAKE YOU TO THE PSYCH WARD." I can hear Sam try to rebut through tears, and, eventually, he makes his way downstairs while my dad follows him. Sam had filled out a form while at the pediatrician about his mental health, and he had checked that he sometimes had suicidal ideation. On their way out of the office, my mother snuck back and opened the doctor's file to see what he had answered. She called my dad to tell him what Sam wrote.

Now that Sam had relapsed, it was like everyone hit a reset button. Collectively, he and my parents decided to move him to a rehab facility that addresses depression along with addiction in a small town outside of Aspen, Colorado. My mother started going to AL-ANON meetings

and reading books on trauma and addiction. She even went on anti-anxiety medication to help deal with her own demons. Like Sam, I have battled with anxiety and depression for my entire life, and, for the first time, my mother listened when I said that I was in a job that gave me so much anxiety that I wanted to end my life. Never had she been supportive, but now she was able to look at me and say "Quit. It is not worth risking your life over."

My dad, on the other hand, was better but still struggling. During Thanksgiving of 2020, he wanted so desperately to be happy, but Sam was not there. It was like a piece of himself had gone missing. Sam is his favorite child and his best friend, and my dad could not get over the fact that Sam was going to have a different life from his. Sam's college experience would not be "normal." Sam was going to be non-traditional, and that was okay to everyone but my dad, the epitome of tradition. He still thinks he could have prevented Sam's addiction, but my mom, Sam, and I know that no one could have. During his favorite holiday when he ate the same food and watched the same football, my dad could not help but feel empty.

***

I told my partner a few years ago that I knew Sam was going to kill himself. I thought he was going to fashion a belt into a noose or find a gun to put in his mouth. His choice was much more subtle. Sam, like Rob, was sad, and drugs were able to alleviate and, in some cases, eradicate his pain. Xanax was his drug of choice, but he would take anything he could get his hands on if it meant a few moments where the demons could no longer take hold of him. He so desperately hoped for happiness. The only way he could get there, he thought, was by getting high.

Addiction is a disease just like depression. Just like a stomach virus. There is no way to see it coming. When it captures you, you feel like there is no way out. I was talking on FaceTime the other day with Sam when I finally asked him what it was like to be in the throes of addiction. He responded, "Hell. Remember that time when you were in like the fifth grade and were catching minnows in the ocean and accidentally got swept up in a rip current?"

I gulped air on my end of the line, remembering what it was like to struggle to breathe. "Yeah."

"It's like that. You can't get out unless someone sees you struggling and is brave enough to help you." His words are matter-of-fact, devastating me, but I can tell he has talked about this before with my parents or his friends or his therapist.

"Fuck, that sucks" is all I can muster as a response.

Sam smirks, "Tell me about it."

I notice that his eyes no longer have black circles under them, and that his cheeks are the same rosy color they were when he was twelve. For the first time, I see Sam and have hope.

Hope for his future.

Hope for his life.

About the Author

Landon Funk is a feminist, gender, and sexuality scholar, educator, and professor based in Nashville, Tennessee. She received her bachelor's in English from Princeton University in 2015 and master's in English Literature from Mercy College in 2022. She teaches writing, film, and literature at Nashville State Community College and Columbia State Community College. She has presented her research for SAMLA, PAMLA, and Mercy College's W.I.T. Her personal and academic work can be found in *The Tennesseean*, *Red Hyacinth*, *Women's Golf*, among others. Email: mary.landon.funk@gmail.com.

The Preface: American Authorship in the Twentieth Century, by Ross K. Tangedal, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, 220 pp. $119.99 (hardcover).

Drawing attention to the preface, a paratextual space often overlooked by scholars, Ross K. Tangedal astutely argues that many twentieth-century writers negotiated the "shifting landscape of a more self-consciously professionalized trade" by using preface-writing to establish authorial control (9). Grounded in Gérard Genette's *Paratexts*, Tangedal's book examines how the professionalization of the literary marketplace created various kinds of demand for prefatory writing, how writers sought to establish authority through the prefaces they created, and consequently how prefaces demonstrate a tension, a struggle for control, between the writer and the market. He navigates this "shifting landscape" through six chapters on individual authors: Willa Cather, Ring Lardner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Penn Warren, and Toni Morrison. The book closes with a coda on other modern and postmodern writers, ranging from Robert Frost and Katherine Anne Porter to Dave Eggers and Mary Karr.

