

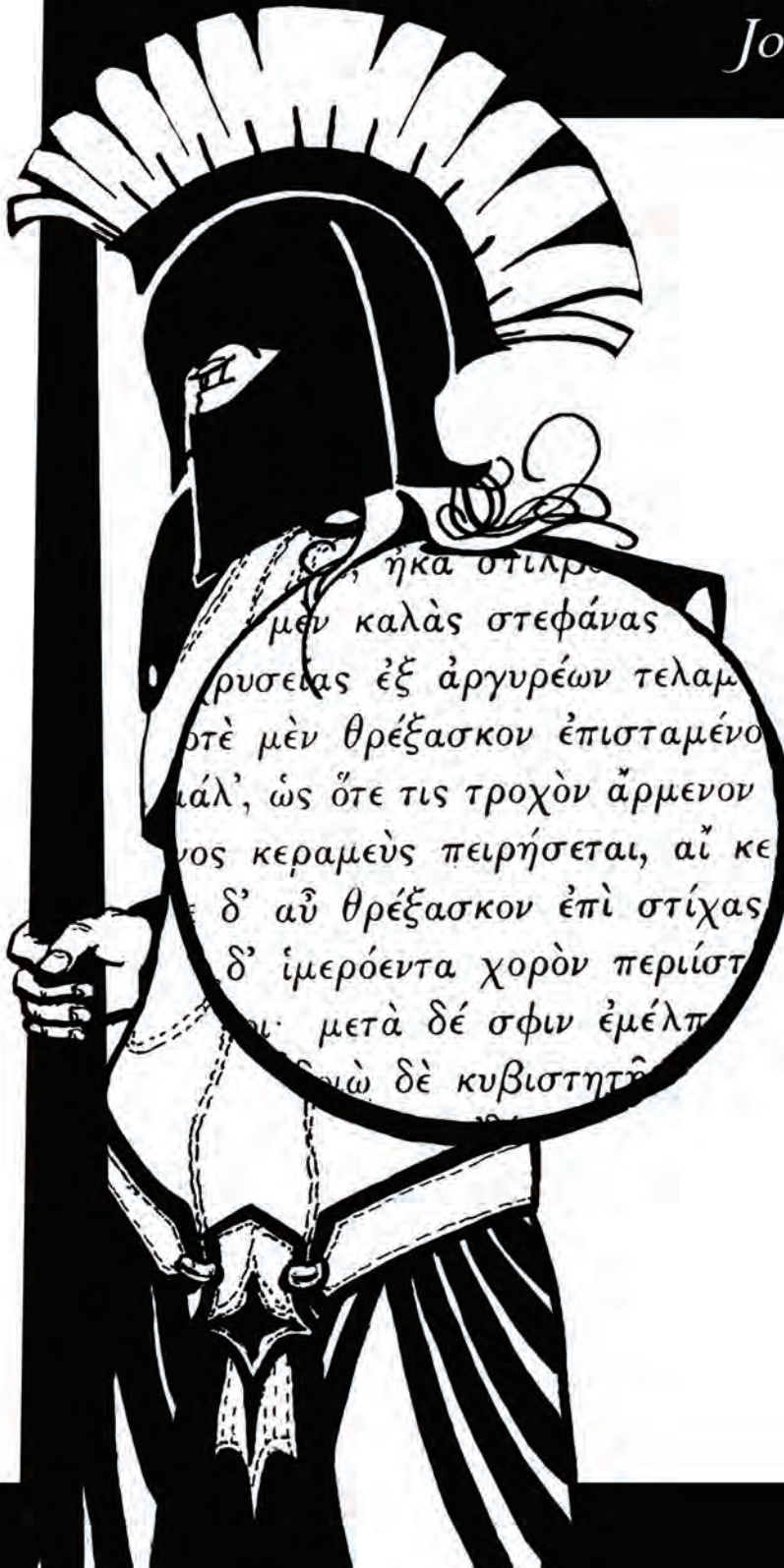
# SYMPOSIUM

*Adelphi Honors College  
Journal of Ideas*

SYMPOSIUM

XIV

Adelphi Honors College Journal of Ideas



ἤκα στίλβον  
μεν καλὰς στεφάνας  
χρυσείας ἐξ ἀργυρέων τελαμ  
οτὲ μὲν θρέξασκον ἐπισταμένο  
μάλ', ὥς ὅτε τις τροχὸν ἄρμενον  
νος κεραμεὺς πειρήσεται, αἶ κε  
δ' αὖ θρέξασκον ἐπὶ στίχας  
δ' ἱμερόεντα χορὸν περίστ  
αι· μετὰ δέ σφιν ἐμέλπ  
οῖω δὲ κυβιστητῶ

# SYMPOSIUM

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JOURNAL OF IDEAS

VOLUME XIV

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“Achilles, armor-clad, bearing spear and shield, spares one final thought for the pastoral life he leaves behind as he steps onto the battlefield prophesied to be the site of his famous death.”

# CONTENTS

Meaning Within the Private Space .....	4
<b>Allison Adler</b>	
On Labor: Crevecoeur's Vision of the American Subject .....	29
<b>Joseph Taglienti</b>	
Concealed from Despair .....	39
<b>Rebecca Endres</b>	
Creating a System Without the Lear "	
<i>Please don't kill me.</i> .....	48
<b>Jason Wesson</b>	
The American Mania for Reform .....	53
<b>Jennifer Lin</b>	
On How to Take a Picture in Europe.....	61
<b>Alex Diana</b>	
Contrived Conventions: Laws as Unnatural Constructs.....	67
<b>Alexa Savino</b>	
Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice.....	73
<b>Jaskirat Singh</b>	
Perceptions of Women through Victorian Theatrical Costume .....	82
<b>Krista Intranuovo</b>	
Scales to Tail.....	92
<b>Georgina Podany</b>	
King of the Beasts.....	97
<b>Shannon Fitzgerald</b>	
Barn Owl .....	98
<b>Alison Adler</b>	
Butterflies.....	100
<b>Lisa Pastore</b>	

# SYMPOSIUM

Tortoise .....	105
<b>Kyle Morrison</b>	
Water, Water Everywhere: Thoreau's Worldview in <i>Walden</i> .....	107
<b>Catherine Grover</b>	
Snow Melted .....	112
<b>Rebecca Endres</b>	
Knowing Your Roots: How History Makes a Home .....	115
<b>Catherine Jermolowitz</b>	
Retractable .....	125
<b>R.A. Sobeck, Illustrations by E.C. Mullane</b>	
Edward Hopper: The Twentieth-Century American Flâneur .....	142
<b>Alex C. Maccaro</b>	
My Essay Shall Be Brief' .....	167
<b>Brandon Dove</b>	
A Comparison of Ignazio Silone's <i>Bread and Wine</i> and Carlo Levi's <i>Christ Stopped at Eboli</i> .....	175
<b>Annemarie Correa</b>	
On Sight .....	190
<b>Joe Wasserman</b>	

# Meaning Within the Private Space

**Allison Adler**

When discussing the western conception of home, certain scholars present the house designs of non-western groups as a contrast to our method of organizing the private space. Members of these societies create private spaces to embody a pattern of living that is closely intertwined with cultural values, family, the surrounding environment, and community. These patterns invest the private home with meaning and create a sense of permanence and belonging. While western domestic spaces also contain a pattern of living, public actors have designed this space according to an ideal pattern designed to promote a single way of life that is often at odds with the needs of individuals within the home. This is ultimately the result of a dissonance between the public and private spheres, a rift made evident through the public sphere's attempt to address social disparity and reshape ethnic identity through housing design. As a result of this dissonance, public sphere actors have overlooked the idea of the private sphere as a meaningful space designed in accordance with the views and needs of the group living within it.

Domestic spaces in non-western cultures, like all homes, are physical expressions of cultural values; they are what Mary Douglas in "The Idea of Home: A Kind of Space" refers to as "virtual ethnic domain[s]," plans for meeting the current and future needs of a family (267). This plan may be intimately connected variously with environment, culture, family, and community through layout and architecture designed to reinforce certain behaviors and ideas. Some traditional non-western

homes are designed in accordance with the surrounding physical environment. The home is not only constructed from natural materials but also designed to reinforce a relationship with the elements of nature that are most important to a particular culture. The Yup'ik of Siberia, for example, always construct their homes facing the sea, the source of their food, shelter, and clothing. In this way, the sea is part of the rituals of domestic life, which reinforces the private space's obligations to nature. This also fosters a sense of belonging in which the family is only "at home" when close to certain elements.

Similarly, this sense of permanence and belonging is created by the expression of cultural values in the private space. As indicated by Dolores Hayden in *Redesigning The American Dream: Gender, Housing, and Family Life*, the domestic space "present[s] the largest metaphors of society and religion," and reflects "the inhabitants' fears, desires, rituals, and taboos" (267, 142). In many cultures, the private space is designed to reinforce certain cosmologies or ideas. This is often achieved through spatial design, such as the orientation of Temne homes in Africa according to certain "directions of existence" (Douglas 264). Reinforcement is also achieved through architectural embellishments. Among the Tlingit, both the house and household goods are decorated with the symbol of the family's ancestral spirit. In both of these examples, connections to cosmology and family are reinforced through spatial arrangement and architecture, as daily rituals such as cooking and eating occur within the domestic space. Connections to cultural values and beliefs further invest the private space with meaning and give the family a sense of belonging.

The design of non-western homes is also closely connected to family and community. Many traditional homes, such as Unangan *barabaras* in Alaska and Mexican *ranchitos*, are designed around a central open space where activities such as cooking, laundry, bathing, and socialization take place. Private bedrooms or sleeping areas surround this space and can only be accessed from entrances that open onto the central area. Because the daily rituals of cooking, cleaning, and eating take place in and around this central space, the connection to family is constantly reinforced. This spatial design does not isolate family members from each other or the center of activity. It promotes mutual accountability and makes every member conscious of the needs of the family. This family consciousness is also reinforced by traditional homes' accommodation of the family life cycle. *Ranchitos*, for example, always contain extra sleeping rooms for older children so they no longer have to share a room with younger siblings. Similarly, *barabaras* contain compartments for future burials. These connections to family and the family life cycle create a sense of belonging and permanence within the private space.

The pattern of organization within traditional homes may also be a microcosm of the community as a whole. As mentioned by Joseph Rykwert in "House and Home," non-western homes "always presuppose neighbors" and are built around communal spaces (52). Just as rooms in the private space open onto a central area, homes in the community open onto communal spaces. This connects the private home to communal centers of thought, ceremony, and production. It also makes every household a contributor to the community and encourages interaction and interdependence among various households. In hunter-gatherer communities,

for example, women gather in communal spaces to care for children, making child-rearing a communal activity. This interaction with community is the final connection in what Hayden considers the “web of economic arrangements” in non-western homes (142). A single space reinforces connections to environment, culture, family, and community, creating a sense of coherence that invests the private space with meaning. The importance of forming these connections is a shared cultural value, and the home is therefore constructed according to cultural norms that are created and shared by the entire society. In this respect, the values of both the individual family and the community are one when it comes to designing the private space.

Like non-western private spaces, domestic spaces in the west also contain a pattern of living that reinforces certain concepts. A main difference between the two, however, is that the design of western spaces is largely in the hands of the public sphere. In the United States, the public sphere consists of manufacturers, developers, labor unions, realtors, planners, and architects. These actors have gathered on several occasions in an effort to formulate the ideal family home. In the 1920s, for example, Herbert Hoover and the Better Homes in America organization, an amalgamation of public actors, came together to design the private space as the male worker’s retreat (Hayden 50). The pressure to create this type of home came from manufacturers, politicians, and labor unions who aimed to prevent striking by providing the male worker with a place to settle and invest his savings. This plan was further enhanced by support from government policy as “FHA design guidelines



actually penalized any builder who hired a sophisticated architect” to create a house “that did not conform to their norms of design” (Hayden 61).

A similar planning effort took place in 1909 at The First National Conference on City Planning and the Problems of Congestion. In *Building the Workingman’s Paradise*, Margaret Crawford discusses how this conference “brought design professionals together with urban reformers, public officials, social workers, and economists” to discuss the best way to design the ideal town and home (66). One major goal of these public actors was to eliminate class conflict by creating a “vision of social harmony” (Crawford 64). The upper class enjoyed homes with large, open spaces built on the most favorable tracts of land with the most “pleasing views of the landscape” (Le Corbusier 56). Meanwhile, working-class families lived in crowded areas of the least favorable zones pervaded by poor hygiene and sanitation. Naturally, this led to conflict among the social classes, a situation that architects and planners sought to improve through top-down reforms that would provide the working-class family with a haven free from the hardships of industrial life. However, as stated by Crawford, these professionals’ “abstract concern for ‘the people’ rarely translated into respect for the values or aspirations of [the] communities or the individuals for whom they designed” (67). Instead, architects and planners focused on adhering to a single norm of design. In this way, top-down reforms established public sphere actors as the designers and builders of the American private sphere, and eliminated the mutual relationship between public and private in the creation of the domestic space.

The loss of a mutual relationship between public and private in housing design was manifest in a loss of coherence among the elements that invest the home with meaning. One of the main components of top-down reforms was the allotment of private homes in more favorable zones to provide the less fortunate classes with open spaces previously reserved for wealthier families. However, this allocation also isolated the private home from centers of commerce and production. On one hand, this separated the family from the congestion and poor sanitation of the city; however, it also sacrificed “public space and social services...to private yards,” which isolated the private sphere from the community (Hayden 25). This eliminated the possibility of interaction and interdependence among domestic households, which is normally present in non-western communities.

When creating the actual layout of the private space, public actors carried out what Rykwert referred to as the “packaging of a lifestyle” in which “architects...fit everything that went on in a ‘typical’ household into a closely packed shell” (55-56). This typical household consisted of the male worker, his stay-at-home wife, and their children. The majority of builders and architects arranged the private space to reinforce certain behaviors expected of this typical family. For example, in many homes areas for cooking and laundering were separated from areas of socialization to encourage strictly defined gender roles. This design isolated the female housewife in her task to make the home a haven, a design much different from non-western households where all activities are so often carried out in central spaces with connections to family and community. While certain homes, such as Unwin’s garden city cottages, created a single space for the housewife’s activities that brought her

into contact with family and community, these homes were designed only for a single constituency. Unwin's garden city cottage homes were ultimately designed for skilled working-class families that consisted of the male breadwinner, his stay-at-home wife, and their children. This plan did not seek to accommodate a variety of family types and continued to advocate the "typical" family and its expected lifestyle. Additionally, it also left little room for the family to endow the private space with its own spatial patterns and to create its own sense of meaning.

Public actors also sought to unify all single-family homes with a single aesthetic, an effort to create a sense of equality and to prevent any deepening of the class conflict pervading the industrial era. However, these "standardized and generalizable solutions...rarely addressed local traditions or conditions in their designs" (Crawford 83). Many of these solutions arose from the architectural profession's search for a more technical and rational means of building and designing the home (Crawford 63). However, these did not take the particular views of the family living within the space into account and, contrary to non-western homes, rarely considered culture or environment. Furthermore, it was the job of the housewife to confront "the badly designed suburban home and make it homelike," a task that is absent in non-western homes designed with connections to culture and environment (Hayden 151). In "The Mass Home in the Middle Class Landscape," Samuel Zipp discusses the consequences of this issue as it carried into the mid-twentieth century. Stuyvesant town, the "suburb in the city" created after slum clearing in New York City, contained a series of "standardized spaces" constructed according to a single aesthetic that left housewives struggling to "dispel the

institutional look” and individualize the private space (Zipp 115, 135, 139).

Although department stores offered housewives options for personalizing the private space and communal forums in magazines stressed variation within the home, this variation could only occur within certain limits, as the private space still had to fit within middle-class standards. This was an idea promoted by the public sphere as *Met Life* sought to ensure that Stuyvesant Town had the “proper cultural and class composition” (Zipp 129). In this way, the public sphere’s application of a single aesthetic and promotion of an ideology that sought to fit the private space into a particular image created a space that lacked meaning and left little room for the private family to create its own sense of coherence.

According to Hayden, the dissonance between public actors and the needs of the private family in designing the domestic space led to an “uncertainty about the meaning of roof, fire, and center” (Hayden 142). This is ultimately the loss of the subjective value of the home. As an expression of cultural values, the home plays an essential role in the “constant struggle to give meaning to life” (Hepworth 17). As discussed by Miggette Kaup in “The Significance of the Door in Nursing Homes,” architectural “symbols of the culture and rituals of space...allow for reinforcement of values and behaviors that are part of the home-like pattern” (36). In this way, connections to the elements of environment, culture, family, and community through space are important for making a private shelter homelike and investing it with meaning. Many reformers of the industrial era who sought to improve the private space and its surrounding community to eliminate social disparities

recognized the loss of this meaning and expressed a need to restore the unity that is present in traditional non-western homes.

Industrialists who aspired to build suitable neighborhoods and homes for their workers hired both architects and landscapers, demonstrating a “commitment to comprehensively designed environments” (Crawford, 83). This was an acknowledgement that the private home not only needs to be well designed but also needs to be connected to the larger landscape and community. When discussing needed changes in city planning in “The City and Its Region,” Le Corbusier recognized that the private space not only provides for the physical needs of the individuals within it, but also impacts their “inner lives” (49). He acknowledged that the connection to environment was not only important for physical health, but also essential for “mental attitudes” and psychological well-being (45). With this in mind, Le Corbusier recommended the placement of private homes in areas with maximum sunlight and in close proximity to open spaces. In “Cottage Plans and Common Sense,” Raymond Unwin also sought to achieve the connection between the private home and the environment through the creation of shared quadrangles. These would not only connect the private home to the environment, but also provide space for the private family to interact with the larger community.

Le Corbusier also recognized the importance of keeping the family together by situating the private home in proximity to public services “that could be considered actual extensions of the dwelling” (58). While Le Corbusier’s belief that the distance families needed to travel to these services was “splitting up the family [and] profoundly disturb[ing] the basis of society” may be exaggerated, he

nonetheless recognized the necessary connection between the private space and the family. Additionally, reformers acknowledged that any plan for the private space and its surrounding environment must vary “depending on...locales” and the specific needs of the cultures and families involved (Le Corbusier 69). Even Robert Kerr, who in *The Gentleman’s Home* advised strict adherence to a housing design fit for one’s social rank, acknowledged that “there are certain points in almost every case upon which the architect will require definite information as to the habits of the family” (72-73). Any housing reform that took all of these connections into account would serve to produce what Unwin referred to as “that indefinable something which makes the difference between a mere shelter and a home” (15). This “something” is all of the elements that invest the private space with meaning, the elements that are important for the inner peace and sense of place within the home.

However, while these public sphere actors expressed a desire to restore meaning within the home, they rarely carried out this effort by consulting the people who were to live in this space. This ultimately led to a failure to incorporate connections into the elements that are necessary for creating meaning within the home. Instead of consulting with individual families on how best to include these elements, the public sphere focused on appropriating a single, ideal version of home. This dissonance has existed in western society since the early industrial era, which is seen through the conflict between the ideal and the real in the Victorian home. In order to create a private environment that demonstrated the family’s commitment to preventing deviance, the Victorian household became a “controlled private realm”

that restricted the lives of individuals within the home (Hepworth 29). This lack of peace within the Victorian home was ultimately the result of trying to create an ideal image of the private sphere, one that was appropriated by the public and out of tune with the “exigencies and contingencies of everyday living” (Hepworth 29). In *Gender and Housing In Soviet Russia*, Lynne Attwood demonstrates how the application of an ideal living arrangement had a similar effect on the lives of families in Soviet Russia. During the Khrushchev era, standardized apartment designs and the appropriation of furnishings and décor to support the ideas of “simplicity, modesty, and utility” led to the formation of private spaces that, while offering the family privacy, ultimately made “few concessions...to geographic, cultural, and demographic differences” (Attwood 155, 164).

According to Hayden, the American single-family suburban home resembles the Victorian home in its isolation as a haven for the family (59). Additionally, Attwood draws a parallel between the American single-family home’s support of the “traditional family” and the Soviet Union’s similar effort to standardize single-family apartment designs to fit with “an idealized image of the ‘Soviet family’” (155). Top-down reforms established by the public sphere to fit the private suburban home into a specific image have ultimately led to a situation similar to that of the Victorian and Soviet home, one in which the ideology employed by the public sphere for housing design is out of tune with the needs of private families and individuals.

Jenny Hockey in “The Ideal of Home” also discusses the issue with ideology through an analysis of nursing homes, and the efforts of public sphere actors to re-create the ideal of the Victorian home in private spaces for the elderly. According to

Hockey, the matron of the nursing home, who can be seen as a public sphere actor who “provid[es] an interpretative framework for everything which t[akes] place within the home,” maintains a façade that “attempts to bring the institutional setting into line with figurative or mythical representations of the ideal home” (110). This includes a rigid set of rules and organization of space that, like the Victorian home, “control[s] residents’ ‘deviance’” and disguises “evidence of deterioration and death” (Hockey 112, 114). While this rigidity provides for the physical care and monitoring of the elderly, it is ultimately out of tune with the elderly’s need for autonomy and “loving consensus” within the home (Hockey 113). Similar to Victorian, Soviet, and American single-family spaces, this demonstrates yet another conflict between the ideology employed by public sphere actors when designing the private space and the needs of individuals within the home.

This same trend was also observed within non-western groups in the modern era, as public actors sought to reshape ethnic identity and traditional housing norms to fit within the ideal vision of the western single-family home. In *House and Home in Modern Japan*, Jordan Sand discusses this transition by examining the efforts of Meiji period public actors to “bring [Japanese] houses into step with the progress of the nation” (39). In an effort to demonstrate Japan’s status as a “civilized” nation that was equal to the west, Meiji period public actors sought to reform the private sphere and transform it into the domain of national policy. Through magazines, domestic texts, and school curriculums, public actors in areas such as education, architecture, and journalism dispersed guidelines for private home reform supported by the Meiji government. Many of these discourses aimed to



“impose a set of national standards in place of the range of local practices” (Sand 58). These national standards promoted the ideals of the western single-family home and its Victorian model, and, in the process of reforming ethnicity, also sought to reform gender roles and class identity. New domestic spaces placed Japanese women on the same stage as the isolated suburban housewife, and they became markers of middle-class status. However, although these domestic reforms appealed to Japanese families as a means of social elevation, they ultimately led to a loss of coherence among the elements that were present in traditional Japanese homes, a trend very similar to that observed in the west as private spaces were reformed to ease social disparity.

To create a private space similar to the Victorian home, Japanese public actors encouraged the transformation of the domestic sphere into a realm reserved for the nuclear family. Like the American suburban home and the Soviet Khrushchev era apartment, this realm was specifically reserved for the “family of four with...the father a professional and the two children in primary school” (Sand 166). This was in contrast to traditional homes that included extended family such as elders and adopted children (Sand 23). In this way, the connection to family was partially lost, a trend that was also perpetuated by kitchen reforms that encouraged the female housewife to dismiss her maids and spend time cooking a variety of meals in new compact kitchens. Although they made cooking more efficient, these new kitchens isolated the female housewife from the rest of the family and also replaced traditional sitting kitchens that were “not only large and unconstrained spaces but also social ones” (Sand 88). Traditional Japanese kitchens contained doors that

opened to the outside for contact with tradespeople and the exchange of “practical knowledge derived from local transmissions” (Sand 69, 91). By transforming the kitchen into a constrained and isolated space, new housing reforms eliminated this connection with community and environment. The loss of connection with community was also perpetuated by public actors’ criticism of traditional attitudes towards guests, advising that the best rooms be reserved for the nuclear family and guests be treated as outsiders (Sand 47).

In this way, Japanese domestic reforms that sought to emulate the ideal western single-family home led to a loss of connection between the elements of family, culture, environment, and community. According to Sand, many of these changes were “sacrifices made largely unconsciously” on the part of Japanese families (Sand 91). The desire of many Japanese families to advance themselves and achieve middle class status inevitably entailed the loss of certain elements of culture. Although these losses occurred unconsciously, many Japanese families still felt the repercussions of the lack of coherence. This is manifest in a comment by Yanagita Kunio who “attributed the change to confusion in the modern era between the special and the everyday” (Sand 73). Similar to Hayden’s comment regarding the “uncertainty about the meaning of roof, fire, and center” in the American suburban home, this comment expresses how a loss of coherence among various elements in the Japanese home ultimately led to a loss of meaning and confusion about the home’s subjective value (142).

Similar reforms in traditional housing patterns also occurred within the Seminole tribe of Florida in the 1950s and 1960s, an issue discussed by Jessica

Cattelino in “Rebuilding Sovereignty.” Unlike in Japan, Seminole housing reforms prior to the casino-era were not advocated by actors within the ethnic group, but by philanthropists and officials in the United States government’s Bureau of Indian Affairs who sought to westernize the Seminoles and solve the perceived “problem” of traditional housing (Cattelino 143). Despite this difference, however, U.S. public actors sought to reshape Seminole housing through reforms similar to those in Meiji period Japan. As in Japan, public actors sought to eliminate traditional Seminole Chickees and replace them with western single-family homes and their single prescription for private life. This way of life was supported by government policy through the Indian Housing program of the 1949 Housing Act, home-economics programs, and government publications advocating western domestic principles (Cattelino 143, 145). Through this housing reform, public actors reshaped a critical aspect of Seminole ethnicity, a change that also entailed the reshaping of gender roles and social status. Single-family homes placed Seminole women in a similar position to the suburban housewife and became symbols of middle-class identity. While there were advantages to new single-family homes, such as their ability to elevate Seminole’s social status and grant them “equality with other South Florida communities,” there was still a profound loss among the elements that were once incorporated in traditional housing (Cattelino 150).

Similar to housing reformers in Japan, U.S. public actors encouraged the formation of nuclear families, eliminating traditional Seminole kinship ties via matriline. Traditional Seminole Chickees were organized in groups based on matrilineal clans which reinforced familial social and economic obligations

(Cattelino 141). Instead of reinforcing this concept, new single-family homes enforced separation of clans, leading to a loss of the traditional connection to family. By preventing this interaction among family members, new single-family homes also led to a loss of culture. According to Cattelino, the single-family home with its division of space, placed “walls between people that prevented elders’ speech from reaching children” (150). This disintegration of the extended family was perceived by the Seminoles as “kill[ing] the culture,” eliminating the transmission of traditional language and practices from one generation to the next (145). The walled-in single family home also isolated the Seminoles from the surrounding environment which provided a connection that was reinforced by the openness of Chickees and their construction out of natural materials. The lack of personalization and cultural connection is also manifest in their description of single-family homes as “cookie-cutter residencies” that lacked individuality or cultural expression such as symbols that reinforce clan affiliation (Cattelino 150). This a problem similar to that experienced by families in Stuyvesant town, who struggled to individualize their standardized apartments inspired by the suburban single-family home.

Like top-down reforms during the industrial era, many of the housing policies created by non-western groups, or imposed on them, to reshape ethnic identity, gender, and social status ultimately led to a loss of coherence among the elements within the home. Also, like industrial era reforms, this issue was caused by a dissonance between the public and private spheres. When establishing reforms for Japanese homes, public sphere actors “were in broad agreement without needing verification from direct study of existing conditions” (Sand 200). Similarly, the

United States government did not consult with the Seminoles on how to best integrate new housing solutions into their existing culture, and instead adopted colonial principles that saw traditional Seminole housing as unorganized and primitive. As stated by Cattelino, “rather than understanding their project as a reordering of space, government officials and philanthropists adhered to a vision of progress that equated modernity with order itself” (148). Once again, the ideology employed by the public sphere for housing design was out of tune with the needs of individual families and their desire to maintain certain aspects of traditional culture.

The dissonance between private and public observed in the industrial and modern era persists in American society, and has led to a loss of connection between the private home and family, culture, environment, and community. While there are very few restrictions on how the family can decorate the interior of its home, zoning laws sometimes prevent certain changes to layout such as adding an addition for another family member (Mendelson 763). These restrictions created by the public sphere prevent families from connecting the private home to culture and family, ideas that are reinforced by layout in non-western homes. Additionally, the public sphere continues to isolate the private suburban home from the larger community and public centers through the federal government’s continued support of highway construction over public transportation (Hayden 129). This is not only disconcerting for families from non-western countries who build their homes around the community, but also for single individuals and the elderly who are in need of socialization and public services.

