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Mission Statement

Literature and film continually reimagine an ever-changing world, and through our research we discover our relationships to those art forms and the cultures they manifest. Publishing continuously for the duration of each semester, *Wide Angle* serves as a conduit for the expression and critique of that imagination. A joint publication between English majors and faculty, the journal embodies the interdisciplinary nature of the Department of English at Samford University. It provides a venue for undergraduate research, an opportunity for English majors to gain experience in the business of editing and publishing, and a forum for all students, faculty and staff to publish their best work. As a wide-angle lens captures a broad field of vision, this journal expands its focus to include critical and creative works, namely academic essays, book and film reviews, and commentaries, as well as original poetry, short fiction and non-fiction, short films and screenplays.

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The Not So Hollow Crown

In a recent article on portraying King Henry, Tom Hiddleston said, "Henry V is one of Shakespeare's most fascinating characters, simply because the journey and arc of the character are so extreme and intense" (Hiddleston, par. 11). Hiddleston would know all about King Harry's transformation from rake to royal, as he portrayed him in the recent BBC production of *1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV,* and *Henry V* in *The Hollow Crown.* While most critics and even some of the characters in the play are inclined to see Harry as completely divorced from his former self, Thea Sharrock, who directed this version of *Henry V,* chooses to take another direction. This *Henry V* is the capstone of a *bildungsroman* epic rather than a patriotic pageant, taking a more personal view of King Harry. This film concentrates on his growth as an individual and how his personality makes him a great king. Sharrock's interpretation of the play in her film is more a character study than a patriotic pageant, making Harry more relatably human than he can sometimes appear in other productions. The audience is meant to identify with Harry rather than revere him, so the production emphasizes his quirks, thoughts, and vulnerabilities to show his effectiveness as a king. Harry is more a man who grows into his nobility with the responsibility of the kingdom than a king who has undergone a total transformation into an idol or ideal ruler. Harry is still a great leader, but Sharrock's production focuses much more on Harry the man than Harry the king: the production's reflections on his past, his interactions with others, and his private moments establish his complex personality instead of painting him as a patriotic symbol.

In Act I, the text of the play frequently comments on Harry's past, mostly to emphasize how much he has changed. Canterbury responds to Ely's comment that Harry is "full of grace and fair regard" by saying, "[t]he courses of his youth promised it not. [. . .] Never came reformation in a flood / with such a heady currence scouring faults" (I.i.25, 34-35). The Dauphin also comments on Harry's past in a more derogatory way. He sends a message to Harry saying that he "savors too much of [his] youth" (I.i.250). Harry replies that he will "keep [his] state / Be like a king, and shall show [his] sail of greatness" (I.i.273-274). He realizes he has responsibilities that go beyond his own desires now that he is king, and to fulfill his role as a ruler he must change his demeanor completely. This conversation is the only mention of Harry's questionable past in the text; after this exchange, the text leaves the king's past behind just as thoroughly as Harry does, making no more mention of it except in following the story of his ne'er-do-well friends. The text's pursuing of these characters contrasts Harry's attitude toward them: Harry seems to leave his friends from his past behind along with his bad behavior. In following Pistol, Bardolph, and Nim, the play reminds the audience of Harry's past and connects him to the common people, even though he is now beyond their social strata. Harry's time in the slums of London not only causes his enemies to underestimate him but also grounds him and allows him to become an exemplary leader of his people.

Sharrock's film theorizes that the change in Harry is mostly in demeanor, showing that though Harry has grown up, he is still the same person under his crown. The previous films and plays put a lot of emphasis on Harry's hedonistic nature. He spent more time in the pubs with Falstaff and the like than he did in the castle. The films do not stint Harry's revelry: in *1 Henry IV*, Harry performs keg stands and associates with prostitutes. He even resorts to thievery for the sake of a laugh. Because of this, his father holds him in disgrace. The king is so disgusted with

his son's behavior he slaps him across the face, shaming him in front of the entire court (*The Hollow Crown: I Henry IV).* Though Harry's father thought his son's ways would never mend, his discipline did have a strong effect on Harry's future behavior. Sharrock holds these previous events in mind, showing that though Harry has forsaken his carousing, his past is still a part of him. He now chooses to carouse in a way that befits his station. She hints at Harry's love of fun in the first scene of Act I. Before his audiences with Canterbury, Ely, and the French ambassador, Harry is outside riding his horse. He may not be out drinking in a pub, but he is reveling in the pleasure of his activity. This short scene shows that Harry still has ties to his amusement-driven past, but he now takes his enjoyment in more acceptable forms. It is a beautiful day, but the film darkens when he enters the castle. Though he was in the bright sun moments before, the heavy stone walls of the palace prevent that light from coming in. The only light comes from braziers and torches, lending seriousness to the dark discussions of war that are about to happen. The entire film becomes more somber as Harry assumes his kingly role, but it happens gradually. Even while Canterbury and Ely are commenting on how much he has changed, Harry is hurrying through the back hallways of the castle to meet them. Instead of sitting on the throne in full state, Sharrock shows the viewers that he only just entered the gloomy throne room from the bright outdoors. He takes his crown from a servant and jogs around to the front of his throne even as Canterbury enters, assuming his kingly persona just in time to have his audiences (*The Hollow Crown: Henry V)*. These shots remind the audience that his royal role is only a part of Harry's personality. He is the solemn royal for most of the film, but he still carries within him the sunny, smiling prince.

A smiling prince should still not be trifled with. When the Dauphin accuses Harry of being a boy playing at being king, Harry says that the Dauphin does not measure "the use [he]

made of [. . .] [his] wilder days" (I.ii.287-88). But what use did Harry make of them? Harry's interactions with people from his past inform his sensibilities about the war. While he does have a selfish motive to invade France, he pauses to consider the fates of the common people that will become wrapped up in his battle. When Canterbury gives Harry his justification for pursuing his claim, Harry warns him against lying: "For God doth know how many now in health / shall drop their blood in approbation / Of what reverence shall incite us to" (I.ii.18-20). His time spent with the common people of England enables him to value them as more than pawns. Instead, he considers the common people of England to be his friends and countrymen as well as his subjects. This makes him a more considerate and effective leader, because he can see things from the commoner's point of view. He sees his subjects as people with their own concerns, and though he certainly considers himself their lord, he does not want to interrupt and sacrifice their lives needlessly. Sharrock tells the audience that the king knows the common people do not think of the fate of their nation. Harry used their company in the past to escape from his princely responsibilities. Because he spent so much time with them, he knows that they are mainly motivated by drink and money, which ironically makes him more reluctant to uproot them in the film. He must think of things like his claims in France, but he knows that trying to explain his dynastic troubles to his common friends would only make them laugh at him. Without his past, he might not be able to think of his subjects as real people because he would not be able to relate to them. Sharrock visualizes Harry's concerns for his people by showing he still cares for the common friends he left behind, even if he cannot associate with them directly.

In the film, Sharrock illustrates the effect of Harry's "wilder days" when he encounters the embodiment of them in Pistol (I.ii.288). Harry has merely moved on from them, not forsaken them completely. Pistol, Bardolph, and Nim have no place in his court, but he remembers his

days with them fondly. One of the most touching moments in the film is when Harry disguises himself and comes upon Pistol in the English camp. The English are huddled around their fires, the only lights in the dark foreign night. Harry goes to visit his frightened subjects, instilling their hearts with courage as they sit around their campfires (*The Hollow Crown)*. However, there is no one to comfort Harry.

In the play, Pistol happens upon the king in disguise and confronts him, but in Sharrock's production, Harry cannot keep himself away from his old friend and seeks him out. He visits Pistol where he sits by his lonely fire, the king disguising his face with a borrowed cloak. When Pistol tells whom he perceives to be a fellow soldier that "The King's a bawcock and a heart-of-gold, a lad of life and an imp of fame. I kiss his dirty shoe, and from heartstring I love the lovely bully" (IV.i.45-49), Harry almost begins to cry (*Henry V*). Though Harry never reveals himself to Pistol, it is evident that the feelings his friend still holds for him affect him deeply and strengthen his resolve. Pistol performs a service for his king that no other man could, but the distance between them is still evident. The two are never in the same shot. Instead, the camera switches between close-ups of both their faces. A few feet is all that separates them physically, but their social and spiritual differences keep them from reestablishing their former closeness. Sharrock uses these camera angles to demonstrate the conflict Harry feels about his old friends and his decision to leave them behind. He knows that he can never return to them. Though he is now a king, Sharrock shows Harry still cares for his subjects individually. His overwhelmed reaction to Pistol's evaluation of him shows his esteem for his subjects, though their low status would exclude them from the regard of other, less connected rulers. His personal connection with his friends enables him to care for the rest of his kingdom's inhabitants and sympathize with them by remembering his own dubious past.