As Tangedal notes early on, "We ought not separate the preface from its original home, for in doing so we deny the textual influence of the prefaces" (10), and one of the most informative aspects of this book is the way he situates analysis within historical and literary context. For instance, exploring the authorial ambivalence occurring in Cather's 1918 and 1926 prefaces to *My Ántonia*, Tangedal reads these prefaces in relation to Cather's novel and other writings, her other professional experience, and World War I. Unlike most of the prefaces Tangedal discusses throughout the book, Cather's have received no shortage of attention. In conversation with numerous scholars, Tangedal considers how, in the 1918 version, Cather characterizes herself as the editor of Jim Burden's manuscript, establishing dichotomies between Jim's romantic impulse and Cather's editorial prowess, which creates the illusion of Jim as the true originator of the story and, at the same, Cather as Jim's creator and as the story's narrator and editor. Skillfully overviewing Cather's editorial training at *McClure's* as well as her deep interest in even the most minor of details related to her books' composition and overall look, Tangedal studies how Cather's preface erases her authorial centrality while continually reconceiving and reestablishing it. Following WWI, as Cather moved to a new publisher and won the Pulitzer for her war novel *One of Ours*, the opportunity arose to create a new preface for *My Ántonia*, at a new moment, for a new market. Tangedal stresses how, in this new paratext, Cather further complicates

authorial identity by diminishing her own role as editor and narrator (as well as Jim's identity as a romantic), which might fundamentally call into question the point of view of the novel itself.

Whereas Cather's well-known prefaces support ambivalence over authorial control, Tangedal's chapter on Ring Lardner's little-studied prefaces to *How to Write Short Stories (with Samples)* and *The Love Nest and Other Stories* reveals Lardner's resistance to his publisher's, critics', and fellow writers' demands that he become something he was not: a serious, literary writer. Although Lardner had made a name for himself as a short story writer, his friend F. Scott Fitzgerald and his editor Max Perkins at Scribner's saw short stories as steppingstones to the novel. Tangedal rightly posits that "complications were bound to arise because [Lardner] chose Scribner's" (78), spotlighting a Scribner's ad from June 1924 that equates Lardner with Mark Twain and thus with Twain's ambition of writing witty stories *and* novels. Having made his name as a humorist and short story writer, however, Lardner banked on the fact that his established readership would respond to his carefully crafted persona rather than acquiesce to market pressure.

Fitzgerald's anxiety might be the opposite of Lardner's resistance. In "Inhibiting Signposts: F. Scott Fitzgerald and Authorial Anxiety," Tangedal studies the remarkable table of contents to *Tales of the Jazz Age* (where Fitzgerald attempts to direct how readers interpret and evaluate the stories), the Modern Library edition of *The Great Gatsby* (where he rails against the lackluster reception of *Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night*), and the draft foreword to *Taps at Reveille* (where he attempts to make a three-sentence statement on his literary craftsmanship). To this last point, Tangedal delivers some of his strongest observations in the chapter. Despite Fitzgerald's intentions, the foreword seems to denigrate the short story form, which "likely reflects yet again Fitzgerald's anxiety about being perceived as a writer of commercial fiction rather than as a novelist" (106). Reading against the grain even further, Tangedal examines how, in this foreword, Fitzgerald establishes a nostalgia for a bygone age (a "world" that has "passed"); however, many of the stories in *Taps at Reveille* extend to periods of time before and beyond that age, including the masterful "Babylon Revisited," a work that actually "*critiques* nostalgia" (emphasis original, 107).

Covering a range of prefaces, Tangedal then demonstrates how Hemingway strategically sought public exposure in order to project the public image of an active writer in contrast to the passivity of an author or, worse yet, a critic. Similar to his Fitzgerald chapter, this one examines a writer in an uneasy period of popular reception, using his prefaces to challenge critics, express his writing credo, and work through anxieties. Unlike in previous chapters where Tangedal focuses on pref-

aces to each writer's own work, though, here he also rewardingly discusses how Hemingway prefaced other writers' books, including *Kiki of Montparnasse*, *This Must Be the Place*, and *All Good Americans*. By examining these texts, Tangedal studies how Hemingway attempts to characterize the writer as active via his promotion of other good writers. In his discussion of *Kiki of Montparnasse*, though, Tangedal acknowledges that the preface reveals more about Hemingway than it does about Kiki (Alice Prin), including musings on Paris café culture that echo his June 1922 writings in *The Toronto Star* and warnings on the temptation of abstract writing, which would connect to his concurrent project, *A Farewell to Arms*.