The American single-family suburban home also does not make accommodations for the family life cycle, leaving elderly families struggling with the “demands for physical maintenance of the single-family home” which was designed to be cared for by the suburban housewife (Hayden 29). Attwood also connects Soviet and American housing design in terms of this issue. Like American homes, Soviet single-family houses and apartments were designed according to an idealized image of the average family. However, this image ignored the fact that “even a family which started out ‘average’ would inevitably change over the course of time” (Attwood 155). This made it inconvenient for families to accommodate older children as they reached adulthood, married, and brought their spouses into their family’s living space. While not all American families encounter this same issue, our private spaces do continue to face an issue in accommodating life cycle and family changes, which include aging and the addition of extended family members. Finally, suburban homes continue to be built according to a unifying aesthetic that is not designed to fit within a particular environment or accommodate a specific culture’s view of space. This has eliminated the traditional connection of the private sphere to the surrounding landscape and culture. Connections to environment, culture, family, and community are all factors that invest the private space with meaning. Such connections tend to be united in a coherent whole in traditional non-western homes, a strategy that has been overlooked by the public sphere in our society.

In part, this dissonance between the public and private spheres could result from the condition that most western nations contain a more heterogeneous population than most non-western groups. In homogenous groups where all

individuals share cultural norms and values, it is much easier to come to a consensus on the most agreeable housing solution. For example, once Seminoles gained control of their tribal lands and began reshaping the single-family home, there was wide agreement that many traditional dwelling norms should be re-incorporated into their new homes. Compared to these non-western groups, western nations, and America especially, contain not only a variety of social classes but also a variety of ethnic groups, each having its own traditions, needs, and cultural norms. Reaching a housing solution that is suitable for each of these groups would be time consuming, as public actors would have to meet with each constituency, and would require the investment of economic capital. Additionally, reaching suitable housing solutions for these groups may also require the reshaping of laws and regulations that prevent measures such as adding additions to single-family homes. It is because of these challenges that public actors most likely continue to seek broad policies and adhere to a standard model of domestic life.

Based on the progression of house design in the west from industrial times to the present day, one could argue that these standardized models created by the public sphere have in fact provided for many needs of the private family. In America specifically, the single-family suburban home grants each family its own private space that is free from the congestion of the city and that can be decorated as the family wishes. Families also have control over the majority of the activities that occur within their houses, and the public sphere has created several laws that protect the privacy of the domestic space from intruders and inconsiderate neighbors (Mendelson 764-769). In these ways and others, the public sphere has

taken the needs of the private family into consideration. Additionally, it is also true that these advantages of the single-family suburban home may be enough to make it “home-like” for some families and individuals.

However, there is no denying that “residential neighborhoods reverberate with meaning, and disappointments about them affect women and men of all ages, income levels, and ethnic backgrounds” (Hayden 58). If this were not the case, then contemporary scholars like Hayden and Rykwert would not be discussing a crisis in American housing that goes beyond financial issues, a crisis concerned with the “uncertainty about the meaning of roof, fire, and center” (Hayden 142). This issue with meaning is also evident in the discussions of scholars like Cattelino and Sand that indicate a profound loss experienced by non-western groups adopting a more western lifestyle. Perhaps Hayden and Rykwert’s comparisons to non-western house designs and Cattelino and Sand’s discourse on a loss of meaning signal that there is still something missing within certain western single-family homes. When evaluating non-western housing designs and analyzing critiques of western housing, it can be concluded that these missing factors include a coherence among the elements that provide the home with meaning, and a mutual relationship between the public and private spheres when it comes to incorporating these elements in the private space.

However, the difficulties of reaching housing solutions that cater to individual ethnic groups, and the concessions made in non-western groups when trying to fit into the western domestic ideal signal that achieving complete unity might be a utopian and unrealistic ideal. When analyzing changes in non-western



groups transitioning to the single-family suburban home, scholars like Sand and Cattelino reveal the inevitable condition that some cultural elements must be given up in order to achieve a particular lifestyle. This is especially true in the case of the western single-family home. As discussed by Lizabeth Cohen in “Residence: Inequality in Mass Suburbia,” acquiring the single-family home is a means of achieving equality, of being seen on equal terms with other members of the same lifestyle; it is the key to the “American Dream” and the prosperity and mobility that the dream ideally entails (Cattelino 148). Although these homes are not always available to all groups, as Cohen reveals in her discussion of the exclusion of minority groups from the American suburbs in the 1960s, it is nonetheless an appealing prospect for many groups that want to achieve the freedoms associated with the American single-family home. Because of this, many families and individuals are often willing to sacrifice certain cultural connections to fit into this image.

However, this does not dispel the fact that, once this ideal is achieved, there is still a loss of meaning within the home. For this reason, despite the difficulties faced in reaching complete unity, perhaps it is possible to strive for some form of unity. When observing the changes that occurred within non-western cultures during the transition to the single-family home, there were attempts to maintain some traditional connections within the private space. The Seminoles, for example, continued to maintain Matrilineal patterns and “many took part in practices of clan-based adoption, foster care, and babysitting” (Cattelino 147). Additionally, in Japan “dwellings were still requisitioned as the stages for more public uses” such as

weddings and funerals, and those who could afford it maintained the “combined Japanese-Western style” home (Sand 45, 53). Given the desire of these groups to achieve the ideal western single-family home while also preserving some of the connections once present in their traditional homes, it can be concluded that certain cultural connections, especially those considered the basis of a particular culture like Seminole Matrilocal patterns, should be taken into account by public sphere actors when designing homes.

In her analysis of the crisis in American housing, Hayden discusses the need for housing solutions that “support diverse choices of ways to live...[and] that allow opportunities for individuals and households” to build their own sense of home and community (205). The importance of catering to the needs of specific constituents was also expressed in Sand’s discussion of Meiji period Japan. Many Japanese citizens who were dissatisfied with the difficulties of achieving the middle-class ideal believed that it “would have to better reflect what seemed urgent in their own lives” (186). Both of these discourses signal that there is a desire for personalization and solutions that can meet a group’s specific needs and wants within the private space. Based on an analysis of the connections that industrial reforms wished to include in the home, as well as the connections desired by non-western groups once they entered the western lifestyle, it can be concluded that some of these desires are related to the connections between family, culture, environment, and community.

While the restoration of these connections entails reconnecting the domestic space to the concepts intertwined in non-western homes, these connections are not incongruous with our current industrialized and globalized society, despite the fact

that they are described as “laden with nostalgia for pre-industrial times” (Crawford 86). In fact, the term “pre-industrial” has connotations that, when used to describe these changes, can be interpreted as indicating a regression to a more “primitive” time period or way of life. However, the investment of the private space with meaning is not a primitive idea, nor does its inclusion in the private space entail a return to pre-industrial times. In fact, Le Corbusier believed that mechanization and advancements in science could be used to restore many of the connections that invest the space with meaning. The efforts of reformers during the industrial period to restore this meaning, and the comparisons drawn by contemporary scholars indicate that these concepts have not been lost and are still important to all individuals regardless of the type of society they live in.

Dolores Hayden is correct in her statement that “home life is the source of great cultural richness and diversity in an immigrant nation,” and part of this diversity is manifest in the various meanings we create within the home (84). However, this meaning is not only created through the celebration of holidays or interior décor; it is also maintained through connections to environment, family, and community, which are established through the organization of space and architecture in non-western homes. Although western reformers have recommended the restoration of these connections and many groups have attempted to reestablish coherence, the public sphere continues to overlook this strategy in its efforts to promote an ideal home. While this may not be intentional, it is nonetheless the result of a dissonance between the public and private spheres,

one that has led to the construction of private homes that are out of tune with the needs of the private space and its role in bringing meaning to the everyday.

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# On Labor: Crevecoeur's Vision of the American Subject

Joseph Taglienti

As a form of subjection, labor is a paradox. Working is the external manifestation of an internal state; that is, physical production not only allows for the amplification of material realities, but also conditions the possibility of a discursive subject. In the grammatical construction of a self, verb precedes subject – politico-economic citizenship is bound up with the act of manually forging self-consciousness. Yet, this is only the first terminal of labor's paradoxical framework; its second terminal is also problematic. Working manufactures estrangement not merely as codified by the matrices of a Marxist critique, but as the alienation of being painfully aware of oneself. Rather than laboring into the epistemological order of the free-holding subject – that is, the property-owning self that is able to consider the future, *homo economicus* – this second modification engenders selves that are pressed into immediate existence, forced into a metonymic signifying chain wherein they labor to create labor, without any experiential claim to a self-consciousness beyond the present moment. Seen this way, the double valence of labor both enables and precludes a subjectivity anchored in self-interest – one works *for* himself, the other, *by* himself. For Crevecoeur, the former is the American farmer, the latter, a reconfigured European: the slave.

In the “Introduction” to his *Letters from an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur disembodies symbolic and material orders, and then reconstitutes them in the figure of the farmer. Hesitant to write, or rather, to fetter himself to the world of the mediated through a gesture of immaterial labor, Crèvecoeur's narrator opposes himself to the European scholar who “never in his life had done a day's work . . . [but has] studied the stars, geometry, stones, flies, and folio books” (12). Concerned with metaphorical transactions, the European employs literature (“folio books”), or the non-signifying remnants of mathematical formulae (“geometry”), as the language of his intersubjective relations. However, because he doesn't physically labor, the logic presented dictates that he only informs one half of his selfhood. The American, on the contrary, is able to “work as [he] thinks” (20): note the not indispensable way Crèvecoeur's narrator allows working to precede thinking, as the positing of self-consciousness, and therefore, the subject is contingent on physicality – labor. In the traditional vocabulary, materialism grounds ideology. But what is at stake here is not merely the ability to multitask, but rather, the necessity of working *as well as* thinking, as Crèvecoeur uses this imperative as a platform whereon he can reassert his original observation: “We are strangers to those feudal institutions which have enslaved so many” (15). It is thinking while working, which translates into the economic prerogative of cogitating on investment, that breaks apart feudalism – the self constantly in transition between his current consciousness and his consciousness of and in the future.

Following this, the succession from an otherwise nameless epistolary entry (“Introduction”) to one that actually names its subject (“On the Situation, Feelings,

and Pleasures of *an American Farmer*") is no longer ambiguous – Crevecoeur has begun to lay the groundwork for his definition of the self. Equally unequivocal, then, is his almost instantaneous claim that the American is "the farmer of feeling" (26). Affective states presuppose external impetuses: a re-articulation of the external act of working (physically "farming") determining the internal state of "feeling" (for Crevecoeur, not only personal satisfaction, but also that *personage* to be satisfied). The practical reason of the American farmer who marks his subjectivity through both internal and external conduits is set against the pure reason of the European symbolist who doesn't labor.

But for Crevecoeur, sentiment is of minor importance in the realization of self-consciousness. More tangibly, it is his Lockean sense of property that further congeals the relationship between labor and subject. He writes, "The instant I enter on my own land, the idea of property, of independence, exalt my mind. . . . A pleasant farm . . . has established all our rights. On it is founded our rank, our freedom, our power, as citizens; . . ." (27). Not insusceptible to close analyses are Crevecoeur's particular word choices here, insofar as they speak to the tropological preoccupation with the self. The American farmer's sense of ownership is inherent to the "instant": the moment in time that may be endlessly reproduced as a moment of truth then, now, and later. Reproducibility is central to his conception of labor, as tilling and pruning the land are processes that require the tacit understanding of continuity through time. He then uses "own" as a signifier to exorcise his "idea of property" – the natural world being coextensive with human mastery. Self-interest begins to take shape, as property unearths "independence" – the free, indirect



discourse of the subject as property owner, answerable only to his own land – and quickly, his “mind”: the pinnacle and culminating locus that echoes the idea of “working while thinking.” Mind – internal, psychical subjectivity – does not rupture the axis whereon external property abides, but rather, nuances it, and further accents the phenomenology of self-consciousness.

Additionally, by working *for* himself, the American farmer codifies his “freedom, and citizenship” by suturing labor to legal, economic, and political identity. Crèvecoeur’s farmer produces his existence as an American who is, by definition, narcissistic, self-interested, but who through that self interest, dogmatizes the terms of his subjectivity within American statehood. Citizenship, connected to a futuristic mentality, inasmuch as one must consider the responsibility and promise of existing as a member of society, is forged by labor, and harbored in self-consciousness. This focal pivot on legality, however, is not meant to be delusory; one need not forget Crèvecoeur’s diatribe against lawyers in letter seven who rob their fellow citizens “without labor” (135) and with coercive, incommunicable language. A true sense of legality, based on Crèvecoeur’s terminology, must come from “the law of the land” (135); that is to say, the legally-minded subject can only access law through work – through toiling it into existence. Laws exist internally insofar as they are produced externally, the same mechanisms that encode self-consciousness into the conversation between farmer and his property.

These ideas are further evinced by the content of letter three, “What is an American?” One of the most salient portions of this text is dismissed almost

parenthetically, yet it nearly conditions the present discussion in its entirety: “Here they are become men” (42-3). The progressive sense of becoming may appear partially eschewed here, as it may imply that Crèvecoeur simply wishes to enjoin “become” and “men” into an adjectival noun that would purport to a constant state of improvement. Although this is a tangential point, the real meaning is in fact that men realize themselves through their work on American soil. They literally “become men,” which for Crèvecoeur, also evokes the glossary of citizenship, free-holding, and self-consciousness. Indeed, he explicitly contends, “His labor is founded on the basis of nature, *self-interest* [Crèvecoeur's italics]” (44). “On nature,” physically using and laboring upon the natural world, transforming it into an Aristotelian sense of ultimate perfection, the subject defines his subjectivity; that is, in enacting self-interest, through labor, the farmer announces his internal status as subject through external action (work).

By extension of this, then, consider the following: “Men are like plants. . . . We are nothing but what we derive from the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit, the government we obey, the religion we profess, and the nature of our employment” (45). Note closely how Crèvecoeur deftly navigates the universal and the particular, debasing an abstraction to the realm of commonality. “Men are like plants;” that is to say, subjects are defined by their relationship to the surrounding environment. That environment not only circumscribes the self, but also *inscribes* the self, as a hermeneutics that reveals the subject for what he is in fact conscious of: his ability to work his way into referential reality. This is why each subject, every “we,” is defined linguistically by a verb (“breathe,” “inhabit,” “obey,” “profess,” “employ”):

the farmer must labor to produce his subjectivity, syntactically performing his own tropology. But to reaffirm, this work must be *productive*, as in, it must report to the future; otherwise, it is just action. Hunters seem to moderately transgress this rule, as their role as frontiersman invigorates the dialectical model of westward expansion (which would, by the very nature of its own teleology, resemble foresight). But, as they are not property-owners technically speaking, Crèvecoeur condemns them: they are partial subjects insofar as they are self-conscious, but have no sense of political responsibility.

The question of hunting elides the present discussion with the above-mentioned, double-edged implications of labor: the means for self-production and self-estrangement, by the same mechanisms. Incommensurate with Crèvecoeur's original conception of work, slavery unnerves his sentiments, and nearly undermines his entire project. Largely, the question of slavery seems irreconcilable because it represents the alienating form of labor, the mode of subjection in terms of external and internal domination rather than autonomy, or an internal understanding of the external that is transmissible to a comprehensive self-consciousness. Yet, the multiplied horror of slavery, for Crèvecoeur, lies in the very fact that self-consciousness is present, *but by itself*. The slave labors into robotic perpetuity, but merely for the sake of labor (or even more specifically, *another's labor*). Agonizingly conscious of his own self, with respect to the forces who render his work symbolic, the slave leads an apolitical existence, insofar as his labor is inexpressible within the material framework heretofore presented. He is self-interested, in the loose sense of the idea, but is so obfuscated by his own selfhood

that he fails to recognize the future – the economic-political underpinnings of his labor.

Of their conditions, Crèvecoeur writes, “[They are] driven to toil . . . on different plantations of these citizens. And for whom must they work? For persons they know not, and have no power over them than that of violence . . .” (154). Underscored here at the outset is the diametric opposition between the two types of “toiling”: the one that produces free-holding subjects, and the other that produces the Other: the slave. They are not citizens, as highlighted implicitly by whom they labor for, and are instead, refugees, roaming “different plantations” without any sense of an intersubjective network. This is because they are not only encumbered by the awareness of their own subjectivity, but also because they are suffocated by their masters' subjectivities as well. In “working for persons they know not,” they essentially agree to be the external receptacles for the free-holder's consciousness, insofar as they actualize him, and not their selves, through *his* labor, *disguised* as their own. Their labor is purely symbolic in that it serves an order that they are estranged from, and it purports to a future they are unable to ponder.

Overdetermined by self-consciousness, reduplicated by carrying the mind of the free-holder, the slave is entrenched in work as well as conscience. Obedience is ensured by “violence” which in this model, is a simulation of the natural state – a depoliticized realm without responsibility. Thus, they are suffused with a sense of ethics, through power, or the semiotics of force, attaching them to a consolidated sense of self-consciousness that they may only enjoy vicariously.

This analysis proves that Crèvecoeur's distinction between the northern and southern slave is equally pernicious. He writes, “[In the northern colonies,] slaves enjoy as much liberty as their masters . . .” (156). Power, as elaborated by the constraints of labor, overrides the ostensibly reparative nature of this statement, as the slave literally must “enjoy” what the master enjoys, because he holds his subjectivity – the epicenter of his sense of wish-fulfillment (or more adequately contrived in the French, *l'accomplissement du désir*). He can only participate in the “liberty” of his master insofar as the labor he does for a symbolic, non-signified order translates into a perceptible, material order for the free-holder. Crippled by his own self-consciousness, the slave becomes alienated from the world, and turned inward on himself, not “become man” like the free-holder, but the recipient and system of his own subjecting tropology. Thus, his only options are to remain the passive conduit through which these currents pass, or to stage a revolution, however vain, in an attempt to unite his self-consciousness with a material order by endeavoring an act *that considers the future*.

Finally, then, we arrive at the study of the incarcerated slave, at the end of the above-cited letter. Crèvecoeur's narrator happens upon the spectacle of a slave, suspended in a cage, being devoured alive by various predatory creatures. He later learns that the slave “killed the overseer of his plantation” and that the “laws of self-preservation” (165) sanctioned his gradual execution. The logic of subjection discussed here provides a seminal theory for this punishment beyond mere “self-preservation.” The slave, fatigued by the weight of carrying the self-consciousness of his overseer, and discontent by the fact that the only future he can comprehend is

that of his master's, in an act of fury, attempts to realign his own self-consciousness with the external world, by suspending an ethical order. He kills to free himself; that is to say, he *murders* (invoking the legal reality of the act) the overseer so that he may re-ingratiating himself into the external world, and perform a form of labor (killing) that has material ramifications beyond mere symbolism. Like the cannibalism of the Freudian tribesman, he attempts to assert his own ego, his own self-consciousness, in reality, by “eating” or in this case, vomiting, the ego of his master-father – to remove the double self-consciousness his work leads to, and to create a pseudo-economic citizenship that stands outside of the ethical order. This is perhaps why the retribution turned on him is partly expressed in “eating”: his punishment is that he must receive a symbolic punishment, a metaphor for the crime he committed, which makes him reminisce about his own symbolic labor. Suspended, like the ethical realities he transgressed, he must live his entire life in the moments that he spends dying. And the tragedy, for Crèvecoeur, is not that he is reprimanded so gruesomely, but rather, that he ultimately remains still imprisoned: yet another symbol damned to his self-consciousness. Having the capacity for mortality, but not able to die, the slave's final moments represent yet another series of metonymic labors that refuse to terminate themselves.

Labor, by the logic of Crèvecoeur's American vision, is pulled in two directions that both cohere in self-consciousness and self-interest. Either self-consciousness leads to economic citizenship and personal freedom, working *for* oneself, or it imparts slavery, working *by* oneself, estranged, and masticated alive by an unforgiving, symbolic order.

## SYMPOSIUM

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# Concealed from Despair

**Rebecca Endres**

Dickinson's obsession with the afterlife and separation from others manifests itself in various ways, often bringing her to profound conclusions about her time on earth. Her pensive "I cannot live with You" explores the consequences of emotional commitment and death in relation to frail human bonds of love and friendship while creating a gap between herself and the reader. By forming distance between herself and the strife of living and dying, she draws attention to her own absence from the poem, emancipating herself from its physical restrictions and speaking from a detached place within her own mind.

The first few stanzas of "I cannot live with You" (see Appendix) immediately ensure that Dickinson does not get too close to the person she is writing about. Her diction is full of words like "over there," "[b]roke," "crack," and "frost," which all create a cool, unwelcoming mood (Dickinson ll. 3, 10, 12, 19). Even when she discusses a new "Sevres," the word comes across as "sever" due to her previous word choice (l. 11). Her use of such an obscure word to describe a piece of china assures the reader that her lexicon is carefully selected. The first five stanzas continue with words such as "[d]iscarded," "die," and "shut," keeping the reader aware of the space Dickinson is giving herself from her audience (ll. 9, 13, 15). This vocabulary, which ceases for the most part after the first five stanzas, coincides with her discussion of life with her lover in a domestic setting. It is at the same time that her diction cuts her off from the reader that she explores "Life" with the one she



cannot commit to (l. 3). In this way, even while imagining life alongside that person, she keeps it “over there,” describing it in a lengthy, abstract metaphor rather than actually giving much thought to her potential happiness with her companion; it is as though her words dictate her thought process (l. 3).

She continues to distance herself from the reader by use of syntax as the poem progresses. Dickinson uses dashes to sever her ideas, making it hard for the reader to follow. In the third stanza, she discusses how her time on earth with the addressed friend would be like a piece of china:

Discarded of the Housewife—  
Quaint—or Broke—  
A newer Sevres pleases—  
Old ones crack—(ll. 9-12)

Not a single line in the stanza goes without a dash or unnatural pause obstructing the flow as the eye moves across the page. It seems as if Dickinson is attempting to tear it away. Like the diction she employs in the poem, a majority of these dashes occur in the first third of the poem where she discusses her estranged life, and the consequences of living it with another person. Her fourth and fifth stanzas both use five dashes, but once she introduces the afterlife and the possibility of heaven and meeting Jesus, Dickinson seems to calm herself for a moment and spends more time contemplating and less time denying:

Nor could I rise—with You—  
Because Your Face  
Would put out Jesus’—  
That new Grace...(ll. 21-24)

The only unnatural pause comes with the mention of the addressed friend, breaking him or her apart from the otherwise uninterrupted flow of thought about seeing

Christ. This pattern of broken and unbroken reflections suggest that she is cleaving these ideas apart before she can even begin to explore them, as she does in the first few stanzas, adding dashes to every few words as though afraid to elaborate on them. Even after the use of these dashes becomes less frantic, Dickinson continues to rely on them to convey her concerns, as if thoughts about living with the companion are enough to disrupt her normal cognitive process, especially whenever the friend is directly addressed. Moreover, although the flow becomes a bit more regular as she goes on, denial continues to resound, and her initial statement remains firm.

While the style with which she delivers her ideas is reflective of her sentiments, she leaves some statements open-ended. The life that she spends most of the poem analyzing is the one she would live if she opened up her heart to another person. That life, she claims, “is over there/Behind the Shelf/The Sexton keeps the Key to” (ll. 3-5). This metaphor is not one of comfort and companionship. The joy one would expect her to discuss is absent. Instead, this potential life sounds like a sort of prison or chest, something locked that she does not possess the key to. That the sexton keeps the key implies that her own life and happiness are out of her control, while the image of life being over on a shelf makes it seem that it is not something readily attainable—unless Dickinson herself has decided to place it out of her sight. This stanza takes an ironic twist; while the sexton has the key to her life, the reader must remember that she is not actually choosing life. Although submitting to her lover would mean handing control over to another, she instead

decides to suspend herself above her own life, looking down on the holder of the key and answering to no one.

The lack of clarity is resolved to some extent as she elaborates on this metaphor in the second and third stanza. Not only is life an item locked away on a shelf, but it is:

Like a cup—

Discarded of the Housewife—  
Quaint—or Broke—  
A newer Sevres pleases—  
Old ones crack—(ll. 8-12)

With the use of a housewife, Dickinson displays her vision of living with someone, presumably as someone's wife in a domestic setting. But the fact that life is thrown away by the housewife leads the reader to question if this means that a wife casts aside her way of living when she becomes bound to her husband. Dickinson is characteristically vague with her portrayal, but her clear image of life as something discarded, possibly broken, and certainly replaceable gives a description of an unfulfilled future with someone else, and this life is centered around the house, as the imagery of china on shelves and housewives clarifies.

For the reader, the content and format of "I cannot live with You" seem to visually break the poem into pieces, giving Dickinson the space that she desires from the addressed subject of the poem. The reason she creates this distance seems to be out of fear. As she demonstrates from the fourth stanza on, life with a loved one inevitably leads to the bitter separation of death. "Could I stand by," Dickinson asks, "and see You—freeze—" clearly, she cannot think of life with her companion without thinking of the end (ll. 17-18). Furthermore, the poem goes on to describe

Heaven as a permanent estrangement from her lover. Upon seeing Jesus Christ, she claims that her loved one's face would make "That New Grace/Grow plain—and foreign/On my homesick Eye" (ll. 24-26). To proclaim that she would be homesick in her eternal afterlife makes clear that happiness on earth would be dashed out by all-consuming death. Separation from her companion on earth would cause a despair that would outweigh the joy of her brief time with that person in life. For once, she dissolves any ambiguity in her words in stanza nine, when she describes her preference for her lover over such "sordid excellence/As Paradise" (ll. 35-36).

Paradise is actually the better of several possibilities. The poem goes on to imagine even worse forms of separation, suggesting that if her lover failed to reach heaven, she too would be lost although her own name "Rang loudest/On the Heavenly fame," and that the punishments of hell would be nothing to her compared to the pain of being "condemned to be/Where You were not" (ll. 39-40; 42-43). In many ways, by the end of the poem, Dickinson resorts to expounding on every "what-if" there is; her preoccupation switches from life to multiple possibilities of what she might encounter after death. These actual postulations are not keeping her from being with her friend, but her paranoia and inability to risk the instances she fears coming true prevent her commitment.

The amount of time she takes to consider all these calamities and the fact that she never actually mentions the happiness she might receive from friendship suggest that there might be a level of enjoyment experienced from her vantage point. The result of Dickinson's estrangement is the creation of a place where she can exist alone and transcend both life and death. This somewhat masochistic role

she assumes also grants her absolute control, because she can deny not only her friend, but all implications that come with existence with that person. Writing her poem from a sort of imagined vacuum, she is not susceptible to the pain of loss, the afterlife, or the futile struggle against time. Instead, she occupies a negative space, safe because she is juxtaposed to all the unpleasant experiences she describes without ever crossing into them. She addresses her companion in the afterlife, bemoaning the horror of being “[w]here You were not,” without ever specifying where she is (ll. 43). In this way, she staves off thoughts of partnership and focuses on the melancholy and “that White sustenance/Despair” (ll. 49-50). She describes this “[w]hite sustenance” in relation to her location:

So We must meet apart—  
 You there—I—here—  
 With just the door ajar  
 That oceans are—(ll. 45-48)

Still, there is nothing tangible about the location she occupies, but the image of white on an ocean suggests sea foam which covers shores, but which cannot actually sink into the ocean’s depths. Dickinson paints this imagery to convey the way she observes various aspects of human existence without committing to or delving into any of them. Furthermore, sea foam is a substance that is not entirely liquid or solid, a concept analogous to her location apart from her lover, but in no discernible location. Like the foam, she exists in a sort of in-between, conscious of mortality yet apart from it at the same time.

Dickinson does not simply create a parallel to the metaphorical sea foam with her indeterminate nature; the fact that she refers to it as sustenance suggests that this despair is something she feeds off of and needs. That the poem is

uncharacteristically long supports the notion that she savors her estrangement in some way. While most of her poems are between three and five stanzas, "I cannot live with You" is a full twelve stanzas and fifty lines long, giving the impression that the void she creates for herself is also keeping her going.