The film most deviates from the play in order to emphasize Harry's regard for his friends. The scene where Bardolph is killed for robbing a church is the most evident example of this creative interpretation. In the original text, the scene is continuous: Harry condemns his friend to hang as an example to the rest of the army (II.vi). Harry is "permitted not the least semblance of recognition of their former friendly acquaintance" (Champion 151). It is as if when he becomes king he forgets all of his former friends entirely, which is why he seems to have no trouble condemning Bardolph for his crime in the text. In the film, the scene is split. Pistol still asks Fluellen for mercy on Bardolph and is denied. Harry, oblivious to Fluellen's command, does not know about Bardolph's sentence until it is too late. Fluellen is telling the king of the English losses after Harfleur, and Harry seems glad to hear that his soldiers are all alive. Fluellen then tells him about Bardolph's hanging. At this moment, they exit the forest and enter a meadow that would be beautiful save the makeshift gallows on the tree in the middle, and Harry is confronted with his friend's body.

The location of the gallows in the midst of the beautiful French countryside is dimmed by the cloudy skies, Sharrock's cue to the audience that Harry's war with France may have greater costs than rewards. He is fighting for a thing of beauty, but he might lose his identity in the struggle. Before this moment, the burden of being a king has been only hypothetical. Now he is confronted with the responsibilities of royalty and the effects of his choices as king. He realizes in this moment that he is essentially killing his friends for his own gains. Making conquests and winning wars is part of his duty as king, but now he sees the cost of that responsibility. Though the impact of this might be mitigated by the fact that Bardolph was hanged for a crime instead of being killed in battle, Harry still feels the burden of his death. He must choose either to bury his past with Bardolph, ignoring his empathy for his lowly friends, or to reconcile his two identities,

the hedonistic prince and the stern ruler. Sharrock illustrates this struggle with a flashback. Upon seeing the grisly scene, Harry's face falls, and the film cuts to the prince and Bardolph laughing in the golden glow of the tavern and the past. Touching music plays to enhance the feeling of sad reminiscence. Then, abruptly, the scene returns to the dark, gloomy countryside of France (*Henry V*). Harry chooses to unite his past and his present. He seems to rally himself and make the best of a terrible situation, giving his speech about having "all such offenders so cut off" (III.vi.98). Sharrock's changes to this scene make it an inspirational message instead of a testament to the hardships of war. Harry is genuinely grieved at Bardolph's death, but he cannot deny that Bardolph brought it upon himself. Harry chooses to use him as an example for the other soldiers so his death will not become meaningless, making him a tribute and preserving his own identity in the process. Giving meaning to Bardolph's death allows him to reconcile the two parts of his character, making him stronger in the process. Harry's grief in *The Hollow Crown* belies the picture the text paints of a just but ruthless king, decreasing his eminence in favor of his humanity.

Harry's regard for the common people extends beyond the subjects he knew personally. Along with the reflections on Harry's past, his interactions with his people as a ruler reflect the social abilities he learned in his younger days. Rather than being a distant and grand king, Harry is able to relate to whomever he talks to on a personal level. While some interpretations depict the king using this ability to manipulate others for his own amusement, Sharrock's film makes use of Harry's talent to style him as a commander who genuinely wins the hearts of the people around him. Harry can seem cold and detached in the text at times, but in the film he is very emotional, which endears him to those around him and the audience alike. Harry's more brutal aspects are minimized in Sharrock's production. She entirely cuts out the traitor scene in Act I

because it paints him as a pitiless ruler who tricks the traitors into convicting themselves of their crimes. Harry accuses, “The mercy that was quick in us but late / By your own counsel is suppressed and killed” (II.ii.76-77). Though the king would seem be offering the traitors a chance at redemption in this scene, in reality he is playing with them by making them think they have a chance of surviving. This is a very callous picture of Harry, and Sharrock’s production benefits from cutting it out because of the uncompromising view of the king it gives.

In addition to minimizing Harry’s brutality, Sharrock directs Harry’s interactions with other characters so that they reflect his personality rather than his station. Harry’s grand speeches are given to small groups rather than entire armies in her production. During the battle of Harfleur, Sharrock does not stint on the brutalities of war. Sharrock chooses to depict the battle not with wide panning shots of the action but with quick, intimate shots of each aspect of the fight. While this could diminish the scope somewhat, it emphasizes the suffering of the soldiers as they fight and die. Rather than seeing them swarming over the walls, the audience sees the French pouring hot oil on the English and hears them screaming as they fall (*The Hollow Crown)*.

Harry sees all of this destruction as well, and he encourages his soldiers with compassion instead of ire. Harry rides into the midst of the battle, dismounts form his horse, and gathers a group of his discouraged soldiers. He then kneels in front of them and delivers most of his “Once more unto the breach” speech to them there. He looks each of them in the eyes, physically grabbing a few of them. When he sees that one of them is too frightened to fight, he goes to the terrified man, takes his hand, and encourages him to “show us the mettle of [his] pasture” rather than beating him into battle. He descends to their level instead of commanding them from on high. This speech is shot with quick close-ups of Harry and his soldiers, highlighting the individual experience of everyone on the field instead of showing the English army as one force

(*The Hollow Crown*). This depiction of Harry is unusual because he is not a grand figure on a horse, yelling commands at his army. Instead, he is a king who personally invests in his soldiers and is not afraid to fight alongside them. He does not distance himself from his subjects, but endears himself to them by sharing their troubles and encouraging them in hardship. He is not an idolized hero in this film but a gifted leader who understands the needs of his people. Sharrock's direction of the scenes here shows that Harry views the members of his army as individuals and wants them all to believe in him and his cause as well.

If Harry's subjects suffer, he suffers along with them. In the English camp outside of Agincourt, the French ambassador rides to the king's tent between soldiers digging graves for their fallen comrades. Harry emerges from his tent covered in dirt from the poor conditions and confronts the pristine ambassador (*The Hollow Crown)*. The positioning of the two, with the herald on horseback and the king on the ground, puts the French herald in a position of power over the English king. It enhances the threat of the French army and makes the weakened English forces seem more pitiful. Despite the power reversal and the herald's added equine height, Harry's dignity is not compromised. The contrast between Harry and the Frenchman could make him seem diminished, but Sharrock makes sure that he seems kingly despite his dishevelment. Harry's regality comes from his bearing, not his circumstances. He shares his soldier's conditions and their woes. He does not have any special privileges in the war. In the battle scenes, he is bloodied and muddied like the rest of the army. In the Battle of Agincourt, he does not even wear his crown, and he is knocked from his horse so that he must fight on the ground like the rest of his army (*The Hollow Crown)*. However, his natural nobility of mien is enhanced rather than reduced by Sharrock's association. He is a king that identifies with his people rather than a tyrant who rules them according to his will.