"A Safe Distance: Robert Penn Warren's Introductions to *All the King's Men*" forms a compelling comparative study, as it traces consistencies and slight differences in five different introductions to the celebrated novel from 1953 to 1981. Above all, what Tangedal notices are not radical shifts in Warren's perspective over those three decades; rather, "the remarkable fact about the introductions is Warren's consistency. There are no sudden conversions or changes of heart, only the evolving resolve of an author's convictions" (143). Throughout these various introductions, Warren recounts the origin story and stakes of an artistic project centered on Huey Long and the myths surrounding him, on politics and the corruption of power. Early in the chapter, Tangedal notes that these introductions were composed and published at particularly charged moments (e.g., John F. Kennedy's assassination, Watergate, Ronald Reagan's election, etc.), and it would have been fascinating to include more discussion on how the nuances in these various introductions speak to their different political moments. For instance, when Tangedal mentions that the 1963 *Time* introduction focuses more on Huey Long and less on Mussolini, or that the 1981 introduction for the Book-of-the-Month edition features new details about Allied victories, why, in contrast to Warren's "consistency" elsewhere, do such slight variations exist, and what might they say about his response to these historical events and his engagement with an evolving readership in the 60s and 80s?

In the closing single-author chapter, Tangedal considers how Toni Morrison's forewords, possibly influenced by her winning the Nobel Prize and then her further exposure through Oprah's Book Club, shift from an emphasis on interpretation to "storytelling, language interrogation, and Black representation" (25). As Tangedal argues, Morrison's forewords seek a community of readers, often by emphasizing her own openness, her deference, even her vulnerability, which he argues is not akin to the feeling of anxiety (as examined in relation to writers like Fitzgerald and others). Throughout, Tangedal employs a guiding ques-

tion to assess the prefaces: "Are they worthy of the culture, and therefore, worthy of Toni Morrison?"—finding, of course, that they are, but also discovering that the question itself helps to articulate what he sees as Morrison's two-fold artistic project focused on legacy-building and Black culture.

An immersive study into a neglected paratextual space, *The Preface* helps us appreciate more fully how twentieth-century writers negotiated their private and public identities, their authority, and their own legacies in a complex and rapidly changing literary marketplace.

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Diversity and Decolonization in French Studies, edited by Siham Bouamer and Loïc Bourdeau, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2022, xxi + 267 pp. $159.99 (hardcover).

Over the last decade, enrollment decline across the humanities has necessitated further discussion around the importance and value of learning and teaching languages and cultures. *Diversity and Decolonization in French Studies* is a pertinent and inspiring addition to this dialogue. Written by a diverse group of educators, the collection offers a range of perspectives on how colonialism and imperialism have shaped the field of French studies and discusses how the teaching of the French language and of French/Francophone cultures can be transformed to become more inclusive and equitable. The contributors in the collection contend, from an intersectional perspective, that there should be no exclusive control over the language and cultural elements of French. Language and culture belong to all learners, teachers, and speakers of a given language, not only to those inhabiting the familiar spaces where it originated. While the concept of intersectionality was developed within the American university system, the editors argue that it is not solely an American import, as it has gained significant traction in a variety of fields and settings around the world. This decentralizing

perspective serves as the organizing principle for the collection's fifteen essays, divided into three distinct sections.