It takes fifty lines for Dickinson to restate what she claims in the first line of her poem, and the reader is able to glimpse some of her psychology in both the linguistic choices she makes and the things she leaves unsaid. From the negative space where she resides, she is able to transcend all that she touches upon throughout the poem, and in this way she takes control by means of her own self-denial. The result is safety and a sort of immortality as she avoids all of the sorrows that she illustrates for the reader.

# Appendix: I cannot live with You

## Emily Dickenson

I cannot live with You –  
It would be Life –  
And Life is over there –  
Behind the Shelf 4

The Sexton keeps the Key to –  
Putting up  
Our Life – His Porcelain –  
Like a Cup – 8

Discarded of the Housewife –  
Quaint – or Broke –  
A newer Sevres pleases –  
Old Ones crack – 12

I could not die – with You –  
For One must wait  
To shut the Other's Gaze down –  
You – could not – 16

And I – could I stand by  
And see You – freeze –  
Without my Right of Frost –  
Death's privilege? 20

Nor could I rise – with You –  
Because Your Face  
Would put out Jesus' –  
That New Grace 24

Glow plain – and foreign  
On my homesick Eye –  
Except that You than He  
Shone closer by – 28

They'd judge Us – How –  
For You – served Heaven – You know,  
Or sought to –  
I could not – 32

Because You saturated Sight –  
And I had no more Eyes  
For sordid excellence  
As Paradise 36

And were You lost, I would be –  
Though My Name  
Rang loudest  
On the Heavenly fame – 40

And were You – saved –  
And I – condemned to be  
Where You were not –  
That self – were Hell to Me – 44

So We must meet apart –  
You there – I – here –  
With just the Door ajar  
That Oceans are – and Prayer –  
And that White Sustenance –  
Despair – 50



# Creating a System Without the Letter "t" Please don't kill me.

Jason Wesson

Before you read any further, let me tell you a little about my essay which was my final project in a seminar called *To Infinity and Beyond*. It was the answer to my professor's challenge to write a paper using words without a certain letter (e.g. writing a paper without words containing the letter 't'). So I took it upon myself to accept my professor's challenge, but with a twist. Instead of choosing words that did not use the letter 't', I eliminated the letter 't' wherever it would normally occur while maintaining the essay's coherence. The subject of my paper hopefully reflects its process: the ability to create an imperfect system that functions just as well as a perfect system. Enjoy!

In Jorge Luis Borges' short story "The Library of Babel" the universe is built within an infinite number of hexagon-shaped cells connected to each other, and in each cell there are "twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, covering all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeds that of a normal bookcase" (78). The universe is so vast and seemingly endless that there is a book for every combination of letters that can be imagined. In fact, in the story's universe, there are approximately  $10^{33,013,740}$  different ways the books can be arranged. This means that there would be a copy of his essay in the Library of Babel that might not

include he leer “e”—or even worse, *would* include he leer “. he poin is his: even wihou he leer “ in his essay, i is sill undersandable once he mind is adjused o his slightly modified language. Even if his isn’ an original copy of he essay, all of he informaion is sill here, and he knowledge isn’ los. he nex question is: how can his be applied o formal sysems, machines and oher hings?

Before answering his question, here is anoter issue ha was brough up in my previous essay “Description and houghs”, where I expressed an impornance in beginning he building of real Arificial Inelligence wih he base being a focus on descriptions. I believe ha in order o build a machine ha can feel emoions or creae something beauiful, i needs a srong daabase revolved around collecng descriptions. “Descriptions” include he perception of he physical world, as well as deails in sounds and ouch. Although here are many issues wih accomplishing jus he mechanical pars of his “machine”, he problem ha a colleague brough up o me was: here are muple ways o perceive and collec descriptions, how does he machine know wheher i has he righ deails? o pu i simply, he machine doesn’ know. I hink ha a rue “Arificially Inelligen” machine doesn’ need o have *all* perspecives in is daabase; because where’s he individualiy in a machine if all machines hold the same informaion? By only collecng descriptions from is own poin of view, i’ll be able o build emoions or opinions ha aren’ necessarily perfec or complely buil on reasoning. (Maybe his is a dangerous idea o place ino a machine, bu I’m only jus beginning o creae my heory.)

Even if i did collec descriptions from personal perception, if i were o collec enough daa on ideas or objecs or even pars of a book i has read, hen external minds should be able o undersand wha i is rying o “recall” (for he mos par). Like he Rosea

Sone, when i was found people worked on ranslaing i wihou ever having any knowledge of wha i was abou beforehand. Maybe some areas of he slab were broken or worn off, bu in he end, researchers were able o undersand is meaning and purpose. So why can' a machine be able o do he same when rying o describe something wih is own sores daa? Is a lo like playing a game of Picionary or Charades, where maybe i can' use cerain words, because i doesn' have hose words associaed wih wha i has sores abou he subjec. Hopefully, i becomes undersandable by others wih wha i sores in iself (I wan o say ha if i doesn' become undersandable hen i only needs more descriptions, bu I hink ha's a cop ou, so I won'). Wha is rying o ge a is ha a machine doesn' need o have sores all possible descriptions of a memory, an objec or wha a person has said, jus like his essay doesn' need all of he leers presen in order for i o be undersood.

Using his idea, Arificial Inelligence can be achieved – or a leas i's a sar. he difficulty wih depending on compuer science o creae such a machine is ha he lowes level of compuers resric he possibiliy of any real sor of inelligence. In the lowes level of the human srucure, here is a vas number of neurons hroughou he body ha work ogeher o creae a functioning person. Bu wihin human beings, here is some *oher* componen ha isn' neurons ha makes humans *human*. In oher words, i isn' jus neurons ha make us able o build our own houghs or plan our own acions, jus as here won' be any way for simple circuis and physical pars o make an Inelligen machine wihou some oher componens. Insead of only using 1's and 0's, here need o be 2's and 3's and all oher numbers included. No lierally, of course. If i becomes impossible o make a cerain 1 go nex o a cerain 0 because of Gödel's Incompleteness heorem, hen

here needs to be the next best thing, which just so happens to only miss an important piece, like the leer “.

This can be connected to a Dialogue piece in Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* in which there is a challenge between a talking oriole and a crab. The crab is trying to prove that he can obtain the perfect phonograph that would be able to play any record vinyl. The oriole would then try to create a record that could not be played on the phonograph, as the vibrations of the record's grooves would destroy the phonograph the moment it is played. In the end, the crab has to realize that there is no way to create the perfect phonograph, so he succumbs to the next best thing: a slightly low-fi phonograph, though its function and purpose serves just as well as the perfect one (minus maybe a few things only the perfect phonograph can play) (75-78). As long as the gap between the perfect Artificially Intelligent machine and the next best machine isn't that big, or that the missing component isn't completely essential, then where is the problem in a machine that's only missing a few pieces?

I know it is easier said than done, but think about how imperfect human beings can be. DNA is so fragile and malleable that it can change a person from having blue eyes to brown eyes; it can even determine whether you're male or female. And yet, intelligence can still be achieved. Helen Keller couldn't hear, speak or see and yet she could communicate and create thoughts of her own. Of course, the problem with Artificial Intelligence is many, especially when trying to imitate something like intelligence into a machine. But here's going to be a machine in Borges' "Library" that can be just as valuable as the real thing, right? Look at his essay: even though the leer “ is missing, the information gets sent across just as well as if another leer had been replaced. It does make some going

used o in he beginning, bu i's also he fac ha his essay is *missing* somehing ha allows i o have even more meaning han if i were perfec. A machine ha is buil up unil he poin ha i reaches Gödel's Incompleness heorem – implying ha here will never be a way o obain rue Arificial Inelligence -- may no be able o compose beauiful music or maybe fall in love, here could sill be oher sides of i ha could accomplish somehing ha is human-like. Perhaps a machine could be augh o have “dreams”, where i lierally goes hrough all of he daa i has recorded hroughou he day; or maybe i can learn o save lives by recognizing someone who's life is in danger. Maybe none of hese resemble acual “inelligence”, bu here's somehing else ha can be derived by a machine ha chooses o save a life if i can, and I hink ha's more significan han creaing somehing ha can creae beauiful music.

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# The American Mania for Reform

Jennifer Lin

The sway which religion continues to have for Americans today draws its roots from the Protestantism that not only flourished, but permeated every aspect of life during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following the War of 1812, the United States emerged with renewed vigor and a desire to create a distinct culture – leading to an “American Renaissance.”<sup>1</sup> This cultural gold mine included uniquely American writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, Child, and Fuller<sup>2</sup> while coinciding historically with the Second Great Awakening. Religion’s importance in the lives of Americans expanded as new ideas about the gospel spread even faster with the advent of technological innovations such as the Erie Canal. Although a myriad of flavors existed within American Protestantism during this period, most were either pre-millennial or post-millennial. This important demarcation then nurtured a “mania for reform” with movements as diverse as temperance and sexual abstinence springing up, the latter of which was articulated by Sylvester Graham in *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, a publication that symbolized the importance of individual self-improvement to the reform movement.

Pre-millennialism and post-millennialism differed most significantly in their interpretation of when the Second Coming of Christ would occur, but sects from

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2007) 613.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 618, 629.

both religions believed in the importance of reform. Christians defined the “millennium” as the time when Christ would return and there would be a “blessed thousand-year epoch” in a “messianic age of peace” free of Satan’s evil temptations.<sup>3</sup> Post-millennials disagreed with pre-millennials about whether or not this event was predetermined. Constituting a sharp break from their Puritan and Calvinist predecessors, the many branches of post-millennialism became incredibly popular among the audiences which took part in the Second Great Awakening.<sup>4</sup> The massive appeal of post-millennials was closely correlated with their philosophy that any good Christian who actively worked towards the coming of the millennium was also working towards his or her salvation because Christ’s return to Earth was not predestined. Therefore, many of the reform movements of this time were designed to purge mankind of its many sins. These reform movements ranged from trying to solve the national problem of alcohol abuse via the temperance movement to ensuring a strong moral education for children via a public school system.

Pre-millennialism, on the other hand, believed that Christ’s Second Coming was a predetermined event exclusively open to “divine intervention for deliverance;”<sup>5</sup> but despite this, its adherents also participated in the mania for reform. Their reform work came mainly in the form of missionaries, who worked to remedy such woes as the lack of weekly church attendees and pagan American Indians who still inhabited the American frontier. For example, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, popularly known as the Mormons “did not passively

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>4</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 286.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 285.

await Christ's millennial kingdom but worked to prepare for it."<sup>6</sup> Their prophet, Joseph Smith, often sent missionaries from his faith into neighboring territories "to convert the Indians there as part of his plan to create a Mormon haven."<sup>7</sup> In addition to his concern about the salvation of the Indians' souls, the Mormon prophet also dictated a biblical code which recommended abstinence from a variety of foods and beverages that corrupted the mind and body, including hot tea and coffee, meat, poultry, tobacco, and wine.<sup>8</sup>

This type of moral compulsion to be faithful was commonplace during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where both pre-millennialism and post-millennialism preached that religion had a duty not only to ensure that good Christians did not sin, but also to help reform the wayward and less fortunate. This moral imperative was most clearly explained by the Baptist preacher Francis Wayland who eventually went on to serve as president of Brown University. He argued that "American citizens had the duty to promote the 'means for elevating universally the intellectual and moral character of our people.'"<sup>9</sup> There was a general consensus among the religiously minded that it was not enough for the good Christian to attend church on Sundays and live by a strong moral code himself, but that it was also his responsibility to help his fellow American abide by similar behaviors. This moral principle was grounded in the newfound belief that society could be rid of its most serious ills, and to do so would constitute Christian charity. Post-millennials believed that promoting reform movements – whether for temperance,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>8</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 317.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 288.



vegetarianism, or frugality – would help encourage more moral behaviors for the rest of society and so would in turn hasten the arrival of the blessed millennium. Pre-millennials believed that they had a sacred responsibility to help others worship God properly.

These religiously founded moral obligations to remedy society (subscribed to by mainly upper class reformers) spread rapidly due to the communication and transportation revolutions, and the increasing literacy rates for the average American. During the early of days of the American republic, religion and education went hand in hand: churches often taught basic reading and writing skills during their Sunday school classes. There was no public outcry about the need to separate church and state because most Americans believed that a good education included learning “moral philosophy” and that the “virtue of the citizenry” generally benefited from these lessons.<sup>10</sup> In the 1830s with the rise of the Whig Party in the American Northeast, reform movements sprang up around education and came to include numerous public schools that taught “moral qualities” including civic duties and religious tenets. The incentive for building these schools (which were accessible to any student because of funding from the state), was to educate immigrants and the new working classes in the big metropolitan centers.<sup>11</sup> Not only did churches play a huge role in reducing illiteracy throughout the United States, but religious denominations also founded many institutions of higher education, leading to an explosion in colleges during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 449-450.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 453-454.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 459-461.

Reform movements, regardless of their focus, thus were able to greatly benefit from a generally more educated and more literate populace because even nonmembers could read about their work in newspapers and magazines. Many of the organizations which sprang up to support reform movements also published pamphlets that further raised awareness about their issue to all parts of society.<sup>13</sup> This dissemination of information became all the more important to individuals who subscribed to a philosophy of constant self-improvement. While certain organizations such as Albert Brisbane's "Association" or the abolitionist movement tried to implement structural societal change, most reformers aimed to create change on a smaller scale. For example, the temperance movement relied on persuading individuals to stop drinking. This notion of individual self-reform was also important to the groups that relied on scientific authority to change people's behaviors.

One such scientifically minded reformer was a Presbyterian minister named Sylvester Graham who published *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity* in the 1830s, and preached the merits of sexual abstinence and the harms of sexual excess. He was unconventional, but incredibly popular, and his combination of "millennial preaching with advice on health" made him a well-travelled speaker and popular author in an America with a growing class of literate readers invested in self-improvement.<sup>14</sup> As an early nutritionist he was against alcohol, meat, tobacco, salted food, and "stimulating beverages like coffee."<sup>15</sup> Most notably, he endorsed an early

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 452.

<sup>14</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 629.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 472.

form of birth control by “telling men that frequent sex would debilitate them.”<sup>16</sup>

Graham preached against pre-marital sex writing that “those lascivious daydreams and amorous reveries ...are often the sources of general debility, effeminacy, disordered functions, and permanent disease and even premature death, without the actual exercise of the genital organs.”<sup>17</sup> By connecting sexual fantasies and sexual activity with painful and unpleasant consequences, he aimed to persuade those in his audience that abstinence would improve their health.

Beyond physiological concerns, Graham also argued that man, as a rational actor, should avoid succumbing to his passions because the loss of moral virtues made him no better than the other creatures on earth. He lectured that when a man “[abused] his organs and [depraved] his instinctive appetites, through the devices of his rational powers...” that he would “sink himself deeper in degeneracy below the brutes.”<sup>18</sup> This argument was grounded in the notion that man, gifted by God with the power of reason, must avoid following his passions instead.<sup>19</sup> If man followed his passionate sexual desires instead of his reason, that would be unnatural. Graham elaborated on this point when he said “the lower orders of animals have no rational and moral powers to govern the exercise of their sexual appetite... while man, who has the power and means to destroy the government of the law of instinct” would naturally suffer dire results from engaging in uncouth sexual conduct.<sup>20</sup> Sexual urges were bad precisely because they stripped man of his ability to think rationally and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 472.

<sup>17</sup> Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, (Boston: George W. Light, Cornhill Pub., 1838) 59.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>20</sup> Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, 37-38.

severely compromised his morality and status as a good Christian. To this end, Graham even advocated for chastity within married couples in order to “exceedingly diminish” the effects of health risks such as general weakness, disease, and premature death.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to advocating for total abstinence, Graham believed that certain types of foods increased sexual urges and therefore increased the likelihood of suffering from the same types of ills. He also wrote *A Treatise on Bread and Bread-making* the year prior to *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, where he outlined his recipe for making bread from wheat, rye, and other natural ingredients instead of white flour which he considered too ostentatious and unhealthy. Graham’s legacy is actually in his “famous Graham cracker” with which he promoted “coarse grained flour” because “finely ground [white] flour” was too expensive.<sup>22</sup> In addition to endorsing brown bread over white bread, he believed that “flesh-meat, high-seasoned food, richly prepared dishes... tea, coffee, and wine” would emasculate young men while also further increasing sexual urges. Therefore, he was one of the first vegetarians in American history as well as one of the first advocates of coarse wheat bread over fluffy white bread. (He also disliked caffeine and alcohol.) Graham prescribed a similar diet to cure the chief culprit of all morally compromising sexual behaviors – masturbation by young adolescent males. He also believed that late dinners and milk would compromise recovery from the “night emissions” that plagued young men all across America.<sup>23</sup> Sexual abstinence was best accompanied

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>22</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 472.

<sup>23</sup> Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, 146-147.

by strict dietary measures in order to ensure a healthy life where man did not need to fear that his “intellectual and moral nature” would become “subordinate to his animal nature.”<sup>24</sup>

The messages of Sylvester Graham’s *Lecture to Young Men on Chastity* were predicated on the idea of self-improvement and the individual working towards bettering himself for his own moral development. The individual had to actively choose to follow Graham’s directives about a diet free of luxurious and rich foods, alcohol, and stimulating beverages, and abstinence from sex in order to live a morally sound life. This was representative of the importance that self-improvement had in the overall “reform mania” that gripped American society during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whether the religious motivations behind these movements were pre-millennial or post-millennial, the focus was almost always on changing the actions of an individual and then leveraging the reform of that one man to help spread good moral behavior to others around him. Finally, this general spirit for self-improvement was strongly tied to a desire to read more in order to gain more knowledge and better oneself mentally and morally. The Bible, religious books, and educational books were among the most popular sales at a New York City bookstore in 1840.<sup>25</sup> The strong connections between the increased literacy rate, religion, and the many reform movements of early 19<sup>th</sup> century America are thus quite clear. A desire to better oneself reached a great height during this time period because of the combination of religion in the form of many different strains of Protestantism, reform movements, and more access to education.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>25</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 629.

# On How to Take a Picture in Europe

**Alex Diana**

Last January I departed for a four-month journey to Florence, Italy to study art. Along with extra socks, I stuffed my suitcase to the brim with lofty goals and expectations about the places I would visit and the work I would accomplish. At first, I had the grandiose sense of duty as an American student to embark on this Grand Tour (a pilgrimage to Southern Europe) for the purpose of “culturing” myself – an idea that has its origins in the sixteenth century. I also couldn’t help but think about the famous artists and literati of the twentieth century who flocked to the bohemian coffee shops of Europe – Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein to name a few. I also thought of Jim Morrison. I knew that the atmosphere would be filled with new ideas and forms – an exciting and impressionable place and time for artists of every kind

When I arrived in Florence, I was positively floored by the winding alleys and narrow sidewalks littered with bicycles, and the picturesque doors adorned with floral wreaths. I caught what Jacopo Santini, one of my photography professors, jokingly coined as the “Pretty Door Syndrome:” too many photographs of rusted, chipped doors and shutters painted with a hue as green as the Tuscan cypress. Professor Santini often coaxed us students away from taking snapshots of famous monuments and buildings that one would typically see in a slide show of an old uncle’s trip to Europe. He often repeated this piece of advice that has stuck with me

and has irrevocably influenced my work as a photographer and artist: “An image of a beautiful thing does not necessarily make for a beautiful photograph”. That was the kicker about making work in Europe: it became a learning game to think like the Florentines, who having been raised in the city of Dante Alighieri were perhaps not quite as awestruck as I was walking past the Duomo every day.

I came with such ambitious intentions, but it was at times a bit daunting to consider the ways of creating work that reinvents the term “beautiful” in a city that utterly embodies the most romantic sense of that word. I thought of my professors at my Italian Institution, and how they had spent their entire lives trying to make work that fits into the contemporary age despite being confronted with 500 years of Classical genius every day. I imagined how stifling it must have been at times.



*Montmartre Performer, Paris, 2013*

The way I managed to overcome this stage fright of sorts was to shoot with reckless abandon. I had two cameras with me most of the time, a DSLR, and a 35mm Film camera. With these trustworthy cameras, I took to the streets. In order to shoot as a street photographer does, I had to look with a certain pair of eyes.

Understanding the limitations of what my cameras were able to record, I had to visually organize the information I had processed on a busy street where minute details such as a passing car, a racing cloud, or a gust of wind had the ability to

completely change an image for better or for worse. When I captured *Montmartre Performer*, I was standing on the steps of Sacré Coeur surrounded by a large crowd of people who were observing the street performer juggling a soccer ball. I framed my composition in such a way as to ensure there were no other figures other than the performer in the image. In two earlier frames I even managed to capture the juggler with his soccer ball frozen in mid-air. But I decided upon this image where the man is doing a headstand because of the way in which the man's legs are suspended in midair creating a surprising, somewhat surreal moment. I thought of Henri Cartier Bresson, famous 20<sup>th</sup> century photographer, who coined the phrase "the decisive moment".

Though I had taken many of these shots with various assignments and conceptual undertones in mind, it wasn't until I had returned home and had sifted through my amassed collection of negatives that I came to better understand my work. Human absence and presence had played a fundamental role in my images. I was interested in capturing fragmentary traces of life. There was something very psychological about these photos. When I photographed *Glove*, I was arrested by the way in which the surrounding geometrical elements of the adjacent pole, and the winding street pavers seemed to nestle so perfectly around this forlorn article of clothing. It made me wonder



*Glove*, Paris, 2013



if this glove had truly been cast off by chance. In another picture, *Viareggio*, there is a shirt laid out to dry; it seems as if it is clutching the grates of the balcony with a gesture of resignation.



*Viareggio, 2013*

When humans are present in the works they are usually obstructed by another surface. In *Monteriggioni*, I managed to catch passing strangers' shadows that stretched along the ancient slabs. The absence of these shadows' human counterparts transforms the silhouettes into Inferno like phantoms that seem to be attempting to scale the city walls for escape.



*Monteriggioni, 2013*

Even though I was compelled to capture the illusion of city streets that were relatively empty of people, human figures managed to find their way into my images in surprising ways. I took *Le Coiffeur* as I passed by a Parisian barber shop. I was initially interested in catching the shadowy figures inside the shop, and wanted to juxtapose these figures with the reflection from the outside street. However, once the good-humored barber caught wind of the camera in my hand, he immediately posed into a dramatic arabesque.



*Le Coiffeur, Paris, 2013*

One of the most valuable lessons I learned while on my journey in Europe was that one must always be willing to adapt in order to experience the new and exciting. This is true not only for the adventurous traveler but also for the photographer. I worked hard to define a cohesive aesthetic within my work given the constraints of an environment that had been captured by countless photographers around the world. What I discovered is that there is always room for

the element of chance to emerge, despite the amount of control one thinks he or she has over an environment or situation. Often, unpredictable moments such as these make for the most compelling of moments.

# Contrived Conventions: Laws as Unnatural Constructs

Alexa Savino

Both Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* criticize laws and legal systems for being "unnatural": the distance that comes between nature and law is responsible for the improper execution of such laws. Laws impose artificial constructs, determined by authorities external to the individual, on individuals, and, in doing so, they actually contradict nature itself. Swift and Defoe employ different means of communicating this notion, however, with the latter satirically highlighting the absurdity of legal constructs, while the former speaks through a character consistently living in defiance of the system.

John Locke defined life, liberty, and property as the natural rights to which every individual is entitled at birth, rights not to be compromised by any government authority. Swift demonstrates that laws actually enable the violation or breakdown of the natural rights that they were written to protect. For instance, Gulliver provides the Houyhnhnms with a disappointing portrayal of the English justice system: "[If] my neighbour has a mind to my cow, he has a lawyer to prove that he ought to have my cow from me. I must then hire another to defend my right... Now, in this case, I, who am the right owner, lie under...great disadvantages" (Swift 229). To whom does the cow originally and naturally belong? A simple question thus becomes convoluted when filtered through the legal process. Gulliver

suggests that written law has the ability to *transcend* natural ownership: the “right” owner can be deprived of his property by an unnatural means of circumventing, or reinventing, certain truths. In this scenario, Gulliver is careful to note that his neighbor merely “has a mind to” property that does not belong to him. Laws leave enough room for “desire on a whim” to potentially eclipse inherent entitlement.

In the courtroom depicted by Gulliver, arguments of random, self-interested parties can triumph over one’s own natural claims to property. Though this remark might be hyperbolic, it achieves the intended purpose of exposing the absurd artificiality with which justice is approached: laws can be interpreted in such a way that they cast a superficial veil over rational conceptions of “right and wrong.” Thus, interpretation can be employed for utilitarian purposes that run counter to the defense of natural rights. Not only is one’s legitimate, material property often confiscated by law, but one’s implicit right to claim his *own* possessions is also wrested from him in the process. Therefore, the question arises of what is being said about the actual function of law, as used and interpreted by society? From Swift’s perspective, the law exists as a tool for manipulating and rearranging the parameters of natural right, often assisting the pursuits of the unjust.

Gulliver also criticizes the superficiality of legal representation. Since “it [is] against all rules of law that any man should be allowed to speak for himself” (230), self-representation carries no weight in court. Aren’t one’s own voice and perspective the most authentic representations of his identity? Isn’t “speaking for oneself” an implicit natural right? In injecting themselves into the process, lawyers engage in a form of ventriloquism that separates a client from his own case. This

disconnect drives a wedge between an individual and his cause, through the presence of an “unnatural” intermediary. Therefore, Swift suggests that legal customs deprive individuals of their natural right to publicly define, represent, and defend their own interests in their own words.

For Swift, legal language is yet another artificial construct through which natural right becomes unclear. Because of this lack of clarity, wording can be craftily manipulated, allowing for rampant exploitation of both the justice system and other individuals. Gulliver regrets that empirical facts and evidence are lost in a “peculiar Cant and Jargon,” which “[confounds] the very Essence of Truth and Falsehood, of Right and Wrong” (230). From his perspective, this jargon complicates the simple principle of justice, and muddies the waters of “natural right.” The artificiality of legal language is the true source of the justice system’s complications because it is an external transcription of “man-made” justice. It is too far removed from natural reason. Gulliver’s semi-facetious example illustrates this dilemma perfectly: “it will take Thirty Years to decide whether the Field, left me by my Ancestors for six Generations, belongs to me or to a Stranger three hundred Miles off” (230). By referencing “a stranger three hundred Miles off,” Swift yet again employs exaggeration as a technique for exposing a severe flaw.

Law is the wedge between nature and reason that puts distance between an individual and his rights. In Gulliver’s example, it creates an artificial distance between a rightful “inheritor” and his family. Rights to inheritance that *should* be plainly evident and naturally decided become questionable when translated into legal language. Gulliver implies that laws institutionalize ambiguity to make facts

more flexible and unclear. Society must consult phraseology invented by a certain class of educated men, rather than a natural, inherent sense of righteousness, to verify what might be dictated more plainly by common sense; such wording, with its twists and turns, marks a departure from the simplicity that should clearly delineate property ownership. Thus, natural rights are trampled by linguistic technicalities that are artificially imposed on society.

Defoe creates a similar picture for readers. In Roxana's world, family and property law draw extraneous legal lines that circumvent natural rights. They impose artificial conditions on familial relations, individual identity, and property circulation, suggesting that society does not accept natural rights as sufficient determinants of what an individual can or cannot do. In this way, society subordinates natural entitlements to unnatural conventions. For instance, through Roxana's conversation with the Dutch Merchant, readers learn that "marriage was...for establishing a legal posterity, that there could be no legal claim of estates by inheritance but by children born in wedlock, that all the rest was sunk under scandal and illegitimacy" (161). Property law predicates eligibility for ownership on an external symbol—the social custom, and legal institution, of marriage. Because of laws, the simple truths of nature are not enough: being a natural, biological member of a certain family line does not sufficiently justify one's receipt of family property.

Does this not undermine the nature of familial relationships themselves by subjugating them to matters of contrived legality? This alludes to a greater implication of marriage as an artificial social construct: it is necessary for validating one's identity and familial connections to the external world. One must be

acknowledged as a product of a legitimate union, lest his entire identity be called into question. Since descendants rely on tangible documentation to verify their socioeconomic legitimacy, they are dependent on society's "confirmation" of their "lawful" existence. Does this not suggest that one is not truly *born* with rights, but must first justify oneself to the public before effectively exercising them? Such is the burden of the external world's legal demands: individuals cannot lay claim to anything, including themselves, without the personal validation of some legal infrastructure.