Another way Sharrock shows that Harry is a conscientious ruler is through his relationship with his advisors. Harry is very close to his counselors and frequently looks to them to confirm his ideas. Exeter is especially important to him in the film—Harry trusts his uncle more than anyone else (*The Hollow Crown)*. This close relationship is exemplified when the English enter Harfleur. Harry's speech promising to "shut up [. . .] the gates of mercy" and "[mow] your fresh fair virgins and your flow'ring infants [. . .] like grass" seems incredibly harsh (III.iii.87, 91-2). Harry is in full state when he delivers this speech. He sits on his white horse, speaking down to the governor of the French town. He is positioned in the center of the gates, flanked by Exeter and his generals. The camera switches back and forth between Harry's hardened countenance and the fearful subjects of the town, showing what terror an invading king can inspire. However, when he reaches the crux of his speech he glances fleetingly at Exeter as if to ask whether he is accomplishing his desired purpose (*Henry V*). This brief flash of vulnerability shows the man under the battle crown of the king. This look to his uncle shows that Harry has decided violent words are better than violent actions. Scaring the French into surrender by making himself into a figure of destruction will allow him to keep his men fresh and achieve his goal more quickly. Though this is undoubtedly Harry's idea, the glance he sends to Exeter shows the audience that if his ploy does not work, it is very unlikely that Harry will actually carry out his threats. His relief when the governor cedes to him is evident, and he seems glad to tell Exeter to "use mercy to them all" (III.iii.131). He suspends his kingly demonstration, allowing his horse to break formation and softening his voice. This last command reflects more of Harry's true desire than the entire grisly speech that preceded it. In this scene, he is still testing how much of a king he really is and how much of the ruthless ruler is truly a part of his

personality. Exeter's presence and advice allows him to experiment because he can act as a gauge for Harry's behavior.

The wooing of Katherine of Valois is another scene where Harry's inner character overcomes his royalty in Sharrock's production. In the text, Katherine can be seen as "a hothouse orchid poised before [the] devastated garden" of France (Wilcox, 64). She symbolizes the country that Harry has just conquered, and she is his "capital demand" because she will allow him to produce an heir that will unite their nations (V.ii.96). This scene can be viewed as Harry playing with Katherine, since he knows that her desires have nothing to do with whether she will marry him or not. Katherine has been presented as "the flesh and blood representative of the civilian population whose suffering is [. . .] so painfully recorded" (Wilcox 66). If Harry marries her, he has officially won the war.

Sharrock chooses to ignore this harsh characterization of the king and depicts Harry as a man genuinely in love with the princess. He woos her not as a conquering king but as a love-struck suitor. He presents himself as "such a plain king that thou wouldst think I had sold my farm to buy my crown" (V.ii.124-5). Katherine is skeptical of him at first, and he begins his wooing from an emotional and physical distance. The camera separates them as well. They are not shown in the same shot, though they and the nurse are the only ones in the room. When he sees that his formal efforts are not succeeding, Harry removes his crown and charms her as a smitten man rather than a conquering king. This is when Sharrock allows them to be in the same shot. The camera echoes Katherine's response to her suitor: when she is receptive to Harry, the camera unites them; when she doubts him, it separates them. His offers of himself rather than his state are what finally endear him to the princess; she begins to respond more favorably, smiling and giggling at his attempts to speak her language. When Harry reaches the end of his speech, he

kneels at her feet and asks her to come to him rather than seizing her (*The Hollow Crown*). Harry's personality charms Katherine and the audience with her. The scene has no overtones of coercion; Harry is wooing a woman he genuinely cares for rather than merely ensuring a political alliance.

Though Harry is able to interact closely with the other characters, his inner thoughts are displayed most clearly during the few scenes in the film when he is alone. In the text, Harry only has the soliloquy after his encounter with the soldiers to express his vulnerabilities. He laments, "What infinite heartsease / Must Kings neglect that private men enjoy? / And what have kings that privates have not too, / Save ceremony, save general ceremony?" (IV.i.218-221). This soliloquy is the only time Harry gets to shed his kingly demeanor in the play, the only time the audience is allowed to see his vulnerability and his royal burden. Sharrock decides to cut this speech, but she makes up for it by interspersing her film with solitary scenes of Harry's humanity. While Harry is among others, he is forced to inhabit the persona of the king. He must appear confident, learned, and regal at all times. This is the character that we most associate with him because it is the one Shakespeare emphasizes the most. Harry is England's hero, and he must exhibit those heroic qualities in all things.

However, Harry is still a person with fears, anxieties, and feelings that he must express somehow. Sharrock does a wonderful job of displaying his vulnerabilities so that the audience becomes more invested in him. Perhaps the most surprising depiction of Harry alone comes at the very beginning of the film. The first view the audience gets of King Harry is not Shakespeare's solemn ruler in the second scene of act one but a corpse. The film opens with the chorus's lines interposed over a funerary scene. Katherine weeps over a coffin, and the audience is shocked when the flag is drawn back and Harry's face is revealed. Immediately after that, the

close-up of his deathly countenance is replaced with the smiling face of a happy man galloping through the fields of England on his horse (*Henry V*). The juxtaposition of the two shots, one brimming with death and sorrow and the other filled with joy and life, immediately endears Harry to the audience. It is a reminder of his vulnerability and his humanity, and it forms an emotional foundation that Sharrock reminds the audience of throughout the rest of her production.

At the beginning of Act III, Sharrock includes a scene with Harry alone in his cabin on the ship to France. It follows the chorus' lines about the glorious journey to France. The film has these lines voiced over a scene of the English ships going to war, sails flying gallantly in the wind. The sailors and soldiers seem happy to be on an adventure, but after the Chorus' lines, the camera cuts to Harry, clearly ruminating on his responsibilities in the war and the danger into which he is taking everyone. York enters to tell the king that land has been sighted, and Harry looks terrified. He sighs and wrings his hands before reminding himself that he will be "no king of England if not king of France" (*Henry V*). In the play, this line can be interpreted as an arrogant claim of power, but in the film Harry uses it as an encouragement to himself. Sharrock uses the contrast between the soldier's reaction to the war and Harry's worry to demonstrate that he is aware of the risks he takes. Though he is sure of his cause, he understands the implications of his enterprise. He knows that he is risking the lives of his people and his own reputation as a ruler on this campaign, but he cannot express these worries in front of others for fear of making them doubt his cause as well. He is his only source of comfort and validation, and this weighs on him heavily.

A similar instance occurs in act four when Harry prays before the battle of Agincourt. In a very vulnerable moment, Harry briefly sheds his kingly persona and expresses his worries to

God and the audience. Alone on the edge of camp, he kneels and begs God to "steel [his] soldier's hearts. / Possess them not with fear. Take from them now / the sense of reck'ning, ere th'opposed numbers / Pluck their hearts from them" (IV.i.271-274). It is a rare and incredibly moving show of humility from the warrior King. He knows that his men are "with sickness much enfeebled, / [His] numbers lessened" (3.6 131-32). While he covers his worries with bravado in front of his officers and soldiers, in this interlude he gives his worries up to God. His vulnerability is enhanced with Sharrock's lighting of the scene: it is dawn in the camp, and he is lit from behind with his soldiers' blurred campfires. His placement in front of the camp and toward the rising sun shows his leadership as he leads his armies into the day of battle, but his kneeling position reveals his fears in this moment of solitude (*The Hollow Crown*). In this private interlude, Harry acknowledges that he does not have ultimate power despite his royal status. Instead, he asks assistance from God. He knows that "only from God can come [. . .] a miraculous victory," and that is what he receives (Ornstein 197).

After the English win the Battle of Agincourt, Exeter hands Harry the lists of the dead. He is with his advisors in the victorious camp, still covered in blood and wearing his armor from the battle. The camera zooms in on him as he reads the numbers of the dead. His relief at the small number, only twenty-five, is palpable: this is his confirmation that his mission to France was divinely favored. His rule has been confirmed a success, and he can rest assured that not only is the day his but all of history as well. The camera zooms out as he cries, "O God, thy arm was here, / and not to us, but to thy arm alone / ascribe we all" (IV.viii.100-103). Rather than taking the glory of the battle won for his own achievement, Harry remembers to give thanks for his answered prayer. The audience can see two soldiers flanking him in the background, weary but still alive, as the king rejoices in his minimal losses. The camera zooms out further after his

prayer, showing a wider view of the camp and more of the soldiers. Sharrock echoes the scene before the battle, but this time Harry is not alone. While the last line is delivered in front of his soldiers because Harry thinks it fits with his kingly demeanor, his humility in his lone prayer before the battle is Sharrock's glimpse of the man behind the crown. Now that his position on the throne and in history is confirmed, he can afford to show some vulnerability to his men.