Part I disrupts well-known constructs such as "la francophonie," dismantles the notion of what language should be deemed pure or impure, and encourages educators to uplift minority voices that have been silenced throughout colonial history. In this way, multilingualism can be viewed an asset rather than a hindrance, and, as Cecilia Bengalia and Maya Angela Smith point out, "French becomes a tool for linguistic and political emancipation" (29). French-language textbooks written for North American audiences should also be decolonized. Madeline Bedecarré suggests that the use of French across the world has been normalized and ignores its violent imperialist history. By pointing this out, she argues that the imagined community of "la francophonie" is not unproblematic, contrary to what college French textbooks seem to imply. Julia Spiegelman further elucidates the idea of "la francophonie" being "deeply ambiguous, contested, and embedded within racial and economic power relations" (52). It is important to recognize that simply teaching canonical texts or cultural artifacts does not amount to doing decolonial work; introducing "diverse" content into a course syllabus alone is not adequate either. All these efforts require knowledgeable educators who possess both a sound theoretical and historical background and who understand how to decolonize their course content effectively. Although traditional cultural productions should remain part of the curriculum, it is essential to probe their potential imperialist implications. For example, Kristen Stern proposes that students compare the controversy surrounding monuments from the colonial era in both France and the United States. Marda Messay uses contemporary short stories and films to help students grapple with the legacies of oppression and analyze issues of intersectionality, marginalization of ethnic groups, and police brutality in France. Finally, Charlotte Daniels and Katherine Dauge-Roth examine how French colonial narratives from the Early Modern period, such as Paul Le Jeune's "Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en 1634," can help restore oral testimonies of Native American cultures.

Part II builds upon the concept of intersectionality and explores its various manifestations in the French classroom. This section provides educators with insight into the composition of their language classes, and how learners' invisible disabilities, queer identities, and trans experiences can influence language acquisition. The section offers concrete ideas for syllabi, readings, and activities. These range from an upper-level content course on non-white feminisms (Provitola) to beginner and intermediate language courses that create a safe and supportive environment in which students are not marginalized for their

gender expression or experiences. Kris Knisely expands upon the previously theorized framework of *trans-affirming, queer, inquiry-based pedagogies* (TAQIBPs) to create a learning environment that acknowledges gender as an essential component of individual identities and recognizes its influence on the social and political fabric. For example, Knisely suggests that on the very first day of class, instructors should avoid the common follow-ups that ask students to speak about each other in the third person. In the TAQIBPs framework, these potentially uncomfortable moments are replaced with "a private, voluntary first-day questionnaire that includes information about [students'] language experience, motivations and concerns, and the name, pronouns, and agreements they will use" in the class (173).

The chapters in Part III of the collection offer further examples of applying decolonial, queer, and feminist course design to the French curriculum. While Hasheem Hakeem and Kelly Biers provide theoretical support for this work, Daniel Maroun, Thomas Muzart, and Bethany Schiffman give suggestions for tapping into digital tools to implement these approaches. Maroun argues that current French civilization textbooks are limited in their portrayal of modern France, homogenizing former colonies and disregarding the complexities within postcolonial communities. To counteract this one-dimensional view, he suggests turning to Twitter, both to provide language input as a more genuine introduction to French/Francophone cultures, and for L2 student output that Francophones around the world can respond to. In his turn, Thomas Muzart proposes introducing podcasts into French language and culture courses, both as a source material to study and as an opportunity for student production. Further leveraging digital tools, Bethany Schiffman advocates for authentic sources found on the internet, such as "creative writing, visual art, podcasts, YouTube videos, blog posts, social media posts [. . .] and folk productions (233). These segments, "less regulated and codified" than traditional texts, can provide students with a source of interaction as well as serve as an inspiration for their own creative output.

Overall, this collection is a comprehensive source of creative ideas that is valuable to both college and K-12 educators. If downloaded directly from the publisher's website, its free open-access format contributes to its mission of decolonizing the language curriculum, making it available to a wider audience. Though there may be a few minor typos and awkward phrases, this does not detract from the quality of the content.

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Africas in the World and the World in the Africas: African Literatures and Comparativism, edited by Sandra Sousa and Nazir Ahmed Can, Quod Manet, 2022, 335 pp. $19.99 (paper).

In recent years, the ideal of creating a dialogic around the notion of a transnational, ubiquitously human literature has pervaded critical discourse in a variety of ways. One of the more salient ones has been the growth of collections of comparative, critical essays. Many of these works may or may not incorporate a comparative discourse within them, and yet at the macro level become part of a larger, borderless context. In this, the present collection reveals itself as a comprehensive, multifaceted study of African voices in literature. It embodies transnational criticism in its own expressive form, entering into a metaliterary space that both dialogues with, and analyzes, the literary works it intends to study. General themes of struggles for identity creation and confirmation at the community and individual level pervade the overall work, despite the differences in foci, genre, geography (human and physical), and literary tendencies in contemporary African literatures.