Roxana also alludes to this dilemma when discussing the fate of her son: "My boy, the only son I had left that I had a legal right to call son, was...rescued from the unhappy circumstances of being apprentice to a mechanic" (197). One's biological child, one's own natural kin, is not one's child by law if the child was not a "product" of two individuals legally united, and publicly recognized, through marriage. Roxana is thus deprived of her natural right to be acknowledged as the biological mother of her son. Roxana's son is likewise deprived of his natural right to be considered her son; with this comes his relegation to a low social position, since he is determined to be illegitimate. The child's identity, and consequently his future, is entirely dependent upon whether or not he is recognized by law. He experiences a virtual social "depreciation" if not authenticated by legal conventions. Thus, Defoe implies that laws are endowed with the ability to divide blood from blood, defying both nature and the natural familial relationships that arise from it.

In highlighting the seemingly "unnatural nature" of legal systems, Swift and Defoe call into question society's method of implementing justice and maintaining



order. The artificiality of law conceals inherent interpretations of justice beneath an artificial veneer; natural right is no longer clear and transparent, because nature, including one's natural conceptions of his environment and his relationships, are blurred by constructs existing *apart from* these basic truths of the real world. If laws do not incorporate that which they endeavor to protect, how can society avoid the pitfalls of becoming too distant from natural realities?

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# Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice

**Jaskirat Singh**

Discussions on global justice generally possess two elements – a philosophical and ethical justification for why global justice is worth striving towards, and the negotiation (or impossibility thereof) of state sovereignty and sovereignty beyond the state. The concept of sovereignty is vital in discussions on global justice because it determines accountability. Justice and accountability depend on one another because without accountability, justice merely amounts to moral aspirations. In other words, there must be a moral agent held accountable whenever justice is lacking, or an active injustice is the result. Whether one possesses a cosmopolitan or particularistic outlook also colors his or her perception of global justice. In my view, cosmopolitanism possesses more compelling philosophical and ethical arguments in favor of global justice, but it has difficulty remaining plausible when confronted with a global political structure that is still highly state-centric. Nevertheless, there is hope for cosmopolitanism on a practical level. Martha Nussbaum, Robert E. Goodin, and Thomas Pogge all make compelling arguments in favor of a cosmopolitan perception of global justice.

In “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” Martha Nussbaum argues in favor of “the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings” (306). The alternative to cosmopolitanism, patriotism, is “morally dangerous” according to Nussbaum (306). One of the major selling points of patriotism is that it unifies people under a common national or patriotic identity, e.g. Americans as

American, Japanese as Japanese, Puerto Ricans as Puerto Rican, and so on. By doing so, Nussbaum astutely questions “then what, indeed, will stop that person from saying [...] I am a Hindu first, and an Indian second, or I am an upper-caste landlord first, and a Hindu second” (307)? Essentially, she contends that one’s self-identity should be as a member of a collective humanity first, *then*, as a member of various religious or local groups. Otherwise, a “politics of difference, one based on internal divisions among [...] ethnic, racial, religious, and other subgroups” is created (307). Nussbaum does not discount these very real and substantial subgroups; however, she values “humanness” as a fundamental starting point from which an equality amongst people is created. Hence, the more morally relevant identity, according to Nussbaum, is primarily as a human being. Our identities should be thought of as “a series of concentric circles [...] and [we should] give the circle that defines our humanity special attention and respect” (309). This is a fundamental concept for cosmopolitanism as a whole because it does not trivialize an individual’s various identities; instead, it establishes a fundamental moral equality. In summation, Nussbaum provides an agreeable and convincing ethical and philosophical justification for cosmopolitanism and the fundamental moral equality of all beings.

Nussbaum propagates the concept of a cosmopolitan education, citing that rejecting it runs the “risk [of] assuming that the options familiar to us are the only ones there are, and that they are somehow ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ for all humans” (311). Understanding different cultures and perspectives is critical for solving international problems that require global cooperation. On a practical level, Nussbaum is correct in pointing out that there are global problems that require

international cooperation, for example, issues regarding ecology and the global food supply. What she does not discuss, however, is how to mitigate the issue of state sovereignty with the necessity of international cooperation. This was not Nussbaum's primary focus in the text; nevertheless, cosmopolitanism as a whole has difficulty resolving this issue.

In "What is so Special about our Fellow Countrymen?" Robert E. Goodin provides a compelling explanation of how and why citizens of the same state are given special or different treatment from non-citizens. Ultimately, Goodin believes this situation is not due to a moral imperative, but rather the consequence of pragmatic necessity. He says, "[t]here are some 'general duties' that we have toward other people, merely because they are people. Over and above those, there are some 'special duties' that we have toward particular individuals because they stand in some special relation to us" (263). Goodin and Nussbaum agree that a fundamental moral equality should exist between human beings and that "special ties" between individuals need not be ignored or trivialized.

Goodin addresses the notion that co-citizens owe especially "good" treatment to one another (265). He cites numerous examples wherein foreigners are treated better than co-citizens to illustrate that the standard model of special duties toward co-citizens is neither wholly good, nor wholly bad, but mixed. Rejecting the magnifier, multiplier, and mutual-benefit models, Goodin points to the assigned responsibility model which designates special duties as "distributed general duties" (272). This is significant because it implies that special duties "are susceptible to being overridden [...] by those more general considerations" (272-273). In other

words, general duties to all can supersede special duties to some because the duties are derived from the same fundamental moral principle – they only differ in their distribution. Goodin uses an example of drowning swimmer at the beach to illustrate his point. If one person is in the vicinity of the drowning swimmer, then he has an obligation to help that person. If numerous people see someone drowning, somebody must be designated to save the swimmer otherwise chaos would ensue. According to Goodin, “[n]ational boundaries [...] perform much the same function [...] National boundaries simply visit upon those particular state agents special responsibility for discharging those general obligations vis-a-vis those individuals who happen to be their citizens (274).

Thus far, Goodin’s explanation of general and special duties appears sound and reasonable on a conceptual, and to some extent practical, level. Towards the end of his essay, however, Goodin makes two claims that are consistent on a conceptual level, but raise some very pressing practical problems. He proposes that special duties “should be assigned to agents capable of discharging them effectively; and that, in turn, means that sufficient resources ought to have been given to every such state agent to allow for the effective discharge of those responsibilities” (276). He goes on to say that if a state has too many people to care for and not enough resources, then a reallocation is necessary (276). On a conceptual level, Goodin makes sense. If states are merely the agents through which special duties are carried out, it is necessary for those agents to have the resources to be effective agents. On a purely realistic level, Goodin’s point is nearly unfathomable in today’s international political scene. Given that there is an uneven distribution of resources

and disproportionate populations amongst states, the logistical and political implications of redistributing resources or people would be massive and highly impractical.

Assuming such a monumental task were even possible, Goodin does not mention whether states would be willing to redistribute resources of their own accord or if some higher entity/institution would compel states to do so. Either scenario seems unlikely in the current international political context. Additionally, Goodin posits that “[i]f some states prove incapable of discharging their responsibilities effectively, then they should be reconstituted or assisted” (276). Assisting a troubled state is a perfectly sound and logical desire when that state is in need or asks for it. Yet, the idea of reconstituting a state’s government due to incompetence directly flies in the face of international norms of sovereignty and non-intervention. Granted, non-intervention has not always been followed strictly, but on what authority states would be able to “reconstitute” another state’s government is ambiguous. Ultimately, Goodin makes logical and reasonable conceptual arguments, but when he attempts to apply some of them to reality, they lose credibility and weaken his argument.

Opposed to Martha Nussbaum’s and Robert E. Goodin’s respective positions, Thomas Pogge’s argument is not only conceptually sound, but also more grounded in the contemporary international political scene. As a result, Pogge’s argument is ultimately more plausible and convincing. According to Pogge, global economic justice is important because it correlates to other, more abstract notions of global justice such as democratic governments, due process, and the rule of law (358).

Without access to a sustainable standard of living, people in poverty cannot pursue these broader political rights because survival takes precedence to politics.

Although Pogge describes moral universalism as an approach rather than a definitive outlook, he does suggest certain criteria. Moral universalism necessitates that “it subjects all persons to the same system of fundamental moral principles; [that] these principles assign the same fundamental moral benefits and burdens to all; and [that] these fundamental moral benefits and burdens are formulated in general terms so as not to privilege or disadvantage certain persons or groups arbitrarily” (359). Pogge’s description allows for idiosyncrasies to exist, but more importantly, it is ethically and morally sound on a fundamental level. Similar to Nussbaum and Goodin, it propagates the fundamental equality of all people; yet, Pogge does so in a more nuanced and accommodating manner. Pogge takes the time to acknowledge that total equality is either impossible or undesirable. Either way, his conception of moral universalism allows for some discrepancies to exist between individuals, albeit not arbitrarily.

In a way similar to Nussbaum and Goodin, Pogge addresses the arbitrariness of the distinction between the domestic and global spheres. He posits that if an unjust, domestic economic order is unacceptable, then an unjust, global economic order should also be unacceptable. In other words, “there is a discrepancy between the minimal criteria of economic justice we apply on the global and national levels. Moral universalism demands that this discrepancy be given a plausible rationale” (361). Pogge describes the moral minimums of economic justice as such: “social rules should be liable to peaceful change by any large majority of those on whom

they are imposed,” and “avoidable life-threatening poverty must be avoided” (361). Both points are fundamental and belie the sophistication of Pogge’s argument. The first moral minimum indicates that global economic injustice as it exists today is not merely an absence of justice, but the imposition of economic injustice by a minority on a majority. This is a significant departure from Nussbaum and Goodin who promote the idea of an obligation to assist. Pogge suggests that developed nations have an obligation not to impose an unjust global economic order. He calls for the respect of a negative right rather than the obligation to fulfill a positive right. The second moral minimum indicates that we have the means to eradicate life-threatening poverty. Pogge provides a statistic that if high-income states gave up 1/80th of their wealth, life-threatening poverty would be eradicated (373).

Pogge further diverges from Nussbaum and Goodin in his description of how global economic injustice is created and perpetuated:

[a]ny group controlling a preponderance of the means of coercion within a country is internationally recognized as the legitimate government of this country’s territory and people – regardless of how this group came to power, of how it exercises power, and of the extent to which it may be supported or opposed by the population it rules. This international norm contributes to two of the abusive behaviors conducted by states without repercussions or reprimand: the abuse of the international borrowing privilege and resource privilege. States can abuse their ability to borrow from other states without fear of the consequences. They can use borrowed money for their own personal benefit or squander the money in a way that does not help their citizens. (374)

Resource privilege allows states to confer ownership rights of resources to others (373). Similar to the international borrowing privilege, the resource privilege allows states to use a state’s natural resources for personal profit without any consequences. Both privileges lack a system of accountability for people who abuse



them. Furthermore, international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization unfairly disadvantage underdeveloped states because these institutions were created by economically well-off states. Thus, underdeveloped states have no bargaining power with these institutions since they are comprised of economically and militarily intimidating states.

Ultimately, Pogge argues that “we are also and more significantly related to them as supporters of, and beneficiaries from, a global institutional order that substantially contributes to their destitution” 376). In other words, economic injustice on a global scale has been imposed on the global poor by developed world for our own gain. What makes Pogge more appealing than Nussbaum and Goodin is that a solution for rectifying the injustice done to the global poor is fairly plausible. The institutions and norms that have been created to disenfranchise underdeveloped states can be modified and changed over time. Additionally, doing so does not necessitate irreversible violations of state sovereignty. However, it does require mutual cooperation among states which may be not as effective or compelling an approach as instituting a higher form of sovereignty through an institution or governing body. Nevertheless, it is much more conceivable than reconstituting a government or redistributing states’ resources across the globe.

In summation, Thomas Pogge’s articulate and well-grounded arguments are the most appealing of the three. While cosmopolitanism as a whole is a somewhat unsatisfying approach when confronted with the reality of state sovereignty, Pogge

mediates the ethics and practicality of global justice enough to provide a reasonable and convincing account of how global justice can be achieved. Lastly, his description of the interconnectedness of the global political structure is an effective rebuttal to particularists who argue that global justice is a moot point because each state is responsible for its own affluence or squalor.

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# Perceptions of Women through Victorian Theatrical Costume

**Krista Intranuovo**

“Clothes make the man.” More accurately however, and especially in the socio-cultural atmosphere of the theatre of Victorian England, clothes make the character, and even more so, the woman. As it became increasingly commonplace for women to occupy jobs and professional trades outside the home, including work in the theatre, the middle to late 19<sup>th</sup> century marked a period of change and transition with regard to the role of women in society. The emergence of female actors onto the British stage in the preceding century led to the formation of a complex and at times self-contradictory dichotomy between the function of a woman as both a paragon of morality and a sexualized object. In the instance of the moral figure, women could be portrayed as simpering stock characters in grand, picturesque costumes meant to create the illusion of an idealized beautiful, demure, domestic, obedient wife or maiden. This spectacle contrasted with the choice to feature a woman’s sex appeal through more revealing costumes for fantastical roles, “breeches roles”, and most notably, ballet roles. Both interpretations of the function of the Victorian actress which were manipulated and communicated through her costume – as a moral figure or a sexual spectacle – carried strong implications regarding women as characters on the stage and as professionals in everyday society.

With the rise of the Industrial Era in England which was in full swing by the 1840s, women were pushed by both desire for independence and economic necessity into the professional workplace environment where they frequently were faced with the reality that men held all or most of the decision-making power. This fact was no less true in the theatre, where, as in other professions, women were required to perform more jobs and work longer hours than men, frequently earning less respect and lower wages than their male counterparts. Indeed, a great deal was expected of an actress or ballet dancer in the Victorian era. Although women had legally been permitted to participate in theatre for decades, it was this era which saw an influx of female performers, probably because of an increase in economic need. To begin a theatrical career was no mean task in itself; an aspiring actress had to first go through a challenging interview process that demanded confidence and perseverance. Once hired, she had to work her way up through the ranks of actresses already in the company to earn her right to a leading role (Russell 138, 113). This upset the status quo of long-established families that had for generations passed down their craft (and incidentally, their costumes as well) and created solid reputations in the theatrical sphere. Influenced by the disdain of such families, the public tended to criticize the newcomers as having an economic rather than an artistic motivation behind entering the theatre, and treated them as women of ill repute who were worthy of scorn (Foulkes 145-147). Before they even set foot onstage, female performers had already been set on a path of negative perception by their audiences.

Nevertheless, the majority of productions of the Victorian stage were geared towards the moral attitudes of the growing middle class which had become the theatre's main patron at the time (Russell 12). Beginning in the 1840s and carrying on throughout the century, the ideals of Romanticism were prevalent to varying extents in culture. As the dialectic antithesis of the cold, inhumane rigidity of industrialization, Romanticism valued that which was natural and innocent (Russell 67). In many cases, including the theatre, this translated into the promotion and idealization of all things feminine and domestic. In the more conservative circles of the time, women in their proper roles as wives and mothers were seen as the first line of moral defense against the influences of the socioeconomic environment, and as such, it became the responsibility of women – including women in the theatre – to educate and instruct the masses in lessons of moral propriety (Dickinson 58).

The role of woman as a tool for teaching morality was made manifest in the theatre through costume. A dominant stylistic aspect of Victorian theatre was spectacle which used extravagant and stylistically presentational design elements, including costume, in productions that were visually grandiose, but oversimplified with regard to their plots which dealt with simple morality stories. A great proponent of this style of theatre was the contemporary art critic John Ruskin whose articles and personal letters reveal not only the methods with which women were portrayed, but also the ways conservative audiences reacted to how women acted and dressed onstage. Ruskin himself was an interesting character in that he represented the most extreme side of Victorian moral conservatism. He frequently wrote in baby talk, worked from his childhood nursery, and refused to watch any

performance he considered too inappropriate or frightening. Keeping with the Romantic ideal of domesticity and innocence, he saw childish simplicity in plot and escapism in grand visual spectacle as the “height of human goodness” (Dickinson 62). In calling for the infantile irresponsibility of the audience, he indirectly (though not unintentionally) cites the characters onstage – specifically the female ones who portrayed the loyal wife, the chaste maiden, the hardworking domestic angel each clad in her elaborate yet appropriate costume– as the ones who are responsible for the moral education of an entire society.

Institutions such as the Church were not blind to the influence the theatre had on the public’s mentality. To Christian authorities, the woman’s position as a moral paragon made her a highly influential figure, and therefore, it was in their best interest to encourage audiences to patronize those productions which featured morally upright women (Foulkes 144). These types of productions typically featured shallow stock characters such as Cinderella whose greatest virtues were their selflessness and domestic prowess and who were eventually delivered by male characters into a stereotypical marriage (Dickinson 70). When productions glorified such women by dressing them in glamorous gowns – incidentally fantastical character costumes and more specific grandiose pieces were provided by the theatre company, not by the actress as was customary for everyday costumes (Russell 142) – they promoted and spread the Church-approved idealized moral standard of the time. This ideal was namely that the “power” of the ideal woman was purely domestic, and that it was her responsibility to teach morality and gentility to her family (Dickinson 65-70).

According to Victorian socio-cultural constructs, self-sufficiency and independence were undesirable traits that made a woman unfit for marriage. A woman had to fit the role of a damsel in distress in order for a man to want to rescue her, and she had to be not only vulnerable but also worthy of being saved because of her value to the institutions of Church and family (Donohue 120-122). There was a well-acknowledged element of deceit involved in which women attempted to maintain their autonomy while still portraying themselves as ideal wives (Donohue 123), though the reality remained that in the Victorian environment, it often was impossible for a woman to sustain herself without a more influential male companion. The sort of feminized self-sufficiency which was deemed undesirable when portrayed onstage was of course exactly what was required of the performers themselves.

The majority of actresses and dancers of the Victorian era did not live the charmed and glamorous life that was advertised by the published glorifications of leading ladies and prima ballerinas; instead, they were for the most part left to fend for themselves. While it was traditional for male actors to be mentored by older professionals, this practice was less common among actresses, although, based on firsthand accounts of kinship and self-sacrifice, they did experience a strong sense of solidarity (Russell 91). Victorian actresses underwent a considerable amount of social and economic pressure. Diary accounts describe that rehearsals were dominated by the whims of leading men who, despite wage protection laws, earned more money than female performers, especially dancers and actresses in non-speaking “walking roles” (Russell 114, 138). Since these wages alone were not

enough to live on, women often took up needlework jobs at night to make ends meet; however, this also conflicted with their need to make and maintain their own costumes for roles that required everyday, non-designed garments (Russell 82, 138). The life of the female Victorian performer was fraught with stress and pressures often associated with their costumes.

Related to the economic facet of life as a female performer, an 1869 poem entitled “The humble apology of Grace Tarleton, a poor ballet girl” provides an insight into the second role of women in the Victorian theatre, as sex objects:

Why should to dance, *for bread*, ‘in tights’  
 So scandalize beholders  
 Who vie, *from choice*, in showing off  
 A great deal more than shoulders. (Davis 225)

In the poem, the author begs her audience to forgive her for appearing onstage in scandalous clothing (ballet costumes were most notorious because of course one must see a dancer’s limbs to fully appreciate the choreography), because she needs the money she can earn from her performances. She also points out the element of irony that the scandalized ladies in the audience often are wearing gowns that are cut even lower than her own (Davis 224-225). This poem reveals that because the female body was so marketable onstage, many women often had no choice but to risk their reputations by appearing in the sexual (by Victorian standards at least) attire assigned to them.

The role of the costume designer as a separate profession did not fully evolve until the 1880s (Russell 156); until then designs were created by the manager (often an actor-manager) who worked closely with the wardrobe keeper, who had some



input on the design but functioned more as a consultant, a liaison to the actors, and problem solver. Ultimately, the manager had the final say in what costumes were used onstage (Russell 124, 128). This authority was often used to determine whether an actress's costume was sexual enough to wear. This issue was especially prevalent during the heyday of "breeches roles," which were roles for female characters who disguised themselves as men or played male fairies and other fantastical beings so that tight shirts and breeches could be worn to show off their figures to their greatest advantage. The same was true for ballet costumes: as dancers only were required to provide their own shoes and stockings, the rest of their costumes were left to the mercy of the manager (Russell 128-138). Although performers themselves may have been personally opposed to their portrayal as sexual objects, they were often compelled by circumstance to accept whatever roles were available to them. Certainly it was more lucrative for a theatre company to make a large profit from scantily clad dancers than to create the more morally appropriate but exponentially more extravagant spectacles as favored by Ruskin and other conservatives. Ultimately, the majority of directors and managers, according to primary sources, felt that the main function of a woman onstage was to "appear as a decorative item!" (Russell 198).

Offstage, there was a strong link between how an actress was portrayed as her character and her reputation in actual society. If an actress had enough money or good rapport with the manager to get the opportunity to be dressed in glamorous, not-too-sexual garments onstage, her reputation would be considered much higher than that of a girl who appeared in plain or revealing clothing (Russell

113). Here the underlying hypocrisy of Victorian culture's attitude towards women in the theatre is ultimately revealed. Although the Church recognized the fact that all romantic stories which end in marriage have underlying sexual implication, it also recognized that the indoctrination of the idea of the ideal domestic wife through theatre was overall favorable to the religious institution (Foulkes 145-147). The Church, however, made no effort to hide its disdain for actors themselves, and during the Victorian era refused them Christian burials (Foulkes 164). Even the fundamental innocence of John Ruskin is called into question by his suspicious interactions and obsessions with girls as young as eight. The role of women as portrayed by costume in Victorian theatre was ultimately one of internal and external contradictions.

Acting with a mentality decades ahead of her time, Madame Vestris (1797-1856), the first female actor-manager known to British history, asserted her autonomy as a theatre artist and played both the moral and sexual roles of women simultaneously in an attempt to bridge these contradictory ideas. She was one of the first true costume designers as well as one of the first proponents of historically accurate costumes; she dressed elegantly when she chose but also used her clothes to show off her pride in her sexuality. At times, she even played leading male roles such as King Oberon, which was utterly unheard of at the time (Finkel 112-113). Her impact as a woman upon theatre and costume was neither equaled nor exceeded until the turn of the century. At this time, the roles of women were continuing to evolve as women became more liberated in society. The rise of Realism and Naturalism led to less presentational stage designs and costuming that was true to

the character rather than true to what the audience desired as spectacle (Kaplan 63). In productions such as *Dianna Dobson's*, half-dressed women onstage were no longer there as sexual objects, but rather served as examples of poor living conditions that the author wanted society to address (Kaplan 108). To a degree, the theatrical portrayal of the idealized, domestic, moral woman became an artifact of the Victorian era.

The perception of women's social roles in Victorian England was communicated in the theatre through their costumes. These roles were manifest in what was perceived as the two main functions of women in society: as a bastion of moral domestic righteousness, and as a disreputable and immoral sexualized object. Both roles were manipulated less so by the performers than by managers seeking to profit from middle class audiences. Reception of these portrayals held implications for actresses and dancers both on-and-offstage, as their social status was greatly dependent on how appropriately they were portrayed during performances. In the theatre as in other professional spheres throughout the Victorian era, a time in which women's burgeoning autonomy still could not liberate them from the influences of men, clothes truly did make the woman.

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# Scales to Tail

**Georgina Podany**

Last year I was introduced to the works of Walt Whitman whose collection of short pieces entitled *Specimen Days* touched me in a way that no writing had done before. His thoughts on nature and his time spent upstate spoke directly to me. The meadows and creeks he described are identical to those surrounding my family's cabin in the Catskill Mountains which I visit often in summer. His powers of observation and his ability to recreate the sounds and smells of nature inspired me as I worked to breathe life into my technical illustrations. Whitman's words captured fragments of life on paper – the way sunshine looked, the smell of cut grass, the feel of the breeze on his face, the sound of the wind rustling the leaves – “Nature's mighty whisper” as he called it (Whitman 840, *Thoughts Under an Oak*). Whitman puts the reader in that moment, to experience what he is experiencing. As I created my illustrations, I wanted my viewer to see more than an accurate representation of my specimen. I wanted him to look into the eyes of an individual being, in this case a golden carp, and know that this creature was returning his gaze. While my drawing class taught me technique, Whitman taught me how to give an illustration life.

Fish are striking subjects to draw: their skin is made up of unique patterns of shiny scales which create subtle colors and different textures. Fish are also easy to break down into layers – their outer scaly skin, their segmented muscles, their

organs, and finally, their delicately boned skeleton. I chose a carp for my project mostly for sentimental reasons. While growing up, I spent quite a lot of time kayaking on the lake near my family's summerhouse. Large grass carp were introduced into the lake to help combat a milfoil weed infestation. These fish like to hang out just below the water's surface in shallow, sun-warmed waters. You can find them by looking for their dorsal fins which peek above the surface of the water like some lazing sea monster. But these fish are skittish; if they detect you, they will dart away. As carp can measure up to two feet in length, their sudden motion can cause quite a bit of disturbance which is startling if you don't notice them. Other times, when they are swimming in deeper water, the only telltale sign of their presence is a gentle swirl or a puff of unsettled silt from the bottom of the lake. Getting close enough to see more than their fins takes a bit of skill, but I learned the tricks, and soon I was able to sidle my kayak right up next to them. The way a lazy flick of a tail would send them sliding through the water was mesmerizing. Carp also have large, beautiful silver-gray scales that flicker like gold when the sun hits them just right. I love the way their scales look like exotic chainmail. Carp look as if they are ready to clash against some vicious enemy, but in reality they are the placid deer of the freshwater world. They are gentle vegetarians, and their formidable outer covering is strictly for defensive purposes. As a surface dwelling fish, they are common targets of fish-eating birds. These distinctly scaled fish were always my favorite, so when faced with the decision of what fish I should draw, I knew my subject immediately.

My carp was about 20 inches in length and weighed four pounds. Its scales were a shimmery green-gold, its eyes still clear and glassy. Although my project required that I photograph and draw each level of dissection, I chose the following illustrations to give some idea of the beauty and vitality of my golden carp.



Colored outer layer with acetate overlay



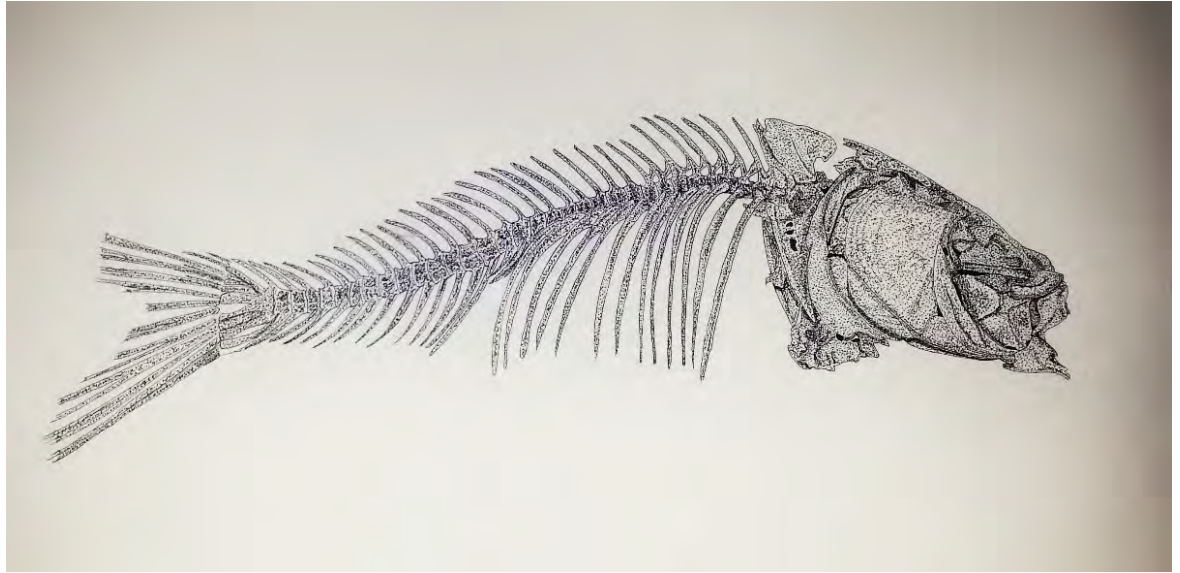
Muscle layer, colored pencil on vellum



Organ layer, colored pencil on vellum



S Y M P O S I U M



Skeletal layer, ink on paper

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# King of the Beasts

**Shannon Fitzgerald**

In my Drawing III class, one of the guidelines for my piece was that the process be rhythmic, repetitive, or meditative in nature, which would in turn be reflected in the finished work. Fur was the first thing that came to mind when I thought of a meditative process since, much the same as stippling, drawing fur lets my mind wander while I work, and the repetitive motion of making thousands of tiny lines can be surprisingly calming. For this piece I did not want to focus on the "big picture" and use the entire reference image, instead I chose to zoom in on a small part and to center the drawing around the detail of the fur. This work was done on black pastel paper with white charcoal pencil for the fur, teeth and whiskers, and regular black charcoal to deepen the blacks in certain areas such as the mouth and nose.