Sharrock's version of *Henry V* glorifies the king by showing who he is as a person rather than making him an idol of British patriotism. Sharrock's method endears Harry to the audience and establishes why he was loved so well. Harry's growth into a capable, magnificent leader precisely because he learns from his past and has an intense awareness of himself and those around him. His personality, not his authority, wins his followers. His authority comes with their love and support. His reflections on his past, interactions with others, and vulnerability in solitude are Sharrock's method of showing the products of his development. This personable king, who alternates between a frolicsome young man and a god of war, embodies the height of the English royalty and glorifies a time that may never come again.

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Essay

Elizabeth Gardner

The Existential Faust

The identity of the Faust-figure hinges upon the selling of his soul to a demonic power. In the three texts examined here—Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust,* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—this trade is enacted through a performative utterance, a statement in which "the utterance is the performing of the action" (Austin 163). However, at the time the trade is enacted, there is a conspicuous disregard of consequences, indicating that there is no moral or philosophical system from which the Faust-figure may draw a decision-making process. The Faust-figure defies religious morality by choosing earthly (or demonic) power over salvation, and in its place there exists a void. The Faustian situation is microcosmic for the zeitgeist of the twentieth century, when an increasingly secular Western world began searching for non-Christian philosophies, such as the philosophy of Existentialism. Existentialism, as Jean-Paul Sartre defines it, is centered on the idea that "man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterward, defines himself. [. . .] Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence" (15). Existentialism is a philosophy based upon the choices an individual makes after recognizing his or her existence as an independent being. Returning to the Faustian legend, in one sense the Faust-figure's performative utterance constitutes an existential act because as speech becomes action it constitutes what he is actively willing himself to be (to use Sartre's language). On the other hand, with a lack of reflection on the impact or consequences of his actions, the Faust-figure exhibits a failure of the existential

process because, though Existentialism is a philosophy of the self, it is not selfishly motivated. Sartre writes, "To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose, because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for us without being good for all" (17). An existentialist cannot be selfish because he or she is preoccupied with contemplating how to make the good choices and how those will affect the world. Overall, the Faustian myth illustrates the need for an existential philosophy because the absence of existential thinking lands the protagonist, quite literally, in Hell.

This essay compares three different incarnations of the Faustian legend and examines the ways in which the universal elements that appear in each version collectively anticipate the philosophy of Existentialism. Though the three texts precede the writings of Sartre, the Faustian legend's emphasis on choice and consequences can be described as the roots of existential philosophy. Additionally, the inclusion of performance theory in this thesis assists in the task of connecting the Faustian legend to Existentialism because performance theory explains how a vocalized choice becomes a definitive action by which a man may "define himself" (Sartre 15).

The existential quality that the Faust-figure lacks is what Sartre calls "anguish" (18). When Sartre discusses anguish, his meaning does not pertain to physical pain; instead, Sartre defines the term as follows: "The existentialists say at once that man is anguish. What that means is this: the man who involves himself and who realizes that he is not only the person he chooses to be, but also a lawmaker who is, at the same time, choosing all mankind as well as himself, can not help escape the feeling of his total and deep responsibility" (18). Here, Sartre again explains why it is impossible for an existential thinker to be considered selfish, but, unfortunately, the Faust-figure does not act as an existentialist. The Faust-figure's actions are not fraught with the existential sense of responsibility. They are, instead, a selfish grab at power, and each Faust-

figure follows a similar pattern: the Faust-figure relinquishes his soul for some sort of material gain, which results in a hellish existence. In the first version, Marlowe's Doctor Faustus bequeaths his soul to Lucifer in order to gain power over the demon Mephistophilis, proclaiming, "Faustus gives to thee his soul" (21). From a performance standpoint, though the action is described in the written play as the signing of a contract, to a viewing audience, the oath is sealed at the moment of speech. In this way, the selling of the soul constitutes a performative utterance. Additionally, when Doctor Faustus utters the oath and, therefore, performs the act, he is, according to Sartre's definition of anguish, creating a standard of action for all people. However, Marlowe's character does not meditate upon the impact of his actions in relation to others; Doctor Faustus thinks only of himself. In the second example, Goethe's *Faust*, the performative utterance is enacted through a bet:

> I [Faust] offer you [Mephistopheles] this wager [. . .]
>
> If ever I shall tell the moment:
>
> Bide here, you are so beautiful!
>
> Then you can fetter me and I'll
>
> Go gladly to perdition that instant. (*Faust, Part I* 1692-1698)

With this speech, Faust has condemned himself to a life of unhappiness and discontent because the wager is dependent on Faust remaining so wretched the he never wishes to linger in a moment. According to David Constantine, Faust's sin is striving, and in the Introduction to *Faust, Part II,* Constantine writes, "striving is, of itself, neither moral nor immoral, but, as Faust practices it, is, again and again, indistinguishable from criminal selfishness" (xl). Goethe's Faust, like each Faust-figure, errs in judgment due to the selfish belief that he is outside, or perhaps above, the world and that the effects of his actions are separate from the rest of humanity.

This perceived separation is physically delineated in Wilde's novel where Gray's soul is entrapped in a portrait. It is clear, however, that the soul is placed within the painting as a result of a direct speech act by Gray himself, in which he declares: "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. [. . .] If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that–for that–I would give everything! [. . .] I would give my soul for that! (28). This is the most thoughtless and ill-conceived of the three Faustian deals studied in this essay. Dorian Gray never pauses to consider why selling his soul for eternal youth might not be the best of ideas, so he certainly does not think of the rest of society or undergo Sartre's existential anguish. Furthermore, Gray later tries to deny his own responsibility in what transpires: "[Dorian] felt that the time had really come for making his choice. Or had his choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him—life, and his own infinite curiosity about life" (Wilde 106). Dorian believes "life" has decided his fate, but for an existentialist like Sartre, this is impossible. For existentialism to function as a philosophy, each individual must be responsible for his or her own decisions and subsequent actions. Dorian Gray, as a Faust-figure, takes the opposite approach: he thinks that life is something that happens to an individual. In Gray's way of thinking, outside forces have just as much, if not more, impact on an individual's life than his or her own personal choices. Yet, Sartre writes, "Thus, existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him" (16). Dorian Gray's decision to lock away his portrait first behind a screen, and later in his childhood playroom, is analogous to his refusal to face his own nature and accept "the full responsibility of his nature" (93, 117). Comparatively, the failure of the Faust-figure in general lies in his inability to accept responsibility for himself or his choices; because there is no existential process to which the

Faust-figure can defer, he is doomed, or damned, as the case may be.

Though the Faust-figure's actions are a failure of the existential process, his nature is best understood through existential philosophy and performance theory. As has been stated, Sartre considers existentialism to be how a man "defines himself. [. . .] Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust towards existence" (15). In the Faustian legend, the actuation of self-definition is not the singular act of the Faust-figure selling his soul; it is found, instead, in a repetition of actions throughout the Faust-figure's story that allow him to create his own nature. To explain how the repetition of actions constitutes the creating of a nature, Judith Butler writes,

> Consider gender, for instance, as a *corporeal style,* an "act," as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where *"performative"* suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning. [. . .] As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized from of their legitimation. (2499-2500)

Butler is discussing the formation of gender, but the concept of repeated actions constituting and reinforcing a characteristic can be applied in various ways, which Butler predicted by mentioning "other ritual social dramas." In relation to the Faustian legend, the characteristic that is enacted and reenacted is, for lack of a better term, damned-ness. The clearest example of this idea is seen in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. The deal struck between Doctor Faustus and Mephistophilis is the primary establishment of Doctor Faustus as damned. Yet, throughout the play, a character called the Good Angel provides Doctor Faustus numerous opportunities to repent, but Doctor Faustus refuses and, with each refusal, consistently reinforces his identity as damned (Marlowe 5, 19, 25,

27). Additionally, in Goethe's *Faust*, repetition is evidenced by Faust's relationships with women. Both of Faust's lovers, naïve Gretchen and classical Helen, suffer the death of a child, Faust's child (Goethe, *Part I* 4446, *Part II* 9904). The death of the children and resultant pain of the mothers contribute to Faust's lifelong status as miserable and damned. In the final work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Gray's repeated viewing of his portrait creates his damned character because each instance illustrates to Gray the depravity of his character but does not result in a change of actions (Wilde 128, 140). In each iteration of the Faustian legend, the Faust-figure exhibits a want of existential thought; however, if the selling of the soul is seen as an existential act, then the repetition of the "performance" of damnation constitutes the existential ideal of an individual's ability to define him- or herself.