As the work itself incorporates short chapters from twelve different literary critics, along with an introduction by the editors, Sandra Sousa and Nazir Ahmed Can, that summarizes each individual chapter, this review will not attempt to rewrite the cleverly composed, efficiency-minded descriptions of each available to the reader in the collection's introduction. Rather, it will emphasize larger themes and draw examples from various chapters.

The collection contains studies by (in order of appearance) Fátima Mendonça, Nazir Ahmed Can, Ricardo Luiz Pedrosa Alves, Juan Miguel Zarandona, Mayca de Castro, Lisa Nalbone, Susana L. M. Antunes, Fernanda Murad Machado, Sheila Khan, Iara Christina Silva Barroca, Daniel Silva, and Sandra Sousa. Nazir Ahmed Can and Sandra Sousa's introductory text titled "African Literatures: The Urgency and Impasses of Interlinguistic Comparativism" successfully sets the trans-

national, thematically open tone and the epistemological framework of the collection.

Although not imposed by the editors, the book implicitly groups its chapters thematically into three sections, each focusing on a different level of metaphoric discourse. This allows the reader to gain a sense of how the larger thematic and metaphorical structures at work in the collection engender an intertextually laced critical narrative. The first group, a series of studies on postcolonial nationhood and collective identity, encompasses the articles by Mendonça, Can, Alves, and Zarandona. These chapters not only apply literary analysis to the national/post-national epistemologies of various African nations and countries, they also bridge linguistic and historical gaps between various spheres of European colonial influence. As Mendonça states, "[a] perda dos direitos antigos, com a demarcação de terras a favor de colonos, vai ocasionar o desapossamento da terra, uma reacção emotiva e psíquica, loucura e assassinato [. . .]" ("[the] loss of ancient rights, along with the demarcation of lands in favor of the colonists, will occasion the dispossession of land, an emotional and psychic reaction, madness and murder [. . .]"; my trans; 39).

The second section, incorporating studies by Castro, Nalbone, Antunes, Murad Machado, and Khan, focuses its critical apparatuses on the individual experience of postcolonial nation building and the ethical and/or moral failures of many of these projects. As Antunes makes clear in her study, narrative voices in this context find themselves "[. . .] [n]a representação de sentimentos em fluxo contínuo balizados pelas multifacetadas consequências da colonização [. . .] " ("[. . .] [w]ithin the representation of emotions in buoyed, continual flux by the multifaceted consequences of colonization [. . .]");"; my trans; 181).

The third and final section takes a closer look at familiar relationships as the most intimate creators, sufferers, and ultimately, the most acerbic critical symbols of the abuses absorbed by African postcolonial bodies. Silva Barroca, Silva, and Sousa offer novel and refreshingly creative contributions to this discussion. Khan states in her analysis of thematics in recent postcolonial novels that there exists, "[. . .] um conhecimento que resulta da vivência direta com episódios da vida de alguém que sente na pele e no âmago da sua existência os golpes duros dos espectros da racialização e da ostracização [. . .] " ("[. . .] a knowledge that results from directly living with episodes of the life of someone who feels in their skin and the core of their being the hard knocks of the specters of racialization and ostracization [. . .]"; my trans; 230).

In speaking of the study's strengths, it is possible to highlight several aspects of the collection's content and presentation. The work's

foundation on such a novel, multilingual, and transnational approach, on its own, is deserving of recognition. Alongside this essential aspect of the work, the wide range of literary texts analyzed and contextualized, the plethora of themes presented, and the constant discussion of various national and regional identities in play, all underscore an unusually rich critical study in breadth and depth. Notions of a dialectic epistemology implicit in the collection's initial presentation reinforce themselves within each essay, as well as throughout the work.

In the vast spaces created by this innovative and appealing collection of essays, I can find only one point of criticism to offer. The implied thematic and epistemological relationships between chapters, meant to reflect an ongoing dialog between groups of writers now unconfined by the national borders that define criticism's conceptual-level approach to their placement in the wider, literary-cultural world, could do well with a final, unifying statement to finish the series of essays. Perhaps some sort of epilogue or conclusion would have resolved such a tension, or at least highlighted the points of conversation that the contributors/editors would merit as most relevant. On the other hand, it is feasible that the editors would want this apparent omission to serve as a reflection on the incompleteness of these dialogs, the chance for the reader to continue the work they started. In this way, we may argue that the collection is truly complete, insofar as no dialectic, scientific process or progress ever would be.