***"Ikenna" - Last Lion's Snarl***

# Barn Owl

Alison Adler



This is an illustration of a barn owl (*Tyto alba*) done with colored pencil on Bristol board. I drew the tree on the right with gray marker on a sheet of clear acetate that I layered over the drawing. My arrangement of these images was inspired by scientific illustrations from the 1700s and 1800s in which several views of an organism were presented on a single page.

I chose the barn owl not only because of my fascination with this animal, but also because of the detailed colors and patterns of its plumage. This particular barn owl has plumage that is a soft, pale peach color with patches of lavender at the tips of its feathers and on the crown of its head. It is beautiful how these colors blend together like a watercolor painting and their subtlety fits perfectly with the barn owl's silent nature. Through the close-up of the wing on the bottom right, I sought to capture its intricate pattern of stripes and spots, as well as the mixture of shades of orange, blue, purple, and pale pink which I observed upon closer inspection of the owl's feathers. When viewed quickly and from a distance, barn owls often appear to be a dull mixture of white, brown, and gray. However, I think the details of this drawing, and those highlighted by all scientific illustrations, demonstrate the truly beautiful details we find in nature when we take time to stop and observe closely.

# Butterflies

**Lisa Pastore**

While pursuing both art and chemistry in my studies at Adelphi, I have continuously looked for connections between these two subjects. However, it was not until I studied medical illustration that I realized how interconnected and complementary these disciplines are especially when they are used together to illuminate a subject. At first, I was skeptical about the possibility of making what would essentially be textbook illustrations as accurate as they would be if I had used photography. But I quickly learned the value of using my own illustrations over a photograph. Using just ink and colored pencils, I attempted to create drawings that were original, while learning more about the subject at hand, in this case the anatomy of four butterflies. Science is often characterized as precise and objective, so I was consistent in my choice of materials and style of illustration. With rapidograph pens filled with ink, I created a black overlay of stippling to enhance depth and shadow. Stippling is a traditional technique that uses the concentration of ink in the form of dots to create light and shadow. Under this ink layer, I added the coloring of the butterflies onto a sheet of velum using colored pencil. This process required that I closely observe and carefully replicate my subject. At first glance, a butterfly's body and wings appear to be symmetrical, but upon closer observation, it becomes clear that this isn't so. In this way, art is used to illuminate science. Often, subjects in nature seem to follow the golden ratio, and ideas of symmetry create an



image that is pleasing to the eye. However, my butterflies have shown me how to find beauty even in subjects that are asymmetrical.



*Junonia coenia*  
Common Buckeye Butterfly



*Battus philenor*  
Pipevine Swallowtail Butterfly



*Danaus plexippus*  
Monarch Butterfly

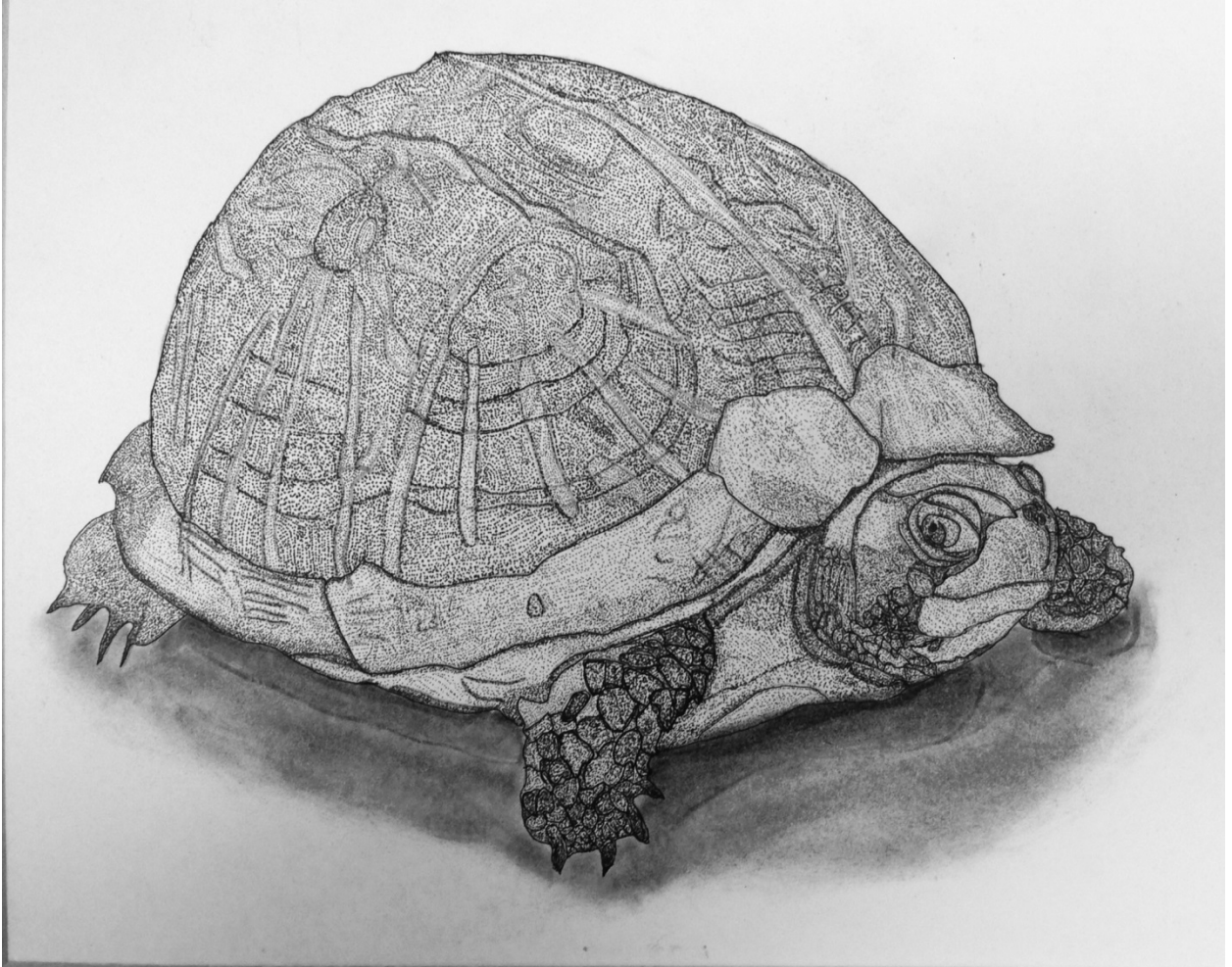




*Heliconius charithonia*  
Zebra Longwing Butterfly

# Tortoise

Kyle Morrison



I drew my illustration of a Mediterranean spur thigh tortoise (*Testudo graeca*) with rapidograph pens on paper. First, I traced the outline of the image using carbon paper, and then retraced the outline with technical pens. Then I painted the outlining shadow on the bottom of the image with a small brush using charcoal dust. Finally, I stippled the image using two different size pens: a smaller

.25 pen for the head and body, and a slightly larger .3 pen for certain parts of the shell.

I chose the tortoise because of the intricate detail of the lines of its face and the curvature of its shell. I darkened the stippling of the tortoise's head in order to emphasize the way the shell angles upward while distinguishing it from the skin of the head. I sought to capture the rough texture of the scales on the legs in comparison to that of the underlying skin by using a rough, random form of stippling. When viewed from a distance, the contrast of dark and light creates two separate dimensions. I designed this illustration so that the viewer would focus on the detail of the tortoise's legs, feet, and head.

# Water, Water Everywhere: Thoreau's Worldview in *Walden*

Catherine Grover

Say you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent minded of men...set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in that region (Melville 4).

In the first chapter of his novel *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville presents the “magic” that inevitably draws all men to water – it is a discourse that is woven through the entire narrative. Henry David Thoreau shares Melville’s preoccupation with water, and he quite literally wanders to a “pool” called Walden which becomes the site of his great life “experiment” recounted in *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (Thoreau 61). Thoreau states that he “went into the woods because [he] wished to live deliberately ...and... [to discover what is] quite necessary” for life (66). What Thoreau discerns throughout his work is that a person can live well if only basic human needs are met. However, though Thoreau does not state it explicitly, the presence of Walden Pond, and that of water itself, is perhaps the *most* necessary element in his entire experiment and philosophy.

This is apparent in the extent of his discussions about water which pervade *Walden*. Even the inherent empirical qualities of water itself, particularly its existence in nature in various physical forms, lends itself to his survival and to his observation of his surroundings during his “experiment.” With each season, the

pond takes on a new attitude and furnishes Thoreau with a new environment to examine. Walden Pond itself staves off the monotony of life in society which Thoreau so longs to escape. He claims that “wherever [he sits], there [he] might live” but this is not actually so (59). Water is necessary for his experiment to succeed, as he bolsters each little philosophical revelation with some anecdote about it.

The sentiment most often repeated by Thoreau on the topic of water is his praise of the clarity of Walden’s water. Physiologically, the clarity of the water means that it is potable. Indeed, Thoreau suggests that it is more suitable for drinking than that of the wells of Concord, and that its clear nature causes its fish to be especially edible because they are “cleaner and handsomer...than those in the river and in most other ponds” (126, 127). Thus the waters of Walden provide drink, sustenance, and a good place to “wash the dust of labor from [his] person” after he gets sweaty hoeing his bean field (115). However, Thoreau’s obsession with its clarity goes beyond its uses for his body. The clear water of the pond is a manifestation of the clarity of life seeks during his stay on the shore.

According to Thoreau, one is afforded the most clarity in the morning to the point where “all memorable events...transpire in morning time”, and water enters into his morning in a way that echoes this sentiment (65). He presents the reader with the image of the pond “throwing off its nightly clothing of mist” to reveal “its smooth reflecting surface” (63). In this way, the water becomes the spirit of the man who is “truly awake” in the morning and in every waking moment of his life. The pond does not grow clouded in the course of the day the way the mind of a man

often does. This is the ideal that Thoreau strives for though he admits that, as yet, he cannot look a truly awake man “in the face” (65). The surface of the pond is often calm, and the things that alight on it disturb it superficially. Just so, Thoreau seeks to be just far enough from society so as to be unperturbed by its comings and goings. He also equates the depth of the pond with the depth of the character of a man, and says that it is possible to discern the character of a person by observing his environment and activities, the way one can detect the depth of a body of water by its banks (194).

Water in *Walden* not only gives an example for the individual to emulate in his mind. It also somehow creates a peaceful and unobtrusive connection between a man and the larger world which is indeed the only type of connection which Thoreau wishes to suffer. Thoreau does not approve of the newspapers and the telegraphs which are supposed to connect people to one another, but which he says never yield any “new” or essential information (68). However, he embraces the idea that when he “go[es] to [his] well for water” he “meets” people from all over the world in the sense that water evaporates and has the ability to “migrate to other climes” in clouds (198, 205). He is connected to the world through man’s universal need for water and Walden Pond’s place in the global water cycle. The ice of Walden participates in the cycle of water which connects Thoreau to the world as well. In this case, the ice travels not around the world, as the cloud does, but goes instead to areas in closer proximity, such as the town of Concord and the city of Boston. In addition, the ice brings men to the pond to harvest it, and Thoreau has brief interactions with them. Thoreau interacts with the ice itself by using it to go out

upon the pond and view the landscape of the area where he lives from a new vantage point. This is essential to his desire for constant freshness. The difficulty of getting fish to eat from beneath the ice is a positive addition to Thoreau's daily activities because he believes that the best way to learn to do a thing is through manual exertion and experience.

Thoreau states that "a lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature" (128). His stay at Walden is a sort of vacation of the soul which allows him to see through this clear "eye" and to discern what is necessary in life. He is then able to return to being "a sojourner in civilized life" armed with this knowledge (1). What he sees through the eyes of Walden Pond is an "Earth [that] is still in her swaddling clothes", where "there is only more day to dawn" and where "the sun is but a morning star" ( 205, 221).

Through all the struggle and "quiet desperation" of daily life in society, this world vision is nigh impossible to see (10). Indeed even some of Thoreau's contemporaries such as Nathaniel Hawthorne did not see it. Thoreau's world of "afternoons which seem infinitely long" cannot be embraced under normal circumstances, or on completely dry land (139). For Thoreau to prove that the world is new and growing, the presence of water (and it must be close at hand) is absolutely "necessary". According to Walden, a man without "water in [his] neighborhood" cannot drink, cannot see, and cannot live (63).

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# Snow Melted

Rebecca Endres

Kissed a boy once  
Who smelled of Marlboros.  
He said,  
There are people in Japan  
Still being born

Sick and deformed

Because of Hiroshima.

Went home, re-read  
*Sadako*.  
Cried again,  
Like in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.  
Wanted to write her  
a letter,  
But what do you  
say?

*Sadako,*  
*when you were born, Hitler was winning.*  
*in my time, they say he lost,*  
*but he didn't.*  
*bombs are still falling*  
*ethnocentrism still beckons.*  
*You suffered, but in the end you got lucky*  
*because you fell asleep*  
*and I woke up.*



Made love once  
To my best friend.  
There was still  
Mascara smeared around her eyes  
She had washed her face  
So hastily

We held each other afterwards  
Until in sleep,  
We naturally rolled apart



There's a plastic Jesus by the side of the road.  
There's a plastic Jesus by the side of the road  
to mark where someone was killed in a car crash.  
And all the pine trees around it  
seem like giant middle fingers  
pointing up towards the sky



Never made it too far  
With that boy.  
I told him I couldn't stand  
The smell of cigarettes.  
He told me he couldn't quit.  
I told him I could.



Someone in Florida was trampled in Walmart  
On Black Friday  
And a man in Tehran lit his wife on fire  
Because he said she slept with another man  
And politicians in Uganda  
Want to slaughter gays  
And North Korea  
Hates the U.N.

... Remember to always say "please" and "thank you."



Are you and I discussing the same evolution?

How do Herodotus, Khan, and George Bush Jr. compare?  
Can you compare the flesh?



Snow melted  
and revealed the grass  
and we reveled

Dirt shifted  
and revealed the graves  
and we reeled

# Knowing Your Roots: How History Makes a Home

Catherine Jermolowitz

Home is not only a physical space, but a personal experience: the beginning of an identity and a point around which that identity can center itself as it evolves. For an individual, this is a personal experience; for a people, it is a cultural one, and this cultural, collective identity is made of history. Both the *Aeneid* and *Omeros* shed light on the importance of history in establishing a home through their displaced protagonists: Aeneas is unable to establish a new home until he learns the true origins of the Trojan people, and Achille cannot come to truly accept St. Lucia as his home until he can make a connection to his ancestral Africa. Although both these epics achieve similar aims, they do so in very different manners: the *Aeneid* as a traditional epic with a clear, linear structure, and *Omeros* as an almost anti-epic with a very non-linear structure.

In the *Aeneid*, the displaced Trojans, led by Aeneas, must return to Italy, where Dardanus, the founder of Troy, has his origins (3. 167); this, however, is something that must be revealed to them, and Aeneas, unaware, twice attempts to establish a home in the wrong place. The first attempt is in Thrace, not far from Troy. Once there, Aeneas is told by Polydorus' ghost that this is not where the Trojans are supposed to be, and that they must "run from this cruel land" in which he was murdered (3. 44). Apollo reveals to Aeneas that he must return to "where

[his] race was born" (3. 94), which the Trojans incorrectly interpret to mean Crete, the home of Teucus (father of Dardanus' wife). This second attempt initially appears to be successful, but eventually, the settlers are plagued by sickness and famine (3. 138-139). The household Trojan gods speak to Aeneas in a dream, telling him that Apollo did not intend for the Trojans to settle in Crete, but in a land "the Greeks call Hesperia" (3. 163): the land where Dardanus was born, and where the Trojan lineage began. Once reaching Italy, the Trojans are finally made aware that they are in the right place when Iulus remarks that they've eaten their "tables," the bread their food was set upon (7. 116). Aeneas recognizes this as a sign of "hardships' end," and rejoices (7. 118).

Aeneas learns that Italy is the Trojans' true destination. But the connection between history, identity, and home has been more alluded to than explicitly stated. Virgil demonstrates this connection with greater clarity through the message of Aeneas's father Anchises, and Aeneas' subsequent visit to him in the underworld. Anchises' ghost speaks to Aeneas shortly after the Trojan women, incited to riot after the goddess Isis played upon their weariness of travel and fear of more battles, burn much of their fleet on the shores of Sicily (5. 653-659). Aeneas wonders if he should take this as a sign to abandon the journey to Italy and just settle in Sicily (5. 701-703). Nautes the seer offers the reasonable solution of allowing the weak and travel-weary to remain in Sicily and continuing on with the strong, but Aeneas is still not sure (5. 711-720). It is only when Anchises, speaking to his son in a dream, tells Aeneas to listen to Nautes that he accepts the seer's advice (5. 747-748).

Subsequently, Aeneas visits Anchises in the underworld and learns extensively about the future of the Trojans. Anchises shows him all of his descendants as far as Romulus, founder of Rome, and the Caesars who will turn Rome into a great empire (7. 777). This revelation “[fires] his lust for glory in the future,” and he finally accepts his destiny (7. 889). Both of these encounters with Aeneas’s father – his ancestor – demonstrate the importance of history and ancestral connection in helping the Trojans reach their new home. Aeneas, in speaking to his father, is connected to a concrete past and is established as a vital continuance of that past; he is placed within a cultural context, (the founding of Rome) and this context gives him identity. As a consequence, Aeneas finds his purpose, and continues his journey to the place where his identity as the founder of what will become the Roman Empire will be realized.

The necessity of knowing about one’s ancestors in order to reach home is a theme also threaded throughout *Omeros*. Achille may have lived in St. Lucia all his life, but he is not truly at home there because the island does not have a history that he can call his own. Its history is that of other countries – France and Britain in particular – that have overrun the island throughout history. Achille, a poor fisherman and a descendant of African slaves, has no clear connection to his ancestral past. For Achille to truly be at home in St. Lucia, he must first reconnect with his African ancestors. In Book 3, he enters into a trance while out at sea and “journeys” in his dreamlike state to Africa. Paddling up river in his canoe, he recognizes the landscape from movies he has seen as a child (Walcott 133). He is

rather frightened however, and wishes that the river would turn into a road (Walcott 134).

Eventually, Achille comes across a tribe of people and is no longer afraid: “he saw the first sight of men, tall sapling fishing-stakes; / he came into his own beginning and his end / for the swiftness of a second is all that memory takes” (Walcott 134). Achille recognizes something in these people that causes him to remember “his own beginning,” his origins. Walcott clearly states that Achille has found the place of his origin when God gives him “permission / to come home,” and this is further affirmed by referring to Achille’s canoe as “his homecoming canoe” (Walcott 135). Achille stays with the tribe for some time, and learns their rituals, such as the importance of the kola nut, how to pour palm wine, and how “to listen to the moan of the tribe’s triumph and sorrow / in a white-eyed storyteller” (Walcott 139). On a feast day, the men dress like women and perform several dances, which Achille realizes are exactly the same as the dances performed by the St. Lucian natives. Walcott asks the reader to recall this moment in Book 6 when Achille explains to Helen that he’s wearing her yellow dress on Boxing Day “not because of Christmas, / but for something older; something that he had seen / in Africa” (275). By traveling back to Africa and learning the rituals of his ancestors, Achille is able to make a connection to his modern day home. St. Lucia now contains history that Achille, as the descendant of African slaves and not of the island’s conquerors, can relate to.

Of particular interest is the importance Walcott places on language in connection to origin and identity, something not so thoroughly considered in the

*Aeneid*. The characters of *Omeros* experience a disconnection and yearning due to their physical displacement as a result of the slave diaspora, but also through their awareness that the language they speak, the language they “live in,” is not the language of their origin; that language has been forgotten and replaced by a foreign one. The importance of knowing the language of one’s ancestors is demonstrated in *Omeros* on two specific occasions: Achille’s meeting with Afolabe, and the healing of Philoctete.

As Aeneas speaks to his father to learn about his connection to the past and future of his people, Achille also speaks to his Afolabe to learn the importance of language. When Afolabe asks Achille about the meaning of his name, Achille says that his name has no meaning, and that he has also forgotten the name Afolabe gave him: “the deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave us” (Walcott 137). Afolabe insists that a name says something about its bearer, such as “the qualities desired in a son” (Walcott 137). If it means nothing, then the bearer of the name would be nothing (Walcott 137). Achille still does not see why it matters, so Afolabe explains that, if Achille does not care about the meaning of names, then he is not Achille’s father (Walcott 138). This exchange shows that, just as he has no history because he is not connected to his ancestor’s culture, Achille also has no history because he has never learned their language. He and the natives of St. Lucia “yearn for a sound that is missing” (Walcott 137). They are looking for their past, and know that learning the language of their ancestors is one way to reconnect with it. This knowledge will help them understand who they were before they came to St. Lucia;



with a clearly understood point of origin, they can establish themselves as a continuance, and this will allow them to finally make the island their home.

This importance of the language of one's ancestors is reaffirmed through the healing of Philoctete, another main character in *Omeros*. Philoctete was stung by a Portuguese man-o'-war, but on a deeper level, the wound is a result of slavery: "he believed the swelling came from the chained ankles / of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?" (Walcott 19). Ma Kilman, the local "medicine woman" and proprietor of the No Pain Café, knows that there is a cure for this wound; her grandmother used to grow a medicinal flower that attracted ants, and she would boil the flower in a particular way (Walcott 19). But Ma Kilman cannot remember the name of this flower or where she can find it.

In Book Six, Ma Kilman wanders through the woods, following a scent similar to that of Philoctete's wound (Walcott 237-238). Suddenly she realizes that a line of ants has been following her, "signaling in a language she could not recognize" (Walcott 238). She eventually finds the source of the smell, a flower grown from a seed carried by a swift from Africa; this flower represents Philoctete's wound, the wound of slavery, the "rage festering for centuries, reeking with corrupted blood" (Walcott 244). Ma Kilman listens to the ants "talking the language of her great-grandmother," and enters into a state of frenzy, praying in this language for Philoctete's, and subsequently everyone's, wound of slavery, to be healed (Walcott 244). She bathes Philoctete "in the brew of the root," which cures the physical wound, but also the intangible wound of slavery; Philoctete feels "the yoke of the wrong name lifted from his shoulders" (Walcott 246, 247). Without learning the

language of her ancestors, Ma Kilman would not have been able to cure Philoctete's wound, and therefore the wounds of slavery which the African-descended population of St. Lucia bears.

Both Virgil and Walcott desired that their respective works would give a history to a people in order for them to establish an identity and a home to return to. They had similar reasons for writing, and yet the presentations of these works, mainly the structures, are drastically different. Virgil clearly desired to create a traditional epic by combining and rewriting the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in order to create a history for the founding of Rome. The parallels between Homer's works and Virgil's are clear: Aeneas travels across the sea for several years before finding home, and visits the underworld for guidance on his quest, just as Odysseus did. The latter half of the *Aeneid* is the reincarnation of the *Iliad*, describing war in great detail. The *Aeneid* as a history of Rome's establishment is alluded to by the fact that Aeneas is destined to travel to Italy, and later made obvious during Aeneas' trip to the underworld in which he sees all his descendants, which include Rome's founder and its emperors.

*Omeros*, however, was written in order to tell the complete history of St. Lucia, and not just that of its conquerors; to give a voice to the native people of the island. Walcott writes an anti-epic – an epic about everyday people and mundane things – the total opposite of the *Aeneid*. Walcott's purpose in writing *Omeros* is made apparent by linking Achille, and therefore all St. Lucians, to Africa through the Boxing Day dance and language, and through Walcott's meeting with the ghost of his father, Warwick in Book 1. Warwick remembers how he used to watch the native

women balancing on their heads huge baskets of coal which were sold for only one copper penny (Walcott 75). He comments on how horrible their lives must have been, and tells his son that he must tell their stories: “your own work owes them / because the couplet of those multiplying feet / made your first rhyme” (Walcott 75).

Virgil’s re-vision of Homer required Virgil to employ a traditional epic protagonist and a rather straightforward and clear structure. Traditional epics, that is, Homeric ones, include prestigious protagonists. Aeneas, like Achilles and Odysseus, is of royal lineage (he is rather closely related to Priam, king of Troy), and like Achilles, Aeneas is also half-divine. He is also a great warrior and leader, often referred to as “Father Aeneas.” Fated to settle what will eventually become Rome, Aeneas has a grand and clearly established destiny as well.

If Virgil wished to fill in the gaps of Rome’s history, it was necessary for the *Aeneid* to have a linear structure, as though it were more an historical account as opposed to a creative work. Book 1 does not contain what chronologically happened first, but the reader receives this information soon, and in great detail in Books 2 and 3. The structure from Book 4 through Book 12, the final book, is completely linear. The reader learns what happens to Aeneas and the Trojans as it happened chronologically. This set structure is demonstrated in microcosm when Anchises shows Aeneas all of his descendants; he names them in order from oldest (those closest to Aeneas’ time) to the youngest (those closest to Virgil’s time). Virgil was looking to give history to the origins of an empire: that required the protagonist to be a traditional one, someone who would be respected in Roman society, and for his work to be a more historical account than creative work.

Walcott, however, did not write to give a history to anything as great as the Roman Empire, but to the average St. Lucian instead. This results in Achille being the complete opposite of Aeneas, an anti-hero. He is a poor, illiterate fisherman who is a descendant of African slaves; he never participates in any great wars, and he is not a strong leader. He is not fated to do anything great; it is likely that he will remain a poor fisherman for the rest of his life. This gives Walcott more freedom with the structure of his narrative. The structure of *Omeros* is totally non-linear; Walcott moves fluidly between times and places, meaning that it is often difficult to discern where one storyline begins and another ends. The non-linear structure allows Walcott to combine the past and present in ways Virgil could not, such as completely immersing Achille in his ancestral village. Walcott's desire to give a history to the people of St. Lucia meant that his character had to be someone they could relate to. Since St. Lucia is not an empire like Rome, Walcott did not have to make *Omeros* an historical account in the way that Virgil had to make the *Aeneid*, and so was more creative with his structure.

Virgil and Walcott both believed that, in order to establish a home, one must know the history of his people first. Both demonstrate this through their protagonists' inability to resolve their physical and mental displacement until they have each learned their origins. They accomplished this through very different characters, Aeneas the hero and Achille the anti-hero, and through very different structures, one linear and one non-linear. But both authors had similar intentions – to give a solid history to their people in the hopes that they would take that history and with it form a solid identity, a home.

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# Retractable

**R.A. Sobeck**

**Illustrations by E.C. Mullane**

My knee bounced involuntarily. I couldn't stop it if I tried. It just started bouncing when I sat down and put my leather suitcase between my legs. The Manila paper portfolio filled with my sketches, character portraits, and plot arcs jostled in my lap – my name 'Jason Amity' written in small letters along the bottom of the cover. It didn't help that I was in a tan suit and blue tie that didn't quite fit. Or that I could feel the beads of sweat slowly forming in my armpits. I clicked my pen repeatedly in my right hand until I started to feel cramps and switched over to my left.

The waiting room was well lit with natural light from the large floor-to-ceiling windows that looked out over Tribeca. The sky was just beginning to turn pink, but the sun was at the golden hour that lit everything in its most vibrant colors and natural shadows. I stared ahead at the huge mural of superheroes that filled the DC Comics' wall behind a young receptionist. Superman was standing tall and straight, right in the middle of the chaos of the other heroes and villains. His hands were on his hips, and he looked straight over my head – out into the blinding golden light.