The initial self-damnation of the Faust-figure is enacted through a performative utterance, but the validity of the act is grounded in the presence of the Mephistophelian-figure. When J.L. Austin defined the performative utterance in his essay "How to Do Things With Words," he included a caveat to his simple explanation: "Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should *also* perform certain *other* actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions or even acts of uttering further words" (164). In the case of the Faustian legend, the presence or influence of a Mephistophelian-figure is required in order for the Faust-figure to successfully sell his soul. The great deception of the Faustian legend is that the Faust-figure believes himself to be in total control of his situation, so he demonstrates great trust in other characters because he considers himself unable to be deceived. That the Faust-figure trusts, or believes himself in control of, the Mephistophelian figure is also a necessary part of the circumstances in which the performative

utterance can take place. It is rare, though, that the Faust-figure is truly in possession of control. With Goethe's text, for example, though his work is titled *Faust*, there are numerous occasions when Mephistopheles clearly governs the story. For example, in the second scene of Act One in *Faust, Part II*, Mephistopheles manipulates the Emperor and his court while Faust is nowhere in sight (4728-5064). Throughout Goethe's text, though Faust technically commands the demon, it is often Mephistopheles who is in charge of choosing the course of action because it is his job to show Faust happiness and win their wager. Additionally, Faust seems to trust Mephistopheles as evidenced by the fact that the scholar follows the demon's advice even to ill ends, not the least of which is his lover Gretchen's death (Goethe, *Part I* 4606). Faust and Mephistopheles seal their wager through Faust's performative utterance, but the requisite circumstances for utterance to become act include the presence and influence of Mephistopheles.

Unfortunately, the Faust-figure being unaware of this manipulation by the Mephistophelian-figure presents a great problem to existentialist thinkers. In his Introduction to Wilde's novel, Gary Schmidgall writes, "Existentialism emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of individual experience and stresses man's responsibility for fashioning his self and his moral responsibility for his acts and their consequences" (xxv-xxvi). I have already observed that Dorian Gray denies responsibility for his actions, instead choosing to blame outside forces. Now, it is important to note that he does not even attempt to use individual experiences to fashion his self. Instead, he relies on Lord Henry, the Mephistophelian-figure in Wilde's novel. It is the words of Lord Henry that influence Dorian Gray before his fateful utterance: "Then had come Lord Henry Wotton with his strange panegyric on youth, his terrible warning of its brevity. That had stirred [Dorian] at the time, and now, as he stood gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness, the full reality of the description flashed across him. [. . .] The life that was to make his soul

would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth" (28). Gray contemplates the future described to him by Lord Henry and cannot stand such a fate, leading to his Faustian deal. Also, after the death of his lover Sibyl Vane, when there was an opportunity for repentance, Gray instead follows the advice of Lord Henry and takes his place in depraved society (Wilde 107). The fact that all three Faust-figures depend on someone outside the self and allow this Mephistophelian-figure to control aspects of their lives is in conflict with Existentialism for multiple reasons. The first reason is that it allows the Faust-figure to deny his responsibility. However, when it comes to responsible decision-making, Sartre does not allow for strong emotions, such as passion, to cloud judgment: "The existentialist does not believe in the power of passion. He will never agree that a sweeping passion is a ravaging torrent which fatally leads a man to certain acts and is therefore an excuse. He thinks that man is responsible for his passion" (23). According to Sartre, the existentialist thinker acts through thought and reason, not passion and emotions. Thus, if being overwhelmed by emotion cannot free a man from his responsibility, another individual's influence certainly does not qualify. Yet, when discussing the Faust-figure's decisions, perhaps even more important than responsibility is the "isolation of individual experience" that Schmidgall mentioned. One person should not entirely rely on another for guidance because, according to existential thought, the two are irreconcilably separated. On individual can never fully understand another. Friedriech Nietzsche comments on the problem with communication and language, stating, "What ultimately is common? Words are vocalizations for concepts, and concepts are nothing more than particular images for a series of recurring sensations, for groups of sensations. For us to understand each other, it is not enough to use the same words; we have to use the same words for the same kinds of inner experiences; in the ends our experiences must be held in *common*" (143, author's emphasis). In other words, in

order for two people to fully and effectively communicate with one another, they must be using the same vocabulary. Unfortunately, as Nietzsche pointed out, this means they must share common experiences, and in order to ensure that one individual's vocabulary exactly matches another's, the two must have had the exact same experiences and thoughts throughout their lives. Suffice it to say, this is impossible. Thus, the Faust-figure cannot and should not trust the advice or guidance of the Mephistophelian-figure because, lacking a common background, there is no way for the Faust-figure to understand the nature and motives of his counterpart. In his novel, Wilde discusses this dilemma of language, "Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words?" (22). Words seem real and clear, but they contain a "subtle magic." Words are the source of manipulation in the Faustian legend because the Faust-figure lacks an existential awareness that words ultimately fail. Again, the Faust-figure's mistakes demonstrate the need for an existential philosophy.

Because there is no existential methodology to decision-making in the Faustian legend, the Faust-figure suffers the unforeseen horror of his choice. Marlowe's Doctor Faustus is eternally damned and dragged to hell at the play's end, a fate foretold to him when he sold his soul but was nonetheless unexpected. Goethe's Faust lives in misery, as is requisite for his wager: death and pain follow Faust throughout his life until he finds something worth living for, at which point in time he immediately dies. Dorian Gray suffers the most, perhaps, in that he is tortured by a damnation he does not fully understand. During his life, Dorian is haunted by the portrait and what it represents until, in one final act of desperation, he tries to separate himself from the

cursed portrait: "Nothing he could do would cleanse him till he had told his own sin. His sin? [. . .] It was an unjust mirror, this mirror of his soul that he was looking at. [. . .] There was only one bit of evidence left against him. The picture itself—that was evidence. He would destroy it. [. . .] It had been like a conscience to him. Yes, it had been a conscience. He would destroy it" (220). In destroying the painting, Dorian destroys himself, and though religious elements do not play a role in Wilde's novel, it is not difficult to imagine that a man who sold his soul for eternal youth would be eternally damned. Because the Faust-figure does not think, does not feel the existential anguish of his decision, does not *know* to feel the anguish, he suffers. If, on the other hand, there had existed an existential philosophy for the Faust-figure to consult, he may have been able to avoid his damnation.

In the three separate Faustian tales, *Doctor Faustus*, *Faust,* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, there are, perhaps, as many differences as there are similarities. Despite the fact that the three stories were written in three different centuries, the common obsession with improper decision-making reveals a recurrent anxiety over how individuals regulate their choices in the absence of religious morality. As a result, each iteration of the Faustian legend is a cautionary tale, demonstrating the need for an existential philosophy. The Faustian story reminds readers that existentialism is, to some degree, essential in a world ruled by secular individualism because existential thought engenders a sense of responsibility for actions and fosters independence in the decision making process. And though the Faust-figure in each of these stories exists in an intellectual environment devoid of existential philosophy, twenty-first-century readers can identify the lack and come to understand the necessity of Existentialism because, as Sartre writes, "In choosing myself, I choose man" (18).

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Essay

Laura Ann Prickett

Evelina?

A name is a symbol that represents something's identity; names are metonyms. As a metonym, a name defines, or identifies, its object. At the same time, the object also defines, or identifies, its name. A small, round, throw-able object not only meets the definition requirements to be named a *ball* but its characteristics are also those that determine just what a ball is. Similarly, in naming human beings, a person is both defined by her name and has the ability to define her name for herself. Frances Burney uses this understanding of names as metonyms, or mechanisms of identity construction, to create a virtually nameless protagonist in her epistolary novel *Evelina*. The heroine, Evelina, has no certainty about her name and, therefore, has no certainty about her identity. With no sure identity, Evelina, in eighteenth-century England, has no family, no place in society, and essentially no personhood. Characteristically human, Evelina's goal is to know her true identity and to have that identity known by others. Evelina's namelessness, or rootlessness, sets the precedent for her struggle to determine by what she will be defined. Consequently, the novel's action centers on Evelina's search for a name to define her, whether that name be Belmont, Villars, Duval, or Orville. More important than her search for a name, the plot consists of Evelina's journey of defining her identity. Burney uses Evelina's reflexive analysis in the protagonist's letters to trace the progress of her quest for self-identification, which in turn is adumbrated by the way Evelina signs each of her letters.