In conclusion, the innovative concept of transnational, rather than traditionally comparative, approaches to literature embodied in this timely and profoundly impactful collection, in itself, makes this collection a worthwhile read. Its mere presence, its structure, and the dialog it both establishes and informs, indeed serve as a unique point of rebellion against the colonial and immediate postcolonial frameworks based on the geopolitical and geoliterary limits that those former colonizers imposed, and continue to impose, as the nations, countries, and literatures of the African continent and its diasporic communities tread, err, and hopefully flourish, in their wake.

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ety of studies that analyze transnationalism and mysticism in contemporary Iberian and Angolan poetries. Email: rsimon5@kennesaw.edu.

Courtly Pastimes, edited by Gloria Allaire and Julie Human, Routledge, 2023, xii + 243 pp. with 22 b&w illustrations. $160 (hardcover), $36.71 (eBook).

Courtly Pastimes represents a selection of papers initially presented at the Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, held in Lexington, Kentucky in 2016. Though it may seem a long gap between conference date and publication, these essays have not suffered in the interim; the research remains current and of interest to literary scholars in a variety of medieval languages. The sixteen essays present a good swath of medieval literary languages and genres, all within the framework of "courtly literature," i.e., literature for a medieval court. The collection contains ten essays on French topics, four on German literary works, one consideration each of texts in English and Spanish. Medieval Latin literature, while not the focus of any particular essay, is evoked in a number of pieces. The theme that ties the volume together is that of the congress itself: "pastime," ways of passing time in the Middle Ages. Each of the sixteen authors plays with this concept, seeing pastime in a variety of activities that we might consider leisure or work, depending on the case.

The editors appear to have organized the essays chronologically by date of work(s) considered; this organization does not lend itself to easy consideration of the volume as a whole. For this review, I consider the essays language group by language group.

More than half of the authors discuss works composed in France between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Laurence Mathey-Maille considers "The Emergence of Courtliness in Wace's *Roman de Brut* and *Roman de Rou*: Pastimes of the Rulers of Brittany and the Dukes of Normand" (15-25). The two works by Wace demonstrate the Anglo-Norman author's skill as a stylist and his utility as an eyewitness to courtly activity. In the same vein, with a focus on "Tower, Bower, Garden, and Forest: Hide-and-Seek for Courtly Lovers," Janina P. Traxler (42-50) discusses narrative voice and the authorial skill of Béroul and Chrétien de Troyes, especially comparing these twelfth-century authors to their anonymous, less skilled thirteenth-century adaptors. Sara Sturm-Maddox takes a different stance, pondering how much of a given author's works are effectively autobiographical in "The Performances of Courtliness in the *Dits* of Guillaume de Machaut" (114-25). Jeanne A.

Nightingale puts the Latin works of Bernard de Clairvaux against those of French romance author Chrétien de Troyes in her "Performing the Embrace: Intertextuality in Bernard de Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs and Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide*" (26-41), seeing numerous correlations between the two authors. She concludes that the lovers Erec and Enide may be a kind of courtly, secular incarnation of the sacred couple whose love is described in the Biblical text (38). Monica L. Wright considers "Marie de France at Play: *Equitan* as Courtly Diversion or Carnivalesque Subversion?" (51-63). As her title suggests, Wright argues for links between the lai of *Equitan*, the genre of fabliau, and the carnival tradition. Wright convinces the reader that Marie uses this combination of high and low to satirize courtly ideals (59).