He looked so calm, so collected – surrounded by disaster and mayhem. I just stared at him and shook in my seat, trying not to perspire too badly before I was called in to meet with Sam Ghogg, one of the higher ups in DC who was going to hear

my comic book pitch. I heard a crack from the pen in my hand and felt the warm ink gush out of the cracks in the cartridge.

I held up my hand and watched helplessly as a small pool of black ink formed in my hand, and dripped onto my portfolio.

“Shit,” I said.

I had a pen in my hand when my son was born. Tara squeezed my right hand as she pushed, and I clicked the retractable pen repeatedly in my left. *Click. Click. Click.* I said something like “you are so beautiful right now,” which didn’t go over so well.

She squeezed my hand tighter, and I squeezed the pen in turn until it broke and got ink everywhere. It was all over my hand and my pants. But if you ask Tara or me about the pain of childbirth, we would probably not be able to fully remember the whole experience because holding our son kind of dominates the memory and gives everything that soft-glow reminiscing effect – Hollywood got that one right.

“What should we name him?” Tara asked as she cradled the blue bundle of blankets. Her hair was up in a ponytail with her bangs sticking to her sweaty forehead. She looked amazing, even in fluorescent lighting.

I met Tara back in college. We both went to Seton Hall. She was in secondary education and I was a jumping-ship kind of liberal arts student with a different major every other week. I first met her while I was sitting in the back of a psychology class. We were talking about Attachment Theory and Freud when she raised her hand and spoke for the first time. I don’t remember what she said; it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter because it was how she said what ever she said that caught me.

Her voice was light and just a shade below airy. It totally woke me up in an otherwise boring class. When finally I was able to see her as she left the room, I don't want to say I fell in love, because I definitely didn't, but I remember the way her auburn hair was pulled over one shoulder, revealing a slender neck with small ears that I imagined liked to listen to people talk, and would love to hear me. I wasn't totally wrong about that. Either way, my talents with a pen paid off. Tara said yes to a date with me after I drew a caricature of her in class with my number on the notebook in the picture. She said it was "cute."

"We could name him Clark. Like Clark Kent. He could be our little superman," I said.

"Jason, why do you have to be such a dork – even when you just proved to the world that you're a man. Look, here is proof of your masculinity," Tara said. She raised the bundle in her arms a little higher. "Why do you have to try and ruin it with your dorkiness?"

I smiled and felt prouder than I think I've ever felt, but I pushed on. "How about Bruce?"

"Jason," she sighed.

"Peter?" I asked.

"That isn't even DC!"

We both laughed and I moved closer to them. I couldn't believe they were mine. I thought back to when I was a kid, and the feeling of safety I got when I was around my dad. He was a big guy – a plumber from Brooklyn who liked his coffee black, his toast burnt, and his eggs scrambled. He told me once "men make their living with



their hands.” And every day I would spread my fingers out as far as I could stretch them to try and make them as big as his. He would laugh and pull me onto his knee to let me read the newspaper comics.

“How about Calvin?” I said, as I looked at his little round face.

“Calvin...” Tara let the name play around in her mouth. She smiled, “I like it. And it’s not from any comic so I guess it’s pretty good,” she said.

I just smiled and nodded. I knew I would put Calvin on my knee too, and point out his name on the newspaper page.

“We should get him a stuffed animal,” I said, “maybe a tiger.”

I stood up from the chair, holding my ink-stained hand out from my suit and portfolio that already had a mark across the front, partially covering my name.

“Mr. Amity, is everything all right?” the receptionist asked from her desk. Her voice trailed off near the end, leaving a silence that I hadn’t noticed before in the large room.

“Yes, just fine. Thanks... I’ll just go to the bathroom and wash this off.”

I made it to the bathroom, portfolio in my right hand and held level so the splatter of ink that had fallen on the front didn’t slide around anymore than it had already. I balanced the portfolio precariously on the paper towel dispenser as I scrubbed at my hand. A lot of the ink had dried. Still, the ink that did come off my hand made the pure white porcelain sink bowl reflect the blackness as it was washed away. It was only a cheap retractable pen, but the ink seemed just as permanent, just as black as any of my fancy comic book pens used for outlining, stenciling, and coloring.

I remember my dad coming home from work and getting oil on everything he touched. The front door handle was permanently black from his palm. My mom would yell at him to wash his hands as soon as he came in the door. He would ignore her and grab a beer.

I gave up washing after a few minutes. I still had a few black splotches on my hand that were more noticeable because the hot water and scrubbing had turned my skin a bright shade of red. I turned my attention to the ink splatter on my paper portfolio cover. The splatter was a dark, deep black – the ink had fallen in a heavy drop and then dried in a thick layer.

“Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit.” I said to no one. My voice had a hallow reverberation off the tile that made it sound small and artificial.

I gingerly touched the ink splatter and felt it was still not totally dried under the initial layer. I pushed the hand drier button and held the cover up to the hot air, hoping it would dry faster. I must have held it there for a few minutes since I clicked the button to restart the drier at least four times. When I finally left the bathroom, the ink splatter was totally dried and the portfolio was almost too hot to hold.

I made it back to the waiting room and sat down at the chair that still had my suitcase beneath it. The receptionist looked over at me from her desk. “Are you okay, Mr. Amity? Would you like a cup of water? Maybe some coffee?”

“No, thank you,” I said, “I definitely don’t need any more caffeine.”

I looked at my hand and the cover. This wasn’t good. I was about to pitch the newest Superman comic idea that I had been working on for most of my adult life, and I had ink on my hand – and probably worse, ink on the portfolio.

The first thing I had ever drawn was a picture of Superman when I was seven years old, after my father got me a comic as an apology for missing some baseball game. He had said something about getting caught up with his buddies after work and didn't get home until late. I remember falling in love with it. I loved the pictures, the colors, and the stories.

I had started working on my own Superman comic when I was thirteen. I remember sitting at home during the summer, reading the latest Superman comic that my dad had bought on his way home from work. He would pick up the new Superman comic for me every Tuesday night, and I would tell him all about how Superman swooped in to save Louis Lane or some other person, while he nodded and sipped his drink at the kitchen table. My favorite was the comic that ended with Superman standing tall on the top of the Daily Planet building, holding the globe on top of the building easily in one hand as he surveyed Metropolis with pride and affection. Eventually my dad would finish his drink and wander off to another room, while I started rereading the same comic again.

I remember the phone rang, and my mom picked it up. I was just turning the comic back to the front cover to read it over again when I heard her slump against the wall and slide down to the floor. She was hyperventilating as the phone receiver hung limply by the cord around her head. I could hear a male voice trying to offer gentle condolences over the phone, but my mom couldn't hear them.

I don't remember crying during the funeral, or anytime immediately after his death. But I do remember the first Tuesday after. And I remember how Wednesday

was worse. So much worse. I remember I picked up a pen at some point and started drawing.

It was a comic about a world where Superman left, and the world had a hole that seemed too big to fill. It was therapeutic, and selfish. Selfish to think that my dad just left – like he had any choice, but I was feeling abandoned. I needed to explore a world without Superman. I needed the space to put down some of my fears about a world that couldn't turn without a super hero, and know that the world could keep on turning.

I reached below my chair, opened my leather suitcase, and pulled out another retractable pen – this one with a fine point, made for drawing thick, strong lines. I started connecting dots from the ink splatter, and forming new shapes and patterns around the mess, until I had an intricate design that filled the page with various stars, solar systems, and galaxies.

I had just finished drawing on the front of my portfolio when the receptionist called my name.

“Jason Amity. Sam is off his conference call and can see you now.”

I picked up my belongings and headed down the hallway, past the mural of the big guy in blue. When I entered Sam's office, I saw that he was exactly like me: a fan. His office was spacious and well lit, like the waiting room, but along the perimeter of the room there were various action figures of the different DC heroes and villains. Each one was placed meticulously in a different pose or stance so no two were the same.

“Jason,” Sam said. He sat behind a thin, jet-black desk with only a laptop plugged in. He was a squat, balding man with thin glasses. I could see the roots of his hair in his scalp as he stood up and offered me his hand.

“Thank you for meeting with me,” I said. I took his hand – we had a firm handshake. Off to a good start. “As you know, Mr. Ghogg, I’ve been a colorist with DC for close to ten years now, and I –”

“Let’s not get caught up on formalities and niceties,” Sam said. “Let’s just dive right in, Jason. Go ahead. Sell me on this comic.”

“Oh, okay. Well... it is a totally new Superman idea.”

I remember I went upstairs to Calvin’s room after work one day, where he was already asleep. I felt alone and scared to be a father. I knew what to do to take care of him. I read all the baby books that Tara had brought home. I could change the diapers, sing the lullabies, and play with the toys. But I couldn’t get the weight that was pressing down on my shoulders and crushing my lungs to lift even for a second. I had to get out of his room.

I went downstairs. Tara was at the kitchen table, papers strewn around her – some in neat piles, others in haphazard heaps.

“Babies are expensive,” she said without looking up.

“Much higher maintenance than a dog,” I said, trying to lighten the mood.

“I’m serious, Jason,” she said. “We thought we were better off than we really are. Just in the last month, we went through both our paychecks and an additional thousand dollars – and we still need to pay the mortgage, insurance, and hospital fees. I mean, we’ll make it. Maybe. But just barely.”

She looked exhausted. After Calvin was born, she went back to full time teaching in the high school. "I'm going to see if I can pick up some private tutoring work. Maybe I can adjunct in a college at night."

I sat down at the table beside her and pulled a piece of paper over and looked at it, but I didn't actually see any of the numbers on the bill.

"Well?" she said.

"Well, what?"

"What are you going to do to help, Mr. Father? You're the creative one around here."

"Oh, right. Yeah," I said. "I'll ask for more hours. Maybe they can put me on another comic, other than the Superman one. It would be nice to change it up. I'm getting sick of using blues, reds, and yellows so much anyway... maybe I can get in on the Green Lantern. I almost never use green when I do the coloring for Superman."

It was the answer I knew she wanted to hear. She started to talk about food budgets and coupons when I told her it had been a long day at work and I was going to head upstairs. I grabbed a beer before I left.

I walked past our bedroom and sat down at the drawing table in the converted closet I had taken over. A large pad of drawing paper stretched out in front of me, and I felt the slight trembling fear I always got at the yawning blankness in front of me before I began to fill it with my own scratches and marks. The white page – it was the brightest thing in the dimly lit room cluttered with comic book memorabilia.

I picked up one of my pens and clicked it open. I started to draw the old Superman comic that I used to draw when I was a kid. I hadn't touched it since I was fifteen or sixteen. I had stopped when my mom told me that there was no time for comics. I needed to work to help out. I got a job as a bag boy at the local supermarket, but I would draw little comic figures on the brown paper bags when I could.

"A new Superman," Sam said. He leaned back in his chair. "We've had a lot of Superman comics already, Jason. Sell me on it."

"Well, for starters, it doesn't actually have Superman in it," I said.

Sam crossed his fingers on his desk. They were short and had surprisingly hairy knuckles.

"A Superman comic without Superman? What do we advertise? 'Another normal, peaceful day in Metropolis. Man of Steel not required.' Who is going to want to buy that?" Sam said. He started to laugh.

I could feel the blood draining away from my hands. My leg began to shake again, and I wished I still had a pen to click.

"Yes, when you think about it simply like that, I suppose it doesn't sound very interesting." I said. "But what I focus on is the inevitable fallout that comes with Superman leaving – I mean, the whole world depended on him being around. And then he just left. Without saying goodbye. Without giving warning or consideration."

"Where did he go?" Sam asked.

"I'm not sure."

"Did he die?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

"He's just not around anymore?"

"Yeah."

Sam leaned back in his chair. "I don't know Jason. A Superless-Superman comic is going to be a tough sell."

"Would you at least like to see the portfolio?" I asked.

"Yeah, sure," he said, "why not?"

When the Superman comics would get to me in the production line, there were never any words in the speech bubbles. There were just black and white lines on heavy stock paper. The ink always looked like it had been infused into the paper – like it wasn't just on the page, but somehow deeper – soaked in and made more permanent because it wasn't just on the page, it was the page. It made me feel small in the whole process because the colored ink I put on never had the same effect on the paper. No matter how vibrant or contrasting the colors were, they always remained on the surface, and looked like I could just wipe them away if I wanted to.

With the empty speech bubbles, I would start making up my own dialogue and stories in my head. Most of the time the writers and stencilers would give me a general idea of the story line and some notes, but it always left a lot of leeway in the story for creativity. I would make up stories in my head as I colored alone at my desk, and when I was done I would go home, changing some of my more serious stories to be more appropriate for a two-year-old child, and sit with Calvin and tell him all of the adventures that Superman had that day.



I always put him on my knee when I got home, and he would bring me his Superman toy. I would tell him how Superman flew around the world and saved this person and that person – how he kept a lot of people from getting hurt, and their families together.

I had just finished telling Calvin a story when Tara came in the front door. I usually got home before her. Not something she necessarily liked.

“We need to talk,” she said from the doorway of the living room. Her auburn hair was pulled back in a neat braid, but her face was paler than when I had first met her.

I put Calvin on the floor, next to his blocks, and followed her into the kitchen.

“What’s up?” I asked. “How was your day?”

“I’m pregnant.”

“B-But we just had Calvin two years ago,” I said – like that was a valid reason for this to not be true.

“Seriously, Jason? It doesn’t work like that. I’m pregnant again. And we are in serious money trouble. I’m already working more hours than I can really handle, and you can’t seem to get more hours out of your job.”

I felt my face go red. To be fair, I hadn’t really tried. I spent a lot of my free time up in my drawing room. I would come home, tell Calvin his story, hang around until Tara came home, and then head upstairs and draw my Superman comic. I didn’t really know what else to do. That was what my father had always done – come home, spend a few minutes with me, and then go off to do his own thing. I remember his eyes were always drifting towards the front door or another room as we sat together at dinner, or on the couch.

"And all you do is spend time drawing your little Superman comic. I feel like I'm the only one around sometimes, Jason. If we have another kid, we aren't going to be able to afford the house. We aren't going to be able to support Calvin. I don't know what we are going to do."

I remember after my dad died, my mom and I moved to a small apartment because we couldn't afford the house we lived in any more. The apartment was nice enough, but the water always ran cold after five minutes, and I could hear through the walls at night when I was trying to sleep. Game show announcers and infomercials tucked me in every night.

"I don't know," I said as I sat down.

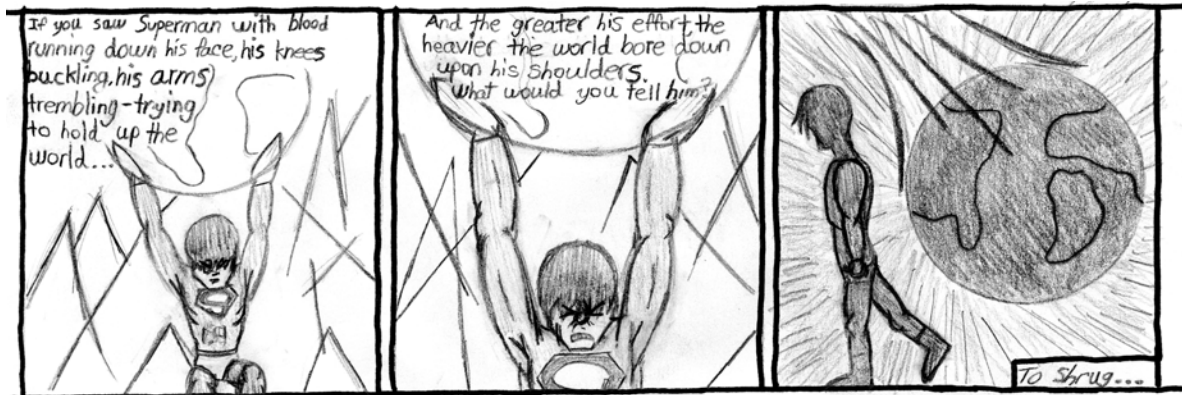
"You could pitch your Superman comic idea to DC," Tara suggested. She put her hand on my arm. "You've been with them for a few years now. Everyone likes you there. Plus you've been saying for a while that you are getting bored just coloring in the lines. This could be your chance to become a lead drawer maybe even a writer."

I had held onto my comic stories for so long, that the idea of presenting them to be appraised terrified me. "We could just... you know, take care of it, Tara. We don't need to have another kid, do we?" I asked.

I remember her look of absolute disgust. I felt it somewhere in my stomach myself. "For a guy who draws superheroes all day, you really aren't a very heroic guy sometimes." She left the kitchen to check on Calvin.

"Yeah, well I'm not Superman. That's why it's a comic," I said to her retreating back. I didn't sticking around for dinner. I went back up to my drawing room.

I had dozens of finished comics. I found the last one I had done in high school before my mom made me stop. I never realized how much better I had become as an artist until I pulled out my earlier work. The first three panels were still just pencil and ink.



I picked up a pen and clicked it open. I started touching up the lines, making them bolder, and more defined as I went through.

"These are good, Jason," Mr. Ghogg said. "I'll give you that. And you have a... unique idea, I guess." He shifted through the portfolio, the black ink design I drew on the front cover shined in the waning light.

"Thank you," I said.

"We'll be in touch." Sam waved me out without shaking my hand. He just continued to look through the comic tiles and plot arcs I had drawn up.

He stopped me before I walked out of his office. "Jason, what did you have in mind for a title for this by the way?"

I had never really given it a name since it had always just been for my eyes and no one else's. But only one name really came to mind. "*On a Long Road, Take Small Steps.*"

I walked back to my car without the portfolio that I had clutched so tightly all day. My hands felt oddly free and open. I pulled out a pen and clicked it a few times as I walked into the parking lot.

I could smell Tara's cooking in the kitchen – roast chicken with mashed potatoes and broccoli. Calvin was on the floor in the living room. I walked over to him and sat down with him in my uncomfortable suit. He looked at me.

He was getting older – he could walk; he was starting to speak in full sentences. He was always looking. Always trying to stand up taller and grab for something higher than his little stubby arms and legs could reach. It was cute – in an over-protective parent's worst nightmare kind of way – especially when he would wander off as you prepared a PB&J with no crusts and some celery stalks.

I played with Calvin and his blocks. His eyes were large and glassy most of the time. I thought they reflected the world in a way that made everything easier to look at.

Occasionally he would pick up a block and hand it to me while we sat on the floor. I would put the blocks he gave me in a stack that slowly grew taller and taller. Eventually Calvin only wanted to see how high I could stack the blocks. He started picking up blocks and stretching his little arms to give them to me. When we ran out of blocks and the tower was taller than he was, he grabbed a block from the bottom to hand up to me and the whole thing fell down around us. I laughed – he cried. Tara

checked on us from another room and came in to settle Calvin's crying as I got up and went into the kitchen. It was a good night.

I didn't have to wait long to hear back from Sam Ghogg. It was only a few days later when I got the phone call as I pulled up in front of my house after staying late at work.

"Hey, Jason. This is Sam Ghogg. Are you available to talk about your comic?"

"Yeah, sure," I said. I stayed in my car as I took the call.

"Well, I just wanted to let you know that DC has decided to pass on your proposal. I was really skeptical of it at first to be honest, but reading through everything you had turned me around. I tried my best to support it, but the rest of the editors and producers didn't feel it going anywhere. I'm really sorry."

"It's okay," I said. "I knew it was a long shot."

I hung up the phone, and looked at the front door. The sun was at the golden hour and should have illuminated the entire house, but it was cast in shadows from the surrounding trees. I realized that in the shadows I could see the paint was chipping on the corners, and the roof had some branches that I would need to go up and pull down. Or I could just leave it.

In the isolated interior of my car, the entire world was muffled. I watched as my neighbor walked out of his garage with a lawnmower and started cutting his lawn, the motor made a dull roaring sound that underscored the stillness around me. I never realized how green his grass was compared to mine. Calvin likes to run around our lawn on the weekends, pulling up handfuls of grass and dirt, and throwing them into the wind. He chases after them, trying to catch them as they

float away in the breeze. A lot of times he will pull up handfuls and leave them in a pile at my feet. I pick them up and tie knots in them, making a string. I grew up with the same kind of lawn.

I sat in the car; I could already imagine Calvin playing on the floor while Tara graded papers in the kitchen. I would come inside and Calvin would run up to me with his Superman toy and expect to be picked up over my head. And I would do it, even though he was getting bigger every day. Pretty soon, I would have to tell him that I can't lift him anymore. I have to tell him to keep his feet on the ground. Not today though, but someday soon.

I got out of my car and walked to the door. The doorknob was dull and tarnished as I walked in. I looked around the dim living room and could see Calvin holding his Superman toy over his head, pretending it could fly. When he spotted me he got up, ran towards me, and jumped. I caught him under his arms and around the chest. I lifted him high over my head as he laughed.

"Mommy, Superman's home!" he said. "He's gonna save the world!"

"Yes," I said as I looked back towards the door. "Yes, I am."

# Edward Hopper: The Twentieth-Century American Flâneur

Alex C. Maccaro

Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world...The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm.

– Edward Hopper<sup>26</sup>

In the early 1920s, a new style of genre painting emerged onto the American art scene. Led by painters such as Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry, these artists, collectively known as the American Scene Painters, produced works that functioned as social commentary on the changes taking place in an urbanized American culture. Many classify Edward Hopper as a member of this group, but this is a label that Hopper vehemently eschewed.<sup>27</sup> His works were also scenes from everyday life, scenes that he witnessed when walking the streets, riding the “El” Train, or going to a restaurant or movie theater. Hopper was a *flâneur*, a man about town, and an observer who took in what he saw and then used that information to create a painting. In that sense, his work was a reflection on his observations which were influenced by the writings of the French poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire. Examining selections from his oeuvre and comparing them to the work of the renowned American Scene Painter Thomas Hart Benton makes it clear that Hopper was very much like other scene painters and at the same time very different.

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<sup>26</sup> Edward Hopper, “Statements by Four Artists,” *Reality*, 1 (Spring 1953), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Tomás Llorens and Didier Ottinger, *Hopper* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux – Grand Palais, 2012), 282.

## Hopper and Painterly Truth

Many scholars and critics misunderstand what Hopper was trying to communicate through his art. Some, such as Barbara Haskell, see his work as “transmuted scenes and motifs from everyday life into epic statements about the human condition.” Others, such as Jerry Saltz, comment that Hopper’s art “shows signs of...implacable isolation.”<sup>28</sup> In reality, in Hopper’s view, what he tried to convey in his art was painting “the fact,” or truth.<sup>29</sup> According to Patricia Junker, Hopper “despised anything that obscured the truth...but in the process ‘the fact’ would give way to the process of making the painting and what would result would be a transmutation of ‘the fact.’”<sup>30</sup>

Hopper also had great admiration for the art of photography. He was especially impressed by the work of Walker Evans who frequently worked with a concealed camera so that his subjects would not know that they were being photographed. Hopper also shared this view that by observing the unobserved, he would be able to capture human nature in unguarded moments. In a 1959 interview, Hopper stated that “My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impressions of nature. If this end is unattainable, so, it can be said, is perfection in any other ideal of painting or in any other of man’s activities.”<sup>31</sup> This interpretation of reality reflected his inner thoughts

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<sup>28</sup> Barbara Haskell, *The American Century: Art & Culture, 1900-1950* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999), 179; Jerry Saltz, “When New Art Became Modern Art,” *New York* (March 4, 2013), 61.

<sup>29</sup> Llorens and Ottinger 2012, 287.

<sup>30</sup> Patricia Junker, *Hopper’s Women* (Seattle, WA: Seattle Art Museum, 2009), 10.

<sup>31</sup> John Morse, oral history interview with Edward Hopper, June 17, 1959, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



and emotions. However, although Hopper's goal was to depict truth in nature, he would lament that the act of applying paint to a canvas would transform his original vision of reality into an idea that would give rise to an image different from the original form. In a 1964 interview, Hopper noted "the imperfection of the means" of painting; "the inert brute manner of the pigment annihilates the idea or memory, or precursory image as it is given form."<sup>32</sup> A few years earlier, he had told *Time* magazine, "I've never been able to paint what I set out to paint."<sup>33</sup> Hopper would start out with an idea garnered from his sometimes voyeuristic observation of people, and in the process of painting, his emotions and inner feelings would change his idea of truth and reality into a new idea that was more intimate than the original concept. He saw one idea, and in the process of painting, when that idea passed through the filters of his mind, it was transformed into something else.<sup>34</sup>

### **Hopper and the American Scene Painters**

American Scene Painters, as a whole, were also considered realists, as they too depicted scenes from nature and from everyday life in a naturalistic and descriptive style. The artistic movement with which these painters are associated emerged during the Great Depression of the 1930s, a period of economic hardship and political liberalism in the United States. These Regionalists concentrated on painting "intrinsically 'American' themes" that countered the more radical styles of European modernism such as the Surrealism of Salvador Dalí and René Magritte.

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Brian O'Doherty, "Portrait: Edward Hopper," *Art in America*, 52, 6 (December 1964), 77.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in "The Silent Witness," *Time*, 68, 26 (December 24, 1956), 39.

<sup>34</sup> Junker 2009, 11-13.

The European modernists concentrated more on the distortion of reality rather than the depiction of reality.<sup>35</sup>

The term “American Scene Painting” is, in fact, an umbrella term for the urban and politically oriented Social Realists which included artists such as Ben Shahn, and the rural and nationalistic American Regionalists such as Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton, the latter of whom is the most prominent American Scene Painter. Nevertheless, both of these groups of artists conveyed a romanticism of everyday American life in reaction to the European avant-garde, and they actively portrayed a social message in their art that aimed to boost American morale during a harsh economic period. According to Erika Doss, their aesthetic principle – particularly that of Benton – was “the art of social contract, of painting in a narrative mode for a public audience.”<sup>36</sup> For example, Benton’s 1938-39 *Threshing Wheat* (Figure 1) portrayed the American farmer as an important element of American society by providing much-needed food for a country in the midst of a depression. Many of these artists, including Benton, were employed under the Federal Art Project (FAP), whose public role was to boost American morale through the promotion of art. A subdivision of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which was a social program created under the New Deal plan of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration, the Federal Art Project enabled many major American

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<sup>35</sup> H.H. Arnason and Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *History of Modern Art*, 6 ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc., 2010), 380.

<sup>36</sup> Erika Doss, “From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism: Modern Art and Consensus Politics in Postwar America,” in Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 325.

painters to develop their talent and survive under such hardship. The WPA and the FAP hoped to achieve this through the advocacy of New Deal politics<sup>37</sup>

One example of this genre was Benton's 1930 mural cycle *America Today* (Figure 2). The series, commissioned for the third-floor boardroom of the New School for Social Research in New York City, depicts a cross-section of working America through images based on Benton's travel sketches from the 1920s. Among the conglomeration of figures in these murals are farmers, coal miners, steelworkers, construction workers, and doctors. The scenes in the murals range from rural America to its bustling cities, and celebrate the development of new technology and labor in all regions of America. They display various scenes in American life from workers toiling in industrial settings to citizens involved in leisurely activity. All of these panels were designed to promote a positive image of an American society in the throes of a depression. The success of these murals provided the impetus for the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression.<sup>38</sup>

These murals differ significantly from Hopper's paintings both in style and subject matter. Benton's murals are large-format paintings that represent composites of overlaying multiple scenes within one frame which is typical of murals. The figures are exaggeratedly muscular and oddly overdeveloped. The lighting of each scene is evenly distributed with no visible light source. Benton's

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<sup>37</sup> Arnason and Mansfield 2010, 380.

<sup>38</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "AXA Equitable Donates America Today, Thomas Hart Benton's Epic Mural Cycle Celebrating Life in 1920s America, to Metropolitan Museum." Last modified December 11, 2012. [metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/press-room/news/2012/benton](http://metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/press-room/news/2012/benton).

varied but subdued color palette is “tawdrily emphatic” and produces a dramatic reaction from the viewer.<sup>39</sup> These characteristics contrast with Hopper whose paintings are in a much smaller format. The subject matter of Hopper’s paintings is usually one or two figures that illustrate or convey a single concept. For Hopper, the control of light - especially sunlight - was essential to the creation of dramatic effects. His color palette was more varied and much more intense than that of Benton.