Burney, characteristically of her time period, chooses to tell the story of Evelina through epistles. Through this method, Burney allows the narrative agency and authority to rest with the letter-writer, who is primarily the protagonist herself. Evelina's narrative agency encourages the reader to identify with the protagonist. Through this identification, the reader adopts the protagonist's perspective, thoughts, and feelings as her own. Because this story is about a young woman's search for identity, her coming out or "entrance into the world" (1) as the original title of the novel reads, the reader best identifies with the protagonist because she tells the story through her own perspective. Because of the reader's natural identification with a first-person narrator, Burney chooses to disclose this *Bildungsroman*, or coming of age novel, through the reflections found in the main character's epistles.

By the nature of the epistolary tradition, written correspondence requires a known identity—an identifiable metonym—so that the reader knows with whom to associate the experiences recounted in the letter. To its recipient, a letter's signature represents from whom the correspondence is received. However, Evelina corresponds without a distinct metonym with which to conclude her letters. Burney ironically constructs Evelina's bildungsroman through a narrative tradition that requires an established identity for its narrator in order to emphasize further the protagonist's lack of identity. In the midst of her identity formation, to make the process of self-discovery even more complicated, the protagonist realizes that she represents different things to different people. Villars, for example, sees her as his beloved, innocent daughter and, quite selfishly, as an extension of himself. Madame Duval and the Branghtons look at Evelina as a pawn to move for their own social and economic success. Sir Clement Willoughby objectifies her in his quest to obtain her affection, and Lord Orville sees her as a captivating mystery. No two characters regard Evelina in the same way, and, consequently,

Evelina faces the daunting task of combining each unique perception into a singular cohesive identity construct. Because of this confusion instigated by the varying perception of others, and ultimately because of the underlying uncertainty of her identity, her signature, or written metonym, shifts throughout the course of the story.

In spite of her constant metonymical shifts, Burney applies one aspect of consistency by including the protagonist's first name, "Evelina," in every signature. The rich history of the name *Evelina* enables Burney to emphasize the nuances of her narrative and of her protagonist. Helena Straub's *Girls' Christian Names: Their History, Meaning, and Association* reveals that the Irish and Scottish origins of this name come from "Aoiffa," which translates literally as "pleasant," and the German origin of the name is from the masculine "Avellana," which translates literally as "hazel" (196-198). The Irish and Scottish origin highlights the protagonist's good nature and amiable disposition. Furthermore, legend associated with the German "Avellena" dictates that the name secures a long life for its title-holder, and Burney's use of *Evelina* implies that distinction for her character. Moreover, Straub also addresses the biblical origin of Evelina's title in the name "Eve," the woman whom the Western Christian tradition identifies as the mother of all the living. The word *Eve* derives from the Hebrew word *chavah*, which literally translates as "life." Just as Paul addresses humanity's connection to Adam as the first man in Romans 5, the female protagonist's name *Evelina* makes a connection to the first female, the mother of all females, and therefore to every female. Consequently, this suggests that Evelina is not alone in her experience but that the quest for self-definition is a process inherent to every woman's identity. The meaning of the Hebrew name *Eve* from which *Evelina* derives, further suggests the universal nature of this story. Evelina's experience is not unique but is a self-defining process in which every female partakes. The universal aspects of Evelina's name suggest that being female

alone implies the necessary process of self-definition. Furthermore, Evelina's German origin *Avellana*, or hazel, symbolically connects her to a tree. The uncertainty of her identity in the novel then suggests that Evelina is a rootless tree or a tree still in the process of forming roots. Burney weaves all three origins of the name Evelina to accentuate the unfinished process of Evelina's identity construction.

While the presence of her signature reminds the reader of much of her character, many of Evelina's letters go unsigned, leaving the reader without the metonymical reminder of who is writing. In a novel full of her epistles, only thirteen of them have an inscription. In "Signing Evelina: Female Self-inscription in the Discourse of Letters," Samuel Choi recognizes that her signed letters appear in clusters, each of which represents a defining sequence in the formation of Evelina's identity. Choi writes, "For just as Evelina encounters numerous persons who, on one level, attempt to insinuate themselves, their lives, their names, and their bodies into hers (to the effacement of hers), so too does she meet with circumstances that threaten to displace or replace her symbolically. Her signatures serve to mark each of these occasions and to reassert herself at fundamental levels" (262). Choi's argument asserts that the clusters of Evelina's letters that lack an inscription also emphasize her lack of identity. Every other character in the novel signs his or her letters with a specific metonym, mostly uniform, with only a slight variation of name. For example, Reverend Villars ends his first two letters with the same introduction of a "most humble and obedient servant" and always signs with his first name and surname, Arthur Villars (21, 165). In contradistinction to the consistent and defined signatures of her fellow characters, Evelina's lack of consistency in her signatures signifies the inconsistency of her own identity. Furthermore, without a clear comprehension of who she is and how she is defined, Evelina struggles to claim any thoughts or written words as her own, for she does not think that someone

without an identity—a nobody, someone who virtually does not exist—is able to possess anything. The language of Evelina's letters overflows with the self-doubt and insecurity of her uncertain identity. For example, in a letter to Villars about Orville, she writes, "could I write as I feel," which expresses a lack of certainty in her own emotions and thoughts (239). Evelina further demonstrates her self-doubt with her confusing reaction to the first letter she receives with Orville's signature. After actually including her signature, the situation unfolds differently than she anticipated, and frustration overwhelms her for having revealed part of her identity to Orville with an impulsively and passionately written letter. Her subsequent attempt to justify her actions to Lord Orville becomes a paramount example of the tragic insecurity from which she suffers. Her many letters without signatures represent her rootlessness and consequent insecurity. Both haunt Evelina throughout the novel, forcing her to attempt ceaselessly to unveil some foundation and security for her self-construction and self-conception.

When Evelina actually includes an insignia, these signatures illuminate her halting attempts to define a satisfactory metonym for herself. Each different signature exposes a different layer of Evelina's identity. Choi agrees that "Evelina's signatures are not simply perfunctory acts randomly distributed throughout the series of letters, but are inflection points at which Evelina attempts to deflect deleterious opinions, positions, or conditions" (260). This process begins with a correspondence between Mr. Villars and Lady Howard about Evelina. Burney reveals the information about Evelina's situation—her lack of family and true identity—to the reader through the perspectives of people other than the protagonist. In this way, Burney refuses Evelina the autonomy of self-assertion and furthermore of self-awareness. This suggests that Evelina's story, her bildungsroman, is not only uncertain but also whispered in secret. Moreover, it is a secret about which others feel free to speculate, but which Evelina herself does

not completely understand. Evelina writes her first letter to Mr. Villars to persuade him to allow her to accompany the Mirvans into London. However, the persuasion is not from Evelina's interest but from the interest of her hosts. Her lack of initiative in corresponding with her guardian before this suggests her uncertainty in herself and in her desires as an individual and her dependence on those around her to define who she is. She first writes to Villars only when others tell her to write to him. This letter also betrays her identity and her narrative agency by revealing her reliance on others to think and act for her. She writes that she is "half ashamed of myself for beginning this letter" (25) and that "I almost repent already that I have made this confession" (26). Evelina's insecurity demonstrates her dependence on Mr. Villars for how she thinks, how she feels, and what she does. In concluding her first letter, Evelina signs, "I am, with the utmost affection, gratitude and duty, your Evelina -- ---- I cannot to you sign Anville, and what other name may I claim?" (26). Though, by definition, this signature seems like an assertion of Evelina's identity, the possessive "your" suggests that her identity is found solely in Villars. She does not belong to herself but to the man who has raised and nurtured her. She is bound to Villars by "affection, gratitude, and duty" in knowing him as "most honoured, most reverenced, most beloved father" (26). After her name is signed, she shows peer reliance again with her final sentence. She admits that Villars is the author of her name, essentially implying that he has defined her being.