An essay whose topic touches most closely on the theme of pastime is Kristen M. Figg's "Blind Man's Bluff: From Children's Games to Pleasure Gardens in the Latin Middles Ages" (126-49). Though he does not figure in the title, Jean Froissart is the real subject of this essay. Figgs makes a well-argued case that Froissart's use of games and game vocabulary offers modern readers a key to understanding not only his works, but those of his contemporaries. "The courtly social game was a release, a symbolic act, a tool for learning, and an occasion for free expression that gave young people a creative space within the safety of set rules" (143). Lori J. Walters's keynote presentation, "Amorous and Poetic Games in Christine de Pizan's Queen's Manuscript (London, British Library, MS Harley 4431)" (150-71), also ties a French author's work to the theme of play, starting with Christine's *Jeux à vendre*. In this work, Christine demonstrates her skill as a "poet, book producer, and monarchical spokesperson" (167); Walters convinces the reader that the *Jeux* are not a throw-away, but an integral part of the author's oeuvre. Just as Walters based her argument on a specific manuscript, so does Joan E. McRae in "Medieval(ist) Pastimes, or What's a *Belle dame* Doing in a Place Like Hatfield House?" (172-82). Building on her work on Alain Chartier and his *Belle dame sans mercy*, McRae offers a mystery tale surrounding one manuscript that had not yet received much attention. She solves the mystery, uncovering the history of Hatfield House Cecil Papers MS 297, a volume McRae hints may have been read by Princess Elizabeth before she became Elizabeth I of England (179).

The last article with a French topic is more a historical study than a literary one. Donald Maddox considers "Ritual, Public Pagentry, and Urban Justice: The *Seizaine de mai* of Bourges" (195-205), explaining the origins, details, and demise of the week-long civic event in the city of Bourges. Maddox offers a plausible explanation for the celebration, an annual event for almost a millennium (200), calling the *Seizaine* an ex-

ample of a purposeful pastime (193) intended to affirm the legal and religious position of the collegiate chapter of Saint-Outrille-du-Château.

Four essays treat German topics. Christopher R. Clason discusses "Courtly Pastimes and Nature in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*: Reading Ecology and Hybridity" (64-75). Clason understands hybridity as "a combination of characteristics of divergent species or spaces which, through juxtaposition in the same individual or environment, provides a unique opportunity to communicate a thematic insight or significant message" (64). He understands Gottfried von Strassburg as arguing that nature is "a spatial and discursive partner with the court" (71). In "*Sî jehent er lebe noch hiute*: Courtly Play and Places of the Imagination in Thirteenth-Century German Mural Cyles" (76-91), Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand invites the reader into spaces decorated with scenes from medieval German romance: images of Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* in Rodenegg castle (Rodeneck, Italy) and in the Schmalkalden Hessenhof, facsimiles of which are now on display at the Museum Schloss Wilhelmsburg (Schmalkalden, Germany). She argues that the use of this imagery as interior decoration allowed medieval inhabitants to live with fictional characters as if they were present in their lives, a phenomenon we can observe today with tourists who organize trips to experience vicariously the adventures of James Bond (76). D. Lyle Dechant uses a different set of visuals in "Fishing for Meaning: Immersive Reading and the Codex Manesse Frontispieces" (92-104). Dechant invites readers to rethink what the Codex's illustrations portray: not author portraits, as has been generally thought, but rather an effort on the part of the illustrator to engage actively in reading the songs copied on its pages. Imagery is also a theme in Natalie Anderson's "Ritterspiele: The Spectacle of the Courtly Tournament in Late Medieval Germany" (206-20). Unlike Sterling-Hellenbrand and Dechant, Anderson does not accompany her essay with illustrations, though her argument focuses on tournaments and images of them, as used by Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519) to demonstrate his personification of chivalry, honor, and martial talent.

Joseph T. Snow reminds the reader of the importance of the Occitan troubadours as one source of the ideals of courtly literature in his "The Apotheosis of Provençal *Fin'amors* in Alfonso X's Marian Poetry" (105-13). The points made by Snow could easily be expanded to book length, a treatment of Alfonso's conversion of poetry directed to an earthly lady into verse directed to the Queen of Heaven (112).

"Performative Courtliness in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*" (182-94), by Shawn Phillip Cooper, is the only contribution representing the English literary tradition. Cooper posits that Malory considered chivalry a military skill and that courtly behavior was "an unwelcome

development" (183) that the English author would criticize throughout his *magnum opus*.

In sum, this collection offers a survey of medieval literature from or for the court with a variety of approaches to a wide variety of works across multiple genres. I regret that most of the essays were relatively short, their authors unable fully to develop their ideas, perhaps the fault of the press, which probably limited page length of the volume. Remarkably, not one of the authors discussed Glending Olson's *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages*, an intriguing bibliographic lacuna in the background reading and, to me, an obvious starting point for many of these studies. Nevertheless, the volume is well produced; each essay is followed by its own list of works cited; there is a general index. This collection of essays will find its place in university libraries and on the bookshelves of scholars of medieval literature.

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