Perhaps the most important objection Hopper had to his label as an American Scene Painter was his refusal to use his art as a medium for social commentary. Instead, he wanted the narratives expressed in his art to be ambiguous. “I never tried to do the American Scene as Benton and Curry,” he once said, adding, “I think the American Scene Painters caricatured America. I always wanted to do [an expression of] myself.”<sup>40</sup> He rejected participation in President Roosevelt’s Federal Art Project because he did not want his paintings to be used as commentary or to promote a particular idea. Rather, he wanted his art to be an extension of himself, a “synthesis of [his] inner experience.”<sup>41</sup> The role of the artist, according to Hopper, was to express himself through his work.

However, critics often labeled Hopper as an American Scene Painter even though he disliked this categorization. When describing Hopper’s work, Lloyd Goodrich claimed that his art was based more on objectivity than subjectivity, as

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 443.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Carole Troyen, *Edward Hopper* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), 166.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Hopper to Charles H. Sawyer (October 19, 1939). Quoted in Troyen 2007, 206.

Benton's work was more subjective. Like Benton's art, Hopper's work was based on American life, but unlike Benton's art, Hopper's art privileged the individual over the group.<sup>42</sup> Often, Hopper's works were snapshots of a scene much like a movie still. His figures are more realistically portrayed and set in a scene with no clear narrative which creates a sense of mystery for the viewer. For Hopper, the lighting of the scene was key to creating the inner emotions he was trying to portray. In a 1933 catalogue for an exhibition of his works at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, he wrote an essay describing the goals of his works in which he states, "My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impression of nature."<sup>43</sup>

### ***Office at Night* and Hopper's Artistic Process**

The several sketches involved in the production of Hopper's 1940 *Office at Night* (Figure 3) illustrate the artist's process from his original concept to the final painting. Hopper would often ride the "El" train which would wind above crowded roadways and pass many commercial buildings. One can imagine him looking down from his window seat on the train and peering into a window of an office where people were working. From this first-hand observation, Hopper would then draw a preliminary sketch in his studio from the memory of what he saw. He usually produced these preliminary sketches with black conté crayon. The first sketch for *Office at Night* (Figure 4) shows a rather mundane office scene with a man sitting at his desk and a woman standing. They seem to be working together. However, in the

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<sup>42</sup> Troyen 2007, 203.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Llorens and Ottinger 2012, 270.

second sketch for *Office at Night* (Figure 5), Hopper has slightly changed the perspective. The viewer now sees the office from above at a more acute angle. The woman is now facing towards the seated man who has turned away from the woman and is facing his desk. In the final painting (Figure 3), Hopper adds a diagonal shaft of light to highlight the woman whose curvaceous body the artist emphasizes. There is a sense of sexual energy in the final painted version.<sup>44</sup> The emergence of the American woman into the workforce created, in the mind of some men, expectations of “sexual forthrightness.” The final version of Hopper’s *Office at Night* is a long way from the original, unremarkable sketches, and according to Carol Troyen, it describes Hopper’s sexual longings.<sup>45</sup>

### **Influence from the Symbolist Movement**

Hopper also avidly read nineteenth-century French literature and philosophy. He was particularly influenced by the writings of Charles Baudelaire whose ideas formed the foundation for Hopper’s philosophy on what art was supposed to achieve and how to achieve that goal. Baudelaire was a nineteenth-century French poet whose writings led to the symbolist movement and influenced a generation of poets including Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé. In his essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire proposed a theory of beauty which stated that beauty is made up of two elements: one that is eternal and one that is

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<sup>44</sup> In a 2007 exhibition catalogue, Carol Troyen writes that Hopper’s pictures describe “erotic yearnings and inevitable disappointments.” See Troyen 2007, 193.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

circumstantial. The eternal element, or soul, of art is invariable while the circumstantial is constantly changing.<sup>46</sup>

According to Baudelaire, however, the viewer cannot perceive beauty without the combination of the two elements. He uses the following example to illustrate this duality: If a viewer were to examine a piece of religious art, he or she can only perceive the beauty that it contains if he or she understands the “discipline of the religion” to which it belongs.<sup>47</sup> All art that is understood as beautiful is defined by the cultural elements, fashion, morals, and emotions through which it is filtered. Baudelaire then speaks of the artist as a *flâneur*, “a passionate lover of crowds and incognitos” and also as a dandy, who “first and foremost has the burning need to create for oneself a personal originality.”<sup>48</sup>

For Hopper, Baudelaire’s theories became the foundation upon which he built his artistic oeuvre. Two oil paintings that illustrate this strong influence are the 1929 *Railroad Sunset* (Figure 6) and the 1927 *Automat* (Figure 7). According to Pamela Koob, the former seems to be a pictorial representation of a poem by Baudelaire titled “Evening Harmony.” The poem describes the sky as an “altar, sad and magnificent” and the sun as “drowning in curdled blood.”<sup>49</sup> The painting depicts a sunset which provides the background for a railroad line and switchman’s house. Hopper uses a strong and intense color palette to depict the sunset which contrasts

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” translated and edited by Jonathon Mayne, in Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>49</sup> Pamela N. Koob, “States of Being: Edward Hopper and Symbolist Aesthetics,” *American Art*, 18, 3 (Fall 2004), 57.

with the dull and somber tones of the railroad line and house. The strong horizontal elements of the railroad line and the clouds of the sunset dominate the painting.

Hopper breaks up this element with two vertical objects: the switchman's house and a telephone pole. The subject of this work appears to be a sunset, but in fact, it might be the artist's reaction to this sunset instead. In keeping with Baudelaire's Symbolist concept of never speaking of an object directly, Hopper achieves a certain ambiguity in his work.<sup>50</sup> He relies on the viewer's interpretation to provide the circumstantial elements along with the eternal elements necessary to perceive beauty.

On the other hand, *Automat* (Figure 7) is a painting that illustrates a theme repeated frequently in Hopper's paintings. It shows a solitary figure of a woman seated at a table in what appears to be an automat. The natural light that enters from what might be the entrance doors, along with the artificial light from above, illuminates the solitary figure and emphasizes her presence as the central theme of this work. Compared with that of *Railroad Sunset* (Figure 6), Hopper's color palette in this work is muted, and it lends a more somber tone to the scene. The woman is dressed in a manner that is consistent with the prevailing fashion of the time which gives the work an historical context. The viewer is left to wonder whether Hopper is trying commenting on the newly liberated woman who has entered the workforce and is now free to enter an establishment and sit by herself, as some critics have suggested, or whether Hopper is being true to Baudelaire's concept of the artist "as a

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<sup>50</sup> Following Baudelaire's concept, Stéphane Mallarmé wrote, "To name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem which is designed to be revealed little by little." See Koob 2004, 58.



creature resistant to the utilitarian and materialism of modern times” that depicts figures of resistance: apathetic individuals, deep in thought, proud of their solitude. Hopper favored introspection and self-reflection over “the positive representation of commercial illustration.”<sup>51</sup>

### **The Question of Isolation**

In his works, Hopper repeatedly avoids any objectification of his subjects. For him, suggestion is the tool he uses to create a sense of mystery and to engage the viewer. As a result of this, critics and art historians have developed multiple interpretations of his works. In many of these analyses, isolation and alienation are recurring themes of Hopper’s paintings. For example, Linda Nochlin provides a lengthy explanation of what she sees as the primary narrative of Hopper’s 1940 work *Gas* (Figure 8): alienation.

*Gas* depicts a gas station located on an isolated country road. Pictured in the center of the frame is a gas station attendant who looks as if he has just finished assisting a customer. The background is non-descriptive and is painted using subdued colors so as not to take away from the central focus of the work, the attendant and the gas pumps. Hopper uses a rectangular format that is broken by the verticality of the central focus. The artificial shafts of light emanating from the structure to the right illuminate the scene, a technique always important to Hopper.

Nochlin claims that the scene “bodies forth a sense of alienation from history as a shared past.” The mobility of American society through the widespread use of

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<sup>51</sup> Troyen 2007, 118; Llorens and Ottinger 2012, 27.

the automobile was a relatively new phenomenon with no historical record and a new moment in shared American history. Secondly, she writes that the image “embodies an obvious isolation of self from community.” Because this scene is a snapshot of a country road at night, there are no other signs of other people or homes in the area. Thirdly, Nochlin states that *Gas* “suggests the alienation of the man-made and human realms from nature.”<sup>52</sup>

Instead of the sense of isolation and alienation that Nochlin sees, I would offer an alternative explanation more in keeping with Hopper’s Symbolist roots in Baudelaire who would never refer to an object directly. This is a scene of peace and solitude, an opportunity to reflect inwardly on oneself and the material world we live in. The gas pump is an iconic symbol of the rise of American materialism, signaling for some an uncertain future. Although this explanation seems more in keeping with Hopper’s tendency towards introspection, Nochlin’s interpretation of the scene as conveying a sense of alienation is just as valid because Hopper chose to provide an ambiguous narrative and leave the interpretation up to the viewer.

### ***Nighthawks***

During Hopper’s career, his work was subjected to various criticisms and analyses. However, one element that is not disputed about his oeuvre is that all his paintings depict scenes of everyday American life. Hopper gathered his material from his observations. He was the consummate *flâneur* living and working most of his life in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. Many of his

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<sup>52</sup> Linda Nochlin, “Edward Hopper and the Imagery of Alienation,” *Art Journal*, 41, 2, Edward Hopper Symposium at the Whitney Museum of American Art (Summer 1981), 136.

paintings were scenes from this area. Among these works is *Nighthawks* (Figure 9), one of his most iconic paintings which Hopper produced in 1942 shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The scene appears to be a summary of all of his past efforts. Hopper admitted in an interview with Katherine Kuh that the inspiration for this work was a restaurant on New York's Greenwich Avenue.<sup>53</sup> He is also quoted as saying, "[*Nighthawks*] is one of the very best things I have painted."<sup>54</sup>

*Nighthawks*, which measures 33 1/8" x 60" (84.137 cm x 152.4 cm), provides a wide-angle street-level view of a well-lit diner on an otherwise darkened street. The building that contains the diner protrudes out into the street, forming what appears to be a peninsula jutting into the neighborhood. As with many of his other works, Hopper makes use of the architectural diagonals to define the composition and to focus the viewer's attention on the subjects within the diner: the vertical post that supports the edge of the building that breaks the horizontal elements; the vertical elements of the frame holding the large expanse of glass; and the two large coffee urns on the counter.

Inside the diner are four enigmatic figures whose only relationship to each other is that they share a common location. A man dressed in a business suit has his back to the viewer, adding a sense of mystery to the scene. The man and woman sitting together appear to be a couple, but the man stares off into the distance, and the woman whose hand is almost touching the man's stares at a piece of paper she holds in her right hand. The counter attendant looks up while continuing his work.

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<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Robert Hobbs, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), 129.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Troyen 2007, 195.

All of these elements create the ambiguity of narrative for which Hopper was well known.

The overhead commercial lights, which not only fill the interior scene but also pour out into the street, provide the lighting for this scene. This connects the diner to the otherwise darkened surrounding buildings. For Hopper, light was always a device he used not only to connect the elements of his composition but also to express emotion, especially as he did in *Railroad Sunset*. Although the original idea for this work was inspired by an actual location, the artist's goal of depicting truth and reality gives way in the process of the creation of an image, which has evolved more into a depiction of Hopper's inner feelings, possibly concerning the recent attack on Pearl Harbor. There are more than eighteen preliminary sketches that still exist and show the progression of the work.

Both the critics and Hopper himself provide some insight into the message *Nighthawks* was supposed to deliver to the viewer. In accord with the artist's intention, the painting provides no clear narrative. Curator Frederick Sweet adds to this notion with his comments that Hopper "presents no social problems, crusades for no cause, [and] airs neither grudges nor ambitions."<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, for critic Robert Hobbs, the "diner represents a move towards a mechanized future and people who still exhibit an untamed restlessness."<sup>56</sup> The art historian Judith Barter provides a slightly different interpretation and sees the work in the context of the time in which it was painted. Hopper began work on *Nighthawks* right after the Pearl Harbor attack. She says, "Hopper chose to paint a picture of a brightly lit diner,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 209.

<sup>56</sup> Hobbs 1987, 131.

without blackout shades or any other protection to prevent flying shards of glass.”<sup>57</sup>

Hopper was a fiercely independent individual with a strong sense of patriotism but wary of an over-controlling government. Barter also states that “Hopper was clearly a conservative...a man who believed in a social contract based on individual liberties and property.” He was an ardent critic of the New Deal and “big-government policies.”<sup>58</sup> With that in mind, it makes sense that *Nighthawks* was Hopper’s way of saying that he was not afraid and that America would prevail.

Over the course of his career, Edward Hopper developed a style that allowed him to transform scenes he observed as he moved through neighborhoods into works that would convey his inner feelings and emotions. Because Hopper chose to create works that had no clear narrative, his art consistently provides the viewer with a strong visual experience which allows for his or her personal interpretation.

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<sup>57</sup> Troyen 2007, 195.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 205.

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Figure 1: Thomas Hart Benton – *Threshing Wheat* (1938-39)  
Sheldon Swope Art Museum, Terre Haute, IN.



Figure 2: Thomas Hart Benton – *America Today* (Detail) (1930)  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY





Figure 3: Edward Hopper – *Office at Night* (1940)  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN



Figure 4: Edward Hopper – Study for *Office at Night* No. 1 (1940)  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY



Figure 5: Edward Hopper – Study for *Office at Night* No. 2 (1940)  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY



Figure 6: Edward Hopper – *Railroad Sunset* (1929)  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY





Figure 7: Edward Hopper – *Automat* (1927)  
Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, IA



Figure 8: Edward Hopper – *Gas* (1940)  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY



Figure 9: Edward Hopper – *Nighthawks* (1942)  
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

# “My Essay Shall Be Brief”

**Brandon Dove**

Generally speaking, the language and imagery in Dante’s *Inferno* move in a linear progressive way that is similar to most other aspects of the poem. Its large scale pattern is that as the poet descends downward and inward, the sins of the damned souls become more severe, the punishments in effect grow more cruel, and simile, metaphor, and detailed language are used more extensively. However, whether intentionally or unintentionally, this scheme and order are interrupted at a number of points within the poem. In such passages, the hierarchy of sins becomes questionable, as does their corresponding punishments, and the language may be abnormally descriptive or un-descriptive. Furthermore, while one would expect by following such a linear scheme might suggest that the darkest, most climactic passage of the poem would be at the center of Hell with Satan, that is far from the case.

If readers were searching for the true essence of the *Inferno*, of darkness and of miserable suffering, of metaphor and of disturbing imagery, they may not find it at the conclusion but rather in the middle ring of the seventh circle: the forest of the suicides. Through the use of skillful language, gruesome imagery, and a conglomeration of resonances, the speech given by the soul-tree Pier della Vigna contains some of the poem’s most powerful lines. Upon a close look at the words



and through the words, the passage establishes itself as one of the darkest moments in the *Inferno*.

When the ferocious soul deserts the body  
after it has wrenched up its own roots,  
Minos condemns it to the seventh gulch. (XIII, 94-96)

Already in the first tercet of Pier's speech, the language gives the notion of suicide an extremely dark tone. Fittingly, the idea of the soul choosing and carrying out its own suicide is presented quite violently. The soul has become *ferocious*, brutally savage, even inhuman. Accordingly, it *deserts* its own body, shamelessly leaving no trace behind.

Dante brilliantly ties this act of utter disconnect between soul and body in with the prevailing forest metaphor of the seventh circle, creating the violent image of the roots of a tree being scornfully shredded to pieces. The use of alliteration in the English translation also supports the harshness of the imagery, where the lively *roots* of one's own self-being are *wrenched*, tattered beyond repair. After this act has occurred, Minos, the guardian of the seventh circle, *condemns* or dooms the soul to the forest. The word consigns a strong sense of conviction to the act, a conviction which rests entirely out of the hands of the spirit.

It falls into the forest, in a spot not chosen,  
but flung by fortune, helter-skelter,  
it fastens like a seed. (XIII, 97-99)

Here again the use of alliteration in combination with expressive description makes for very powerful imagery. *Falls* and *forest*, *flung* and *fortune*, and finally *fastens* all invoke a particular roughness within the action. The consistent reoccurrence of the consonant seems to allude to the tight, helpless, uncontrollable

nature of the image. The soul, having relinquished all control by dicing up its own roots (which connect it to both its own body and to the vine of God), is carelessly flung into the air by fortune before powerlessly landing in the forest wherever it falls. The image of being flung around in this manner, uncontrollably suspended in air, is fittingly disorienting and rootless. The flinging helps to convey the sense of relinquishment, as does the hurried and confused nature of the phrase *helter skelter*. Upon landing wherever fortune decides, the soul quickly fastens like a seed. Using the word in combination with the continuing tree and forest metaphor makes for a firm rootedness which balances the suspended rootlessness of the first half of the tercet, while still emphasizing the soul's helplessness and lack of control throughout.

It spreads into a shoot, then a wild thicket.  
The Harpies, feeding on its leaves,  
give pain and to that pain a mouth. (XIII, 100-102)

If the overall atmosphere of the first tercet of Pier's speech may be summarized through its detailed language and imagery as violent, and the second as helpless, then the third tercet may be described as inwardly painful. The first line alone invokes a number of painful or discomforting ideas. The seeded soul bursts and stretches apart, sprouts, and *spreads* into a rough and scrappy thorn-bush. While Dante did not specify whether or not this is a painful experience for the soul, one can safely assume in the context that no part of the process is intended to assuage the suicidal spirit.

The second image, of the wretched Harpies feeding upon the shrub-bodies of the souls, more blatantly appeals to one's senses in terms of pain and misery. The

cannibalistic nature of the feeding is quite unsettling; the souls' bodies are continually mutilated, eaten alive for an eternity. Dante makes the painful image even more twisted with the addition of the Virgilian idea of speech coming along with the running blood. The immobile souls are unable to speak, save the words that are able to ooze out of their bleeding wounds. They are eternally given pain, and their pain is given a mouth to eternally speak of pain.

We will come to claim our cast-off bodies  
like the others. But it would not be just if we again  
put on the flesh we robbed from our own souls. (XIII, 103-105)

In contrast to the intensely physical, painful imagery of the previous tercet of the speech, this tercet really captures the evocative sorrow that the suicides undergo. As in other parts of the speech, the English translation makes great use of alliteration to express part of the idea. On Judgment Day, the suicides will *come* to *claim* their *cast-off* bodies, just as all other souls will. *Come* and *claim* phonetically support the skillful use of *cast-off* in describing the suicides' bodies. *Cast-off* makes for a meaningful reiteration of the idea of complete relinquishment of the body, where the body is like an empty ship that the soul has already sent off to sea, never to return.

It is balanced by the word *robbed* in the second half of the tercet. The souls are irrevocably aware that they themselves are completely responsible for their own misery. *Robbed* implies a sense of intrusion to the internal world from the external world. But the suicidal spirit is at once both the victim and the perpetrator – they intruded on the sanctity of their own soul and snatched away their own flesh. For this reason, they know that they will never be able to inhabit again the bodies

they have stolen from themselves. It is a sorrowful recognition that the soul knows will never change.

Here shall we drag it, and in this dismal wood  
our bodies will be hung, each one  
upon the thorn-bush of its painful shade. (XIII, 106-108)

The final tercet paints a picture of the suicides' experience that is by far the darkest. The first image, of the soul *dragging* the body across the rough ground of the dreary woods, is already extremely unsettling. The body, once a sanctuary, is not carefully carried but instead shamefully dragged across the forest floor. One can visualize the image of a distraught soul hunched over, gripping the disheveled corpse by an outer limb and hauling the dead weight through the forest.

As if the scene wasn't already dark enough, the bodies are then hung upon their corresponding souls' trees and thorn-bushes. It is as if the hanging body is to be seen as a repetition of the act of suicide itself and/or as a tombstone to mark each suffering soul in this graveyard of vines and thorns. Thereafter, the soul, the *painful shade*, will silently exist in perfect misery. As it lives on in infinite pain, it will be forced to continually look upon the dreadful body which dangles from its limbs, forever rootless and suspended in air. There, in that intensely disturbing scene, the soul and the body will remain, eternally separated.

The speech in its entirety contains a number of interesting resonances. In fact, this passage in particular serves to be an effective representation of how the entire work is in conversation with the biblical texts, with the pre-existing epics, and with itself.

One of the points Dante seems to be emphasizing through his use of intensely descriptive and disturbing imagery is that suicide is not just an appalling act against oneself. It is an even more appalling act against God. Abusing and abandoning the body, a sacred sanctuary created in God's own image, in such a severe way is a direct abuse against God. For these reasons, the suicidal spirits are thrown around and treated equally as maliciously and carelessly as they have treated their own God-given bodies. The imagery as a whole is full of biblical resonances and perversions of such: the general biblical ideas of the interconnected vine of God, the fruit-bearing seed and the cutting of the branches which bear no fruit, a direct opposite of the Garden of Eden, and even crucifixion all are presented in perverted forms within the passage. The dragging bodies, the thorn-bushes, and the hangings altogether appear to echo the image of Christ, crowned in thorns, dragging the cross and eventually being crucified. Whereas Christ's crucifixion represents love, sacrifice, resurrection, and eternal connection, Dante's perversion of the image represents disdain, suicide, and eternal separation.

Such clear conversation with Christianity and Christian notions are expected, since the work operates in part as an allegory. However, the work also operates entirely on its own, through its language, as a poem in the epic tradition. Accordingly, it contains conversation and resonances of the epics and of mythology. Mythology is perhaps most clearly referred to through Dante's use of mythological beings as guardians of each ring. In the context of this passage, Minos guards the seventh circle of the Violent and is the one who condemns suicidal spirits to the gulch. The wrenching of roots, the bleeding man-tree, and the speech escaping with

blood all pay homage to Virgil, who is of course Dante's guide within the Inferno. Here in this passage, Dante also fittingly uses the forest as a nest for Virgil's Harpies. Meanwhile, the entire notion of metamorphosis within Canto XIII, with the forest full of seed-souls spreading into thickets and trees, clearly contains traces of Ovid. Finally, the dragging of the body across the dismal wood may not only be seen in the context of Christ during the Passion, but also in the Homeric context of Hector's body being dragged around the city of Troy by Achilles (an episode also known to Dante through *The Aeneid* 2.482-4).

Most importantly, the passage contains resonances which are prevalent throughout the text itself. The first is the notion of a punishment which fits its crime, which is demonstrated the most strongly and with the most detail in this Canto. The punishments suffered by the suicides quite blatantly reflect the sin they committed, piece by piece. This code of "eye for an eye" is generally a constant for the entirety of Hell.

This passage also reinstitutes the prevailing notion of pity and pathos. Within the gruesome punishments in the forest, Dante regains the intense pity he gradually abandons on his way down to this point. Throughout, Virgil repeatedly chastises Dante for showing pity in order to stress the importance of God's justice. But for the audience of this poem, humane tendencies prevail, and instances such as these connect Dante with the listener or reader. It is of course fitting then that one of the most pathetic images of the entire poem is that of Satan, crying and acting mechanically at the frozen center of Hell.

All in all, the passage is a strong example of all of the elements which make up the *Inferno*, particularly through its descriptive language, resonance, and prevailing themes. To conclude on an appropriately dark note, it is a bit fascinating (and perhaps chilling) to observe the disturbing level of detail with which Dante describes the forest and the experiences of the suicides. While Dante does not spend an abnormally long amount of time describing this middle ring of the seventh circle (particularly in comparison to the three Cantos he devotes to the bolgia of barrators), it certainly comes across through its use of metaphor and caliber of detail as the darkest Canto in the poem. A final resonance found within the dark woods of the seventh circle is that of the opening lines of the poem. Halfway through life, Dante finds himself lost in a dark wood, one which is savage, dense, harsh, and just about as bitter as death itself. Taking into account these observations along with the knowledge of Dante's excommunication from his beloved city at this point in his life, one might ponder about the implications of this opening passage of the *Inferno*, or what Dante might have been considering before he made the positive decision to embark on his spiritual and poetic journey to Paradise and the stars.

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# A Comparison of Ignazio Silone's *Bread and Wine* and Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*

Annemarie Correa

During the 1920s and 1930s, Mussolini established a fascist police state in Italy that dominated politics, economics, and everyday life. Retrospectively and at the time, activists and foreigners questioned the silent compliance of the Italian public in the face of Mussolini's often unreasonable and disastrous decisions, especially the war in Ethiopia. Both Silone and Levi had firsthand experiences with Mussolini's fascist Italy, and each composed his respective work from these experiences. Silone's *Bread and Wine* follows the fugitive Pietro Spina as he avoids the fascist police and seeks ways to continue resistance. Though Silone draws largely from his own life to create Spina's character and experiences, his work is not a memoir but rather an historical fiction. The author weaves fictional elements into his story such as names and symbols along with events he has experienced and stories he has heard. On the other hand, Carlo Levi's memoir *Christ Stopped at Eboli* chronicles his time spent as a political prisoner in Gagliano, a small village in southern Italy. He sketches individual moments and overall descriptions to convey his own experiences. Both writers analyze the Italian peasants' silent acceptance of fascism, and argue, both directly and indirectly, what course of action should have or could have been taken by the individual, the community, and global institutions.



Levi was “Born of an upper middle class family, [and] graduated in medicine but did not enter the profession, because his privileged economic position allowed him not to. He preferred spending his time developing his passion for painting and politics” (*Italica*). Levi’s early life plays a significant role in his perception of the town of Gagliano in his memoir. He is shocked at its citizens’ isolation and cannot help but cast his artistic eye on their predicament. Like Silone, Levi clashed with fascism and suffered the consequences. His biography describes his political activism and notes that he not only joined liberal organizations, but also wrote for several radical leftist papers (*Italica*). The Editor’s Preface [anonymous] to an early edition of *Christ Stopped at Eboli* published by *Time Magazine* in 1964 further describes the consequence of his political activism: “Levi had been exiled there [to Gagliano] in 1935, after a period of imprisonment for opposing the Mussolini dictatorship.”

Levi guides the reader through southern Italy using descriptions of the country and multiple characters rather than relying on the plot or a single character to drive the story. He acts as an emotionally withdrawn observer as he describes the Italy he sees during his time in Gagliano. Immediately, he sees the region as “a sea of chalk” (5) thereby preparing the reader for the monotony the author will repeatedly experience during his time in Gagliano. Throughout his memoir, Levi emphasizes how the dullness of the landscape reflects the dullness of peasant life.

While Levi is clearly anti-fascist, his political inclinations are not entirely clear for the majority of the novel. He is critical of the local officials, in particular mayor Luigi Magalione, who strives to please the fascists in order to maintain his

position of power in the community (12-13). Again, in the Editor's Preface in an early edition of the novel, "Levi himself has been described as an anarchist – from time to time he has engaged in the politics of the far Left....But he is not telling us about its people just to argue the anarchist position." Indeed, Levi's political views remain largely hidden from the reader, with the exception of the introduction, Chapter 14, and the conclusion. In fact, as the Preface notes, political figures outside of Gagliano itself are almost entirely absent.

Even as Levi recounts his contact with the fascist police and his moment of exile, he states without emotion that "I was wearing handcuffs and I was escorted by two stalwart servants of the State with vertical red bands on their trousers, and expressionless faces" (5). He does not take the opportunity to criticize the regime, to provide reasons for his exile, or to hint at his political tendencies. Rather, he briefly describes his arrival at Gagliano and then proceeds to describe the landscape. Much of his memoir continues in a similar fashion with detailed and objective descriptions which are void of his political beliefs.

Levi's detailed and lengthy descriptions of Gagliano and its inhabitants demonstrate the central role that mysticism plays in every aspect of peasant life and its influence on their political resignation. These citizens "do not have political awareness because they are literally *pagani*, "pagans," or countryman....The deities of the State and city can find no worshippers here on the land...where there is no wall between the world of men and the world of animals and spirits" (77). Levi carefully details the mystical elements that the peasants ascribe to seemingly ordinary occurrences. In particular, he uses the opportunity of his arrival with his

dog to discuss the mysticism of the peasant culture. When the peasants see his dog for the first time, Levi notes that “the peasants, who live immersed in animal magic were immediately aware of his mysterious nature. They had never seen such a beast.” Further, he notes after they name the dog that “In these parts names have a meaning and a magic power; they are not mere empty conventional syllables, but have a reality of their own and a potential influence” (116). To the peasants of Gagliano, mystical forces are more important than political actions of the state, and have greater influence over daily events.