The second letter from Evelina's hand comes to Villars at the beginning of her stay in London. As Evelina experiences her first trip to the theatre, walks for the first time through the Mall at St. James Park, and prepares for her premier private ball, her words reveal her excitement and naiveté about the city. Though its glamour captivates her, high society also overwhelms Evelina and deepens her sense of insecurity and lack of identity because she does not know the

appropriate means of propriety for this class. Kristina Straub, in her article "Women's Pastimes and the Ambiguity of Female Self-Identification in Fanny Burney's *Evelina*," suggests that Evelina's ignorance detaches her from society and allows her to judge society's expectations as an objective outsider rather than to indulge them blindly (64). However, it seems that Straub's assessment of Evelina's callowness suggests more self-awareness and confidence than is actually present within the protagonist. While she views traditions objectively, she does not wish to be nameless and longs to know and be identified as part of those traditions. As a result, her letter bears the signature, "I am your dutiful and affectionate, though unpolished, Evelina" (29). While she still depends on Villars for her identity at this point as seen with the possessive "your," she only describes her relationship to him as "dutiful and affectionate" and leaves out the gratitude she felt in the first letter. Her shift in signature suggests that Evelina realizes her ignorance of the world, counts it as a negative characteristic, and blames Villars for his role in ensuring her continued naiveté. Burney therefore suggests that Evelina is no longer grateful for Villars' participation in her life in this aspect. Describing herself as "unpolished" also further emphasizes the lack of certainty in her identity. In the closing paragraph of the letter, she writes that she "may improve by being in this town" (29), pointing out both that she does not yet know who she is and that she is not yet who she will be defined. Evelina is still becoming herself and constructing her own identity. That confession reveals her story as a bildungsroman, a narrative journey of self-construction and self-revelation.

Her third signed letter unveils the important role of men in Evelina's self-definition. The letter comes after a confusing experience for the protagonist in which she encounters both Lovel and Lord Orville for the first time. The rules of order and extravagance of her first private ball baffle Evelina, and she sits to recount her experience to her confidant Villars. Before the private

ball, Evelina seemed to have no pride to inflate because she had no identity. However, with her first entrance into society and her reception of several men, her nascent self-identification begins to form around a core of male attention. In this letter, the reader begins to notice Evelina's fascination with young men. Because Evelina never had the opportunity to receive young men, she adores the frequency of their attentions and often allows the frequency of their attention to inflate her vanity (30-36). With pride and amazement, Evelina tells Villars that Orville, a man she describes herself as "insignificant" in comparison to his "rank and figure," (35) had "been inquiring *who I was"* (36, author's emphasis). She realizes that even her cluelessness and lack of identity do not remove the attention of suitors; in fact, the mystery of who she is seems to attract their attentions even more. Consumed by this vain reflection, she simply signs, "I am, with all love and duty, your Evelina" (36), as an attempt to soothe Villars' fears of her budding narcissism.

At this point, Evelina goes for a significant length of time without signing any of her letters, which emphasizes her own feelings of insecurity, ignorance, and insignificance in the midst of London wealth and status. She even admits in an unsigned letter to Villars that she is "too inexperienced and ignorant to conduct myself with propriety in this town, where every thing is new to me, and many things are unaccountable and perplexing" (50). In this cluster of unsigned letters, Evelina reveals that even the small foundation of identity she had begun to form around the way men responded to her is crumbling. She writes, with regards to Orville, "I am inexpressibly concerned at the thought of [Orville's] harbouring an opinion that I am bold or impertinent, and I could almost kill myself for having given him the shadow of a reason for so shocking an idea" (73). With feelings of powerlessness, inadequacy, and insecurity raging after an evening of deception from Sir Clement Willoughby, her next signed letter bears the

inscription, “And now, most honoured Sir, with all the follies and imperfections which I have thus faithfully recounted, can you, and with unabated kindness, suffer me to sign myself your dutiful, and most affectionate Evelina?” (116). This signature proves one of Evelina’s moments of highest self-awareness. Here, she questions her composition: do her appearances and façades define her, or do her accomplishments and skills? Or is she defined negatively by her imperfections and mistakes? Or is she perhaps defined by a summation of both her positive and negative traits? In this signature, Evelina makes progress in self-construction. Though she is not completely free of insecurity, this signature is the first negative description of herself and the first instance in which she does not depend on Villars positive, fatherly perception to define her. She questions whether Villars’ perception of her is even true, and this questioning shows the beginning of her testing her own autonomy. While she is still dependent on Villars as displayed with her assertion, “I am. [. . .] Your,” she begins to realize that she has power to define herself to others by how she behaves and what she says.

Evelina’s next inscribed letter is written to Villars after Madame Duval’s proposal to adopt the girl and take her to Paris. Duval obsesses over Evelina’s identity because of the social advancement and filial revenge in reach if Belmont accepts his daughter. Evelina writes, “Whenever my situation or affairs are mentioned by Madame Duval, she speaks of them with such bluntness and severity, that I cannot be enjoined a task more cruel than to here her” (123). Without Villars’ protection, Evelina lacks defense against Duval, which forces Evelina to realize that not even Villars has the power to define her because he cannot always be with her. Socially disconnected from her source of self, Villars, she signs the letter with only her name (124).

The following signature reveals the inconstancy of her identity. Awaiting a response from her legitimate father Sir John Belmont, Evelina runs back to the only constant person in her life,

Villars. Evelina uses Villars' consistency as a means by which to define herself. Even after the progress she made in London, with the looming possibility of rejection, Evelina loses all sense of her self-definition and retreats to her long-standing need to be defined by someone else. Evelina retreats from her self-defined identity as a means to avoid rejection from the individual who physiologically created her. As a result, she signs, "May Heaven bless you, my dearest Sir! And long, long may it continue you on earth, to bless your grateful Evelina!" (132) to the only man who has never rejected her and in whom her sense of self is found.

After Belmont's rejection, Evelina further buries herself in Villars: "You know my heart," she tells him, "you have yourself formed it" (160). At this point, her only behavior, essentially her only sense of identity, comes from the counsel and instruction of her guardian (162). So she writes, "Adieu, my dearest Sir! Heaven, I trust will never let me live to be repulsed and derided by *you*, to whom I may now sign myself wholly your Evelina" (162, author's emphasis). This signature emphasizes her complete dependence on Villars to inform herself and others of her identity.

After admitting to Villars that she depends on him wholly, from London she writes her next inscription to Miss Mirvan with the fake surname, "your affectionate and obliged Evelina Anville" (174). But Anville is not Evelina's real name but rather given to her out of necessity. Her use of Anville suggests that in fact Maria Mirvan does not know Evelina and her situation as well as Evelina tries to convey. She appears to be unknown to all but Villars, which further emphasizes her dependence on him for her definition. Also written during her stay in London with Duval and the Branghtons, Evelina's next cluster of letters remains without a signature. Her anonymity in this cluster suggests shame in her familial alliance with her hosts. Evelina fears

public association with the improper reputations of Duval and the Branghtons, and, as a result, she refuses to accept her own identity in connection to them.

After this series of letters without an identity, her next signed letter emphasizes yet another realization of her total reliance on Villars. Accompanying a letter to Villars, this signature follows an explanation of Orville's interest. It reads, "In every mortification, every disturbance, how grateful to my heart, how sweet to my recollection, is the certainty of your never-failing tenderness, sympathy, and protection! Oh Sir, could I, upon this subject, could I write as I feel, -- how animated would be the language of your devoted Evelina!" (239). Her new epithet of "devoted" seems to serve as a means to convince Villars of her ongoing devotion to and dependence on him. It also serves as a means of convincing herself of her devotion to Villars, though her interest and emotions are pulling her to define herself from Orville's perception of her. The next signature is attached to a letter within an unsigned letter and concludes Evelina's impulsive note to Lord Orville with the inscription, "I am, my Lord, your Lordship's most humble servant, Evelina Anville" (250). The use of her full, fake name emphasizes that, in spite of their budding friendship and interest in each other, Orville still does not really know her. At this point, Evelina's identity is still a mystery to Orville and to herself.