Rather than use descriptions to reiterate a political message, Levi uses descriptions to highlight the desolation and gloominess of his surroundings. In one instance, he says that “An animal-like enchantment lay over the deserted village. In the midday silence a sudden noise revealed a sow rolling in a pile of garbage; then the echoes were awakened by the shattering outburst of a donkey’s braying, more resonant than the church bell in its weird, phallic anguish” (65). By highlighting both the sounds and sights of the visible landscape, Levi emphasizes the lonely, mystical, and isolated tone of the village. The echoing bell, the braying donkey, the “pile of garbage” and the “deserted village” create the lonely and gloomy nature of Gagliano, while the presence of the church and the “animal-like enchantment” preserve the town’s sense of mysticism. Through comprehensive and finely tuned descriptions, Levi masterfully weaves the landscape of Gagliano that dominates the whole of his memoir.

However, Levi’s long sections of description and his restraint from declaring his political beliefs underline the rare moments when he does make a political

argument. In fact, he reveals his conclusions about the peasantry and their lifestyle in the context of Italy almost entirely in his 14 chapter, located about halfway through the memoir. Interestingly, an event occurring outside Italy triggers Levi's reflection on the situation of the peasantry in Gagliano. After the announcement of Mussolini's new war in Africa, Levi says that "On the wall of the town hall, next to the balcony, was a white marble stone with the names of all those who had died in the World War....[N]ot a single house had been spared; besides there were the sick and wounded and those who came back safe and sound" (135). The description of the wall and his observation of the names and their implications initially coincide with Levi's style for the majority of the memoir. However, his own voice of frustration and confusion emerges as he questions "How did it happen, then, that in my talks with the peasants no one ever mentioned the war, even spoke of his own accomplishments, the places he had seen, and the suffering he had undergone" (135)? Levi had never questioned the peasants' actions previously, and had simply described his observations to the reader. His sudden decision to question the peasants' tacit compliance to Mussolini's war draws attention to his own beliefs: how can an individual, and an entire town for that matter, accept a decision that they must have known was futile and horrific after experiencing it firsthand?

While Levi initially seems shocked, or at least befuddled, the peasants' response corresponds with the landscape and tone of Gagliano he had established in the first half of his memoir. He says that "they [the peasants] answered briefly and with indifference. The whole thing had been a great misfortune, and they had borne it like the rest....This other world is stronger and better organized and they must

submit to it" (135-36). Throughout the entire novel, Levi confirms the solitary and glum nature of Gagliano starting with descriptions of the landscape at the beginning of the memoir. He concludes that "Their only defense against the State and the propaganda of the State is resignation, the same gloomy resignation, alleviated by no hope of paradise" (76). Hence, Levi and consequently the reader, recognize in full the implications of the isolation and remoteness of the people of Gagliano; they are powerless to influence external events, and therefore, choose to adapt and survive rather than resist.

Though Levi questions the peasants' silent compliance with the will of the fascist government, he also takes no action to resist or encourage any subtle forms of resistance in others. He does not seek to change the peasants or to inform them of events outside of their community. However, he gives no clear explanation as to why. It may be that like the peasants of Gagliano, he recognizes that resistance is futile. Perhaps the goal of his novel is not to criticize or call for action, but simply to present Gagliano, and to allow his readers to draw their or her own conclusions. Or perhaps Levi tries to provide his readers with a better understanding of the Italian peasants under fascism. While he may not guide the reader to form any particular political position against fascism, he may have recognized that outsiders may not understand, as he once did, why none of the Italian peasants took any serious action against fascist demands. Consequently, he embodies Gagliano in his memoir to provide an indirect explanation for the absence of resistance without explicitly agreeing with the inaction.

While Silone had an experience with the fascists similar to Levi's, he takes a more straightforward stance against fascism and argues for political action. Silone, like Levi, was actively anti-fascist. His biography describes how "he engaged in political activism as a socialist and took part in the struggles against the war and in the activities of the revolutionary worker movement; in 1921 in Livorno he was present at the founding of the Communist Party (that he represented in Moscow, with Togliatti, at the Komintern)" (*Italica*). Like Pietro Spina, he converted his political beliefs into action even before he became a writer. However, also like Spina, he soon found reasons to disagree and to become disillusioned with organized communism. Silone "renounced his membership in 1930, in disagreement with the Stalin purges. A staunch anti-fascist, he remained in exile in Switzerland from 1930 to 1945, the years when his vocation as a writer took hold" (*Italica*).

Silone uses the dynamic character of Pietro Spina to take the reader through 1936 Italy; the connections between Silone's own experience and Spina's character are clear throughout *Bread and Wine*. In the novel, Spina returns to Italy from exile to resist fascism and to promote socialism. He disguises himself as a priest and retreats to the Abruzzi region while he tries to contact the larger Communist Party to enlist their aid. As Spina struggles to maintain his disguise to the peasants, he also cannot help but ask leading questions to ascertain the political inclinations of the peasants and perhaps enlist their aid in the socialist cause. He initially begins with small conversations, particularly with Cristina. After his failure to encourage the Communist Party to take decisive action in Italy, he begins his own resistance independently, and is pursued by the fascists, as the ending implies, until his death.

Like Levi, Silone focuses on establishing the tone of the Abruzzi region to best contextualize the political activity: “The confused noises that floated up towards Rocca at sunset only increased the feeling of the village’s solitude and remoteness....[S]oon the narrow roads and alleys emptied again and Rocca resumed the appearance of a village of the dead” (7). While Silone does not focus as heavily on descriptions of the landscape as Levi does, he succinctly conveys the same tone of isolation and gloominess of the Abruzzi region. Like Levi, Silone also underlines the town’s isolation through a description of the garbage. He notes, “At the beginning of the alley there was an old notice board with the words: RUBBISH MUST NOT BE TIPPED HERE. But at that very spot there was a great pile of rubbish, broken crockery, kitchen refuse and other garbage” (63). While Spina initially interprets the garbage under the sign as a symbol of peasant resistance, his character soon recognizes the peasant’s isolation and acceptance of change.

Also like Levi, Silone notes the local mysticism that plays a central role in the peasants’ behavior, particularly through the use of Spina’s disguise as a priest. In one instance, a local woman, Theresa Scaraffa, begs Don Paulo to bless her unborn child because she dreamed it would be born blind. Don Paulo refuses to perform the blessing, but Theresa “rose like a fury and started yelling” as she tears out her hair and threatens to throw herself out the window (72-3). She reads the dream as a foreboding and hence takes radical action to obtain the grace needed to prevent the tragedy. Spina emphasizes that Theresa is not simply an exception, as he worries that “if he pretended to say prayers or carry out exorcism in one case the inn would be immediately besieged by other applicants whom it would be impossible to

refuse" (72). Hence, like Levi, Silone highlights the mystical beliefs of the peasants which they deem a more significant power than that of the State.

However, unlike Levi, Silone does not only analyze the role of spirituality on an individual, mystical level, but also analyzes the Catholic Church as an institution. By using priest as characters in his narrative as symbols of the greater Church organization, he places responsibility on the clergy to take a significant role in the resistance against fascism. Specifically, Silone creates a contrast between the role that the Church should take and the role it did take by showing the difference between the priests Don Benedetto and Don Piccirilli. In one conversation, Piccirilli declares that "From the purely spiritual point of view the scourge of our time, in my opinion, is immodesty in dress" (18). Because Don Piccirilli is younger than Don Benedetto, he symbolizes the current embodiment of the Church: the institution chooses to ignore the morality that is supposed to define it in favor of trite issues such as immodesty. On the other hand, Don Benedetto represents the more traditional and moral Church that is deeply rooted in conscience. Don Benedetto responds to Piccirilli by declaring "The scourge of our time...is – do I have to tell you? – insincerity between man and man, the pestilential Judas Iscariot spirit that poisons relations between man and man" (18). Through his response, Silone demonstrates the moral role that the Church should have played against the evils of fascism. Overall, Silone presents the Church at a local, historical, and institutional level to criticize its inaction in the face of true evil.

While Levi rarely situates Gagliano in the larger context of Italy, Spina explores the option of contacting the larger resistance movement through the



Communist Party. However, after making contact with them, he realizes that they will do nothing to help form the resistance movement in Italy. Instead, Spina becomes frustrated with the Party, as he demonstrates through his conversation with the regional party secretary, Battipaglia. Spina expresses his exasperation declaring “I find it so difficult to understand...how do you expect me to have an opinion on Russian agricultural policy, to disapprove of some views and approve of others” (163)? In essence, though Spina wants to support the Communist Party and desires their help in turn, their priorities are far from Italy, focused instead on the issues surrounding the Kremlin. Ultimately, though he could continue work with the Communist Party, Spina chooses to leave the Party because they will do nothing to help Italy and have drifted from their original goals of a global workers’ revolution. By exploring local politics as well as global politics, Silone adds a level of complexity and global relevance to his message.

While Silone explores the larger players of politics in Italy, such as the Communist Party, fascist forces, and the Catholic Church, he also addresses the local politics, albeit to a lesser but no less thorough extent than Levi. Like Levi, he also comes to a similar conclusion about the peasantry of Italy: while they can occasionally mock or question the regime, they choose to accept and endure the leadership rather than resist, as Spina does. Both Levi and Silone utilize the declaration of the war in Africa to highlight the peasants’ silent acceptance of Mussolini’s whims. Like Levi, Spina feels compelled to question the peasants’ acceptance as he asks “‘If you fall in the river, do you let yourself be carried along by the stream?’ the priest asked. Magasciá shrugged his shoulders....The others

listened and drank, bewildered, stupefied and silent" (194). While earlier the peasants had mocked the salute to Mussolini, they ultimately comply with the will of the State.

However, unlike Levi, Silone does not stop his criticism here, but instead presents Spina as the hero of the novel. Even though Spina cannot significantly alter Italy under Mussolini's regime, he nevertheless actively resists regardless of its personal consequences. Hence, while Levi does not choose to confront the intimidating and perhaps unanswerable question of what the individual is to do in the face of fascism and futility, Spina tackles the question head on. Ultimately, he concludes that the individual with the knowledge of right and wrong has the responsibility to take action because he must be a "man of conscience." For Spina, the best course of action is to continue resistance, even in seemingly minor ways. After writing charcoal messages against the regime on different locations in the town, he defends his actions as he explains "the dictatorship is based on unanimity....It's sufficient for one person to say no and the spell is broken" (207). While his actions may or not have a dramatic, widespread effect on Italy and will likely do little to bring about a Marxist revolution, he nevertheless takes action to show the regime and the public that resistance is possible, regardless of the consequences for himself.

Here is the clash between the two writers: Silone, or at least Spina, clearly advocates for individual resistance against fascism, while Levi does not directly advocate for any particular course of action. Hence, Silone's novel is more

rigorously driven by plot and character than Levi's which takes a more meandering approach to the question of the passive Italian public.

Levi guides the reader through southern Italy through his own first-person perspective. Unlike Silone, he chooses to write his work directly as a memoir rather than disguise his own experience through a fictional character. Even though this format would seem to lend itself to a deeper, more introspective work, Levi chooses instead to develop the character and landscape of Gagliano. While the objective descriptions may allow readers to draw their own conclusions about fascist Italy, the humanity of Pietro Spina's character connects the reader to Spina's cause emotionally, and hence makes his story and message more compelling. Additionally, Silone's choice to write a novel rather than a memoir allows him greater flexibility to utilize literary devices such as symbolism and irony, to underline the themes illustrated through the plot. Consequently, *Bread and Wine* has a greater literary complexity than *Christ Stopped at Eboli*.

Though Silone's and Levi's actions take place in Italy at the same time, the radical difference in their situations lead to stark differences between the approaches of their respective works. Spina is a fugitive and is constantly driven to take some form of action because of the immediate danger of the pursuing fascist police. The pacing of *Bread and Wine* is compounded by the political identification of the main character; Silone is a committed and active socialist. Because he has dedicated himself to the ideology of egalitarianism and anti-fascism, he feels compelled to take action. Hence, the pace of the novel becomes rapid, as Silone handles a myriad of complex questions and decisions in a comparatively brief work.

Levi's work is distinctly different than *Bread and Wine*. While Levi acts as the speaker of his memoir, he can hardly be defined as the main character. He is withdrawn and the plot does not center on his actions as clearly as it does for Spina. If any character can be identified as the main character, it would be Gagliano itself. Levi paints the landscape of a village by carefully focusing on precise details rather than painting a portrait of an individual. From this landscape, he accents larger themes about the political and social situation of southern Italy. Because Levi thoroughly illustrates every detail and character in his landscape rather than structure his work around a plot, the work as a whole takes on a slower pace. Ultimately, Levi is more like a painter than a novelist; he paints intricate details to pull the reader into his landscape in order to understand the daily life of the Italian peasants. Consequently, the reader can understand the mindset of the people and then apply that to the larger context of Italy.

Both Silone and Levi reach similar conclusions about the role of the individual and the community in the context of fascist Italy. Most striking, both authors accept the ultimate futility of individual resistance. While the conclusion of *Bread and Wine* is unclear, Spina is ultimately unable to take any action to seriously impact his environment. Every method he tries, whether it is collaboration with the external forces or individual actions, has no substantial effect on fascist dominance. Regardless, the reader is left to believe that Spina is indeed a "saint" and hence someone to be emulated, despite his failure to enact significant change. In short, Silone depicts resistance as admirable and the only acceptable action for men of conscience to take.

Levi similarly recognizes the helplessness of the individual and the community in the face of fascism, but his opinion about the best course of action remains largely hidden. While he clearly criticizes fascism, he also takes no action during the memoir to encourage resistance. Though it may seem that Levi advocates for a course of acceptance in order to weather fascism rather than to resist it, he also seems horrified and disgusted by the consequence of silent acceptance. The peasants of Gagliano become lifeless and monotonous as they silently continue to endure events as they occur. While Levi concludes with a criticism of the fascist system, he does not hint as to what course of action the individual should take, and chooses instead to simply present what he knows about the region.

When Levi's memoir and Silone's novel are placed side by side, Silone's work accomplishes the same goal as Levi's goal but more succinctly. More importantly, he never allows the reader lose sight of the larger contexts of Italy and Europe. Because of the pressure of Spina's situation, he is forced to get in contact with greater forces despite his location in a remote town in Italy. Consequently, the complex questions do not only apply to the Abruzzi region; they take on a global significance.

Ultimately, while Levi's book provides a complex landscape of Italy, Silone's novel delivers a landscape and more. He combines rich symbolism, characters, and setting in the larger historical context to highlight philosophical questions that define and provide a deeper insight into Italy under Mussolini's regime. While Carlo Levi masterfully paints a detailed landscape of Gagliano, Silone's *Bread and Wine*

surpasses Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* largely because of the scale of the task he undertakes; Silone analyzes Italian politics at all levels: not just the local but at the national and global level as well. While these three levels alone constitute an arduous task for any novelist, he adds a philosophical analysis of resistance while also incorporating a host of rich literary techniques to underline his overall political message. Hence, Silone weaves a more complex and holistic view of Italy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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# On Sight

**Joe Wasserman**

It's five in the morning when you yawn yourself awake. Quietly, with the covers thrown back, you scurry out of bed so as not to wake your father, but those damn stairs have been creaking since before you were walking, and a rustle and muffled cough make you stop and make an about face. You fear his waking early, his anger at your waking him, but that's it; nothing more comes from your dad's bed. You tiptoe downstairs.

Next is your mom. She won't be mad if you wake her, but she'd be worried why her little sweet tart is up and about so early in the morning in the dead of winter. Christmas has passed already and your birthday's not until March 4.

"What're you doing up?" she'd ask. "Can I do something for you?"

She's always got your back, but all you hear from her this morning is the slight snores that put you to sleep every time she holds you close on the couch as the two of you try to watch Nick at Nite. One cannot ever watch enough *Full House*, you think now; but when John Stamos is doing yogurt commercials, you'll be wishing to watch reruns of *ER* instead of the merciful Uncle Jesse.

You make it to the den or parlor or whatever its proper title is. Everything is dark, of course, but your eyes have adjusted enough to make out the recliner you never sit on and the broken loveseat in front of the old, failing television set. Luckily, you're the perfect size (for the time being) to curl up on that sofa and read or play

Pokémon to your heart's content. But you forget what brought you here to begin with and now you must be light on your feet yet again. Instead of wasting time and driving yourself anxiously over the plastic bin by your mother's bed in the living room, figure out what you want right now. Some Greek myths? The pictures are terrifying, but the stories are epic, the kind you hope to live someday. You've heard there's no time like the present, but you're too young to understand the truth in the cliché – or what a cliché is. And you know that there are the past and the future bookending the “no time,” but all you care about is the future and what it holds for you. (Spoiler alert: By the time you begin to personally see what the future has in store for you, you'll ironically be looking *only* for the past.) For now, just focus on what you want to read in the wee hours of the early urban morning.

You make yourself comfortable with that new book about a wizard boy. Santa brought the first four books of the series this past Christmas, and the longest book you've ever read was just 200 pages. In that one you learned all about Abe Lincoln and how great he is and why his birthday is a holiday. Maybe someday March 4 will be a holiday. Maybe someday, on the fourth of March years from now, you will be able to read whenever and whatever you want. You'll be able to buy your own books when you're able to write your own books. People will buy them to laugh and cry, and *feel*, too. Just pray your eyes don't go first with all this early morning reading in the dim light.

Glasses look cool, like miniature, wearable binoculars for people who want to see everything better, maybe so they can read and understand the world more. Your father has glasses, the clunky old-man kind that makes him look like a warlock with



greying hair. Don't get glasses like his, if you have to at all; you think you want them now but you will find them a nuisance come college when you have a smart, pretty, *funny* girl in your bed. You'll laugh and gently remove her glasses after the pair clicks before your first time together. Your being far-sighted makes you work to see her up close, but, damn, is she worth the extra strain. You'll think about how such an amazing person is giving herself to you and you'll question how it happened. All you'll remember is how you learned to appreciate a book at five in the morning during the winters of your youth; now you're just reading a text of the skin. Luckily you learned how to appreciate it and her for what they are all because you read about that wizard boy's adventures.

You hear the stairs creak and click the lamp off quickly. The book rests open on your pounding heart. Your father walks down, peers in the parlor, coughs obnoxiously, and continues on to the bathroom. *That went much better than last time*, you think as you rub your cheek.

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Age brings thicker lenses and more mundane frames. What matter is it to look like you did in your twenties when you have your life figured out? No need to court anyone, or impress any potential employers; everyone wants to impress *you*, the big man in the publishing house, the one who won't let that Ernest Hemingway obsessed writer get a page out with your name and logo on it. Besides, Hemingway's been dead for so long, and his machismo work is outdated and, frankly, sexist. In plain, anything that "struggling writer" brings you won't sell, so you won't waste more of *your* time to consider trying to sell it.

Everything is blurry when you take off your glasses. The room is a conglomerate of furnished mahogany browns and deep maroon leather, the generic kind that you never thought you'd work in when you wrote stories in your cinderblock dorm room. You reminisce about how you always wished to be something more than a white-collar in an Express suit behind a desk. Instead of drinking aged whiskey, you used to pray that the days of being surrounded by crushed Pabst cans would continue forever while your fingers flew on that old Remington. The bright screen of your Mac hurts your eyes and you rub them behind your glasses.

Your life wasn't supposed to go like this. Remember when you worshipped Hemingway and the Lost Generation? You felt a kinship with them unlike any other relationship. Now a certain heartlessness renders you unable to remember what it was like to want to be an artist, to desire to take hold of something out there and bring it down in the written word. Instead of words bringing a fire to your heart, dollar signs and numbers bring girth to your wallet, and you can't tell the difference.

Your calloused hands roughly remove your glasses unlike the way you took hers off in your dorm room half a lifetime ago. You haven't held her hands in a while, and memories of how soft they once were flood your palms. Instead you toss the spectacles in frustration on your desk as you go to call her and say you won't be home for dinner because you have too much work to finish.

"Again?" Her voice is quiet. You sense how disappointed she is.

"I'm so sorry."

"You aren't," she says. You hang your head with the receiver still pressed to your ear. Maybe she'll ask something, *anything* to bring you back and make you come home to her. The finality of her words, however, suggest otherwise.

You have no words outside of the conversation-ending "I love you." A click reciprocates the feeling. You know she knows something is amiss. *If* you make it home tonight, you damn well better not try to share the bed with her. Both of you know you deserve the excommunication, and a simple breakfast and Saturday with the family can only make up for "late nights at work" so many times.

Your twenty-something year old secretary walks in with multiple galleys for you. She's wearing those red heels again. Her hips look ready to burst from beneath her subtly striped pencil skirt. You don't need your glasses to see what's under there.

Pick up your glasses and read the proofs. You're stupid to have done it once, but twice is no accident and your moral grave will only be deeper. How will you live with yourself to cheat on her after everything the two of you have been through? She deserves more, better; she does *not* deserve you.

Be more and be better; you can do it. The hardest part is always starting.

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For a while there after graduation, contacts were a thing. Your brother convinced you to try the overnight ones that shape your eyes similarly to the way retainers hold your teeth in place after the arduous journey of braces. He swore by them, but his word wasn't too important to you. Every other night he'd text asking for some money so that he could smoke, ingest, inject, etc. the latest drug on the

street. Being aware of where the money was going, you gave in a few times at the very beginning. He knew you knew, and you both seemed to be okay with the parasitic relationship that developed. Eventually you stopped giving him money and then altogether stopped seeing him. Perhaps it was for the best.

You tried using the overnight ones for a few months after graduation, but they quickly became annoying as guests came and went. After doing your thing you'd have to put them in or else you'd be a blind man the next day. *One does not simply cuddle to sleep after sex*, you thought too often. The lack of eyewear during the day detracted from your overall look. Instead of being seen as a stereotypical intellectual, you came off more angry than anything else.

You go back to glasses eventually. People stop thinking you're angry, but instead the glasses just obscure your thoughts and your eyes as windows to them. You go back to her, too. She's a fucking *saint* for taking you back when you show up on her doorstep drenched at midnight on a Sunday. Did you even imagine how horrible an action it is to just waltz back into her life? She's built a life without you in it after college, and she's happy. *Let* her be happy. For some reason (You think it's love but what the fuck is that anyway?) you need to be with her. You know it's acidic and wrong, but you can't help yourself.

"I was trying to read," you say. She looks at you but you can't make out the expression too well; your prescription needs to be intensified. The contacts weren't worth the time, effort, money, or, worst, your eyesight. The nights without her in exchange for others' bodies instead were not worth the pain you caused her or the loneliness that seems only to have multiplied.

She knows all the same that you can't muster much more than that lackluster non-greeting. She knows what those words mean: that you *couldn't* read, that something is wrong. Your glasses, the old ones that clicked up against hers on all those rainy nights on Long Island, are fogged and you can only make out her face so much. It looks concerned, pained even. Although no one ever would, especially a reader such as yourself, you, for the first and *not* the last time in your life, wish you were blind.

She isn't wearing glasses. Her pajamas are baggy in the attractive way where you know she doesn't care how she looks; all that matters is herself and her comfort. She steps aside and lets you in without a word. The door lands with a heavy thud like thunder.

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She's been gone a few years and you've taken to donning the thick old-man glasses that you remember your father wore when you were a boy. At some point or another she found out the truth behind your late nights at work. She never left, but she made sure that nothing was ever the same between the two of you again. In return you made sure that the red heels and hips stopped delivering galleys altogether as a means to show your sorrow, as a penance for yourself as opposed to her. It wasn't enough, but she came back to bed that night.

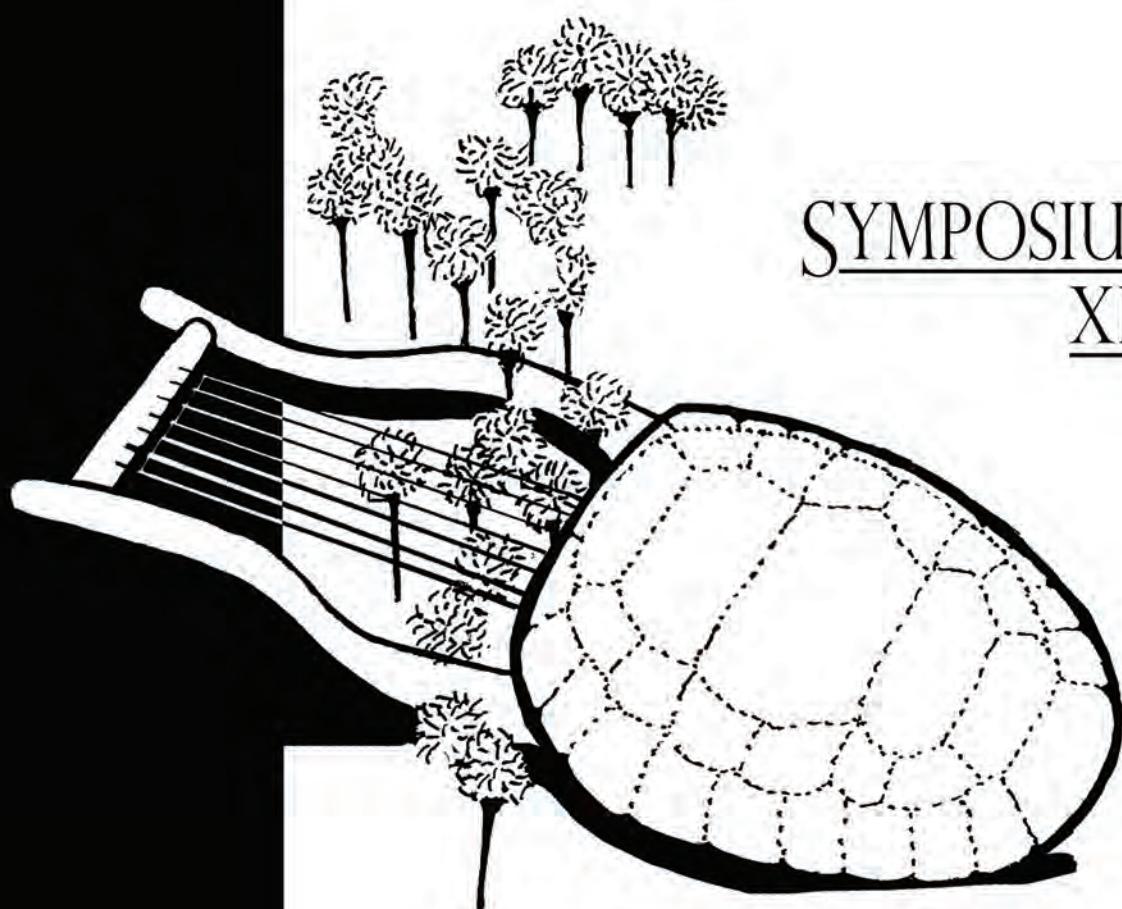
Nevertheless you and she were both too old to live successfully without the other. She would cook and do the laundry while you would clean and maintain the home with whatever handyman capabilities you had. Other than that, the two of you hardly crossed paths. You'd give her the pleasantries, ask how she is and if she had

any plans with her friends or the kids, but she never encouraged conversation between the two of you. She made you wish that those red heels never waltzed into your life, and that you never walked out of hers.

It was a Tuesday when you first woke up alone. You had to put on your glasses to discover that her chest wasn't rising anymore.

Your kids cease to visit because they were always closer with her anyway. They call and leave voicemails now and then to see how you are, but you suspect they're just waiting for the day when you don't call back. Although they would never know it since they only see and empathize with their mother's side of the story, you're waiting for the day when you don't call back, too.

It's five in the morning on a Saturday during winter, and you can't sleep. You think of how you would have killed to be awake and alone with the book du jour when you were young. Now, though, sleep is a rare commodity and books are being phased out faster than Betamax. You get up and head to your living room. The silhouette of a cracked hardcover rests on the arm of your chair. You hobble over, turn around in front of the chair, and hear a snapping noise underneath you. Upon finally getting up after making your way into the chair so carefully, you turn on the lamp and see your glasses with the arms broken off. Suddenly feeling tired, you turn off the lamp and return to bed.



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