Evelina's next signature is a realization of Villars' overwhelming control of her self-definition. Consequently, she attempts to fortify her relationships with peers other than Villars in order to remove Villars as the foundation for her identity. As she ends her stay in London with relief and returns to Berry Hill, Evelina writes her next signed letter to Miss Mirvan in order to justify her absence Howard Grove. Evelina signs the letter, "So witness in all truth, your affectionate Evelina" (256), to emphasize her honesty in the matter and to mend any offense the situation might have caused to their friendship. With this signature, the reader realizes a

difference in epithet from the first letter to Miss Mirvan; here Evelina is only "affectionate" and no longer "obliged" (174). Even though Evelina attempts to mend her friendship with Miss Mirvan, her full dependence on Villars at this point prevents her from maintaining the connection to Miss Mirvan that would consider her obliged in friendship. This signature, like so many others, suggests Evelina's lack of self-assertion and dependency on others, particularly her paternal figure, to define her.

Ironically following a display of total dependency, the next cluster of unsigned letters comes from Evelina's stay at Berry Hill and emphasizes Evelina's uncertain identity as opposed to her dependence. Upon arriving home, both Evelina and Villars realize that she is no longer the girl who once identified herself with Berry Hill. Her experiences have altered her preferences and have ultimately altered her identity. For this reason, Evelina leaves Berry Hill and accompanies Mrs. Selwyn, a ward of Villars, on a trip to Bath. Though Evelina knows she does not fit into the mold of Berry Hill, she still is not certain enough to own her identity in the world. Therefore, she has Mrs. Selwyn to represent constantly her connection to and dependence on Villars. Going on another journey represents Evelina's continued journey for self-identification.

Evelina's next significant moment in this journey is an act of self-assertion. In a copy of a quick, signed correspondence to Macartney, within an unsigned letter to Villars, Evelina calls herself, "Your obedient servant, Evelina Anville" (300). Once again she signs the letter with her full, fake formal name. This signature not only emphasizes the ongoing mystery of Evelina's identity with the use of "Anville" but also serves as a means by which she asserts her own autonomy in defining herself. Through initiating a correspondence with Macartney and seeking ways to be kind to him, Evelina autonomously acts on her intuitions. She does not allow the possibility of a negative perception of her correspondence with Macartney to restrain her from

doing what she believes is right. In this way, Evelina once again begins the process of defining her own self. Furthermore, Macartney's idolized perception of Evelina (226-32) gives the protagonist a confidence from which she can begin to assert her own identity.

The next cluster of letters is the longest stretch of unsigned epistles. All of them are written while she stays with Orville in Bristol and while she undergoes the process of confronting her biological father, Belmont. Her lack of signature suggests both the uncertainty of Belmont's response and the realization that she does not have a complete identity to own and to reveal to Orville.

One of Evelina's final letters is the only time she accepts her identity as a Belmont. Though her biological father receives her several epistles earlier, she chooses to sign her name as his only right before her name changes on her wedding day. "Now then," she writes, "therefore, for the first -- and probably the last time I shall ever own the name, permit me to sign myself, most dear Sir, your gratefully affectionate, Evelina Belmont" (404). This further suggests Evelina's dependence on Villars, on the man who has loved her consistently, because she refrains from assigning herself a name that would remove Villars from the center of her identity. However, she no longer describes herself as "dutiful," and this combination of adjectives used in her epithet has already implied that her loyalty, dependence, and allegiance have been moved to someone else. However, Evelina admits that she only quickly owns the name she has sought to define her throughout the novel, and this inconsistency of her name once again suggests a dependence on Villars' consistent perception to define her and reveals a partial realization that she must define herself separately from the definitions of others.

Evelina's last letter comes as a surprising end to her quest for identity. She signs the final epistle with only "Evelina" (406), which is the second of only two signatures that does not

possess the possessive adjective "your." The assertion of only "Evelina," even as her name has been changed to Orville and even as she returns to the man who has defined her being her whole life, without any epithet suggests that the protagonist has finally realized the fullness of her identity. With this final metonym, the reader ends the novel with the realization that the definition of his or her metonym, like Evelina's, comes not from the perception of others but from him- or herself.

Evelina's metonymical development serves as a reminder that a person constructs her identity both from her own assertions of definition and from others' perceptions of those assertions. Just as Evelina is more than the sum of her decisions and more than her peers' opinions of her, an individual finds definition in the combination of who he or she is and what others think he or she is. Moreover, the process of the narrative of *Evelina* suggests that self-construction and self-conception are never complete in any specific moment. Whereas the entire novel devoted itself to Evelina's self-discovery, only one concluding letter alludes to Evelina's self-definition, suggesting that identity formation is not so much about the final definition as it is about the journey of defining.

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Essay

Katy Ward

Fluidity of Being on the North Atlantic:

Nixing Oppositions in Alice Munro's "Goodness and Mercy"

Boarding a ship means a change of pace. As much as passengers journey away from one place and to another, they leave a landlocked lifestyle to begin a stint in constant motion. A ship is self-contained, so, in a sense, life as a passenger removes the context of anything back home. This hope for difference drives the characters aboard the ship in Alice Munro's story "Goodness and Mercy," but the story veers quickly away from any expected themes surrounding characters on a journey. In spite of the characters' attempts to put distance between their old and new selves, much of the story's narration completely undoes the binaries they each try to establish. Bugs, the dying mother of the main character, does not end her life with words of resolution and closure but with a dazed comment about the "Old World" hospital (178). Apparently, the ship in this story did not reach the New World at all.

Averill and her mother Bugs are on the last journey of Bugs's old age and failing health. They travel across the North Atlantic with a motley cast of characters who seem obsessed with preening and proving themselves. Each of the main characters in "Goodness and Mercy" attempts to define him- or herself by difference, as if progressing to a new self in a linear fashion. The ship, by definition, progresses from an old place to a new destination, potentially offering a clean slate to everyone on board. By the way the characters talk to each other, it would seem as if the new and old are clearly defined in the story, as if the difference between past and present has

helped to define each new self. But Averill picks up on the holes in these binaries and offers a telling commentary on the presence of the past in the assertions claimed around her. Rather than becoming distinct personas, many of the characters represent each other, just like the Captain's strange story so represents Averill and her mother. Ultimately, the ship and its passengers are both journeying away from the old and toward the new in a liminal phase that is neither here nor there. The story offers a narrative version of deconstructive theory, wherein examples of ideas from Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and Jonathan Culler play out to show the circular narrative and inconclusive mystery of people in limbo.

The breakdown of clearly defined identities begins in the story as each character goes by multiple names. Bugs's "real name" is June Rodgers, which in the story is also a well-known stage name from the days when Bugs performed in operas. The narrator never explains where her nickname came from, and neither does Bugs directly explain the nicknames she assigns to the other passengers on the ship. The first nickname given describes a professor that Bugs clearly does not like, in spite of his fancy for her. She calls him the "professorial jerk" and "dumber than ordinary" but officially deems him "Dr. Faustus" (157-158, 160). Dr. Faustus has been scandalously married to two different younger women, so his nickname implies that he had to sell his soul to win his wives. His wife Leslie goes by "Tudor Rose" because she happened to be cross-stitching a Tudor rose pattern when she is introduced to the story (159). Bugs calls her several other unflattering names as well, all of which are interchangeable. Every other character goes by their profession, their place of origin, or their assigned nickname as well; the irritating Jeanine goes by "Glamour Puss," and Bugs associates the brooding Canadian with the unsightly French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (160, 162). Even Averill receives a nickname in the context of the Captain's story, which is a mystery tale of a beautiful woman and her fatally ill

sister. Averill takes the story as the Captain's version of her relationship with Bugs and associates herself with the fictional sister whom the Captain calls "the one who was not sick" and "the woman" (174). Even though the Captain never admits that his story is about Averill and Bugs, the sisters of the story and the mother and daughter on the ship are still interchangeable. The Captain's story can be told about two sisters or about Averill and Bugs, just as Bugs can also be called June Rodgers, or the Professor can also be called "Dr. Faustus." None of the names represents the associated character in a one-to-one fashion.

Though many of the nicknames are clever or comical, they do not directly identify characters and can be rotated out with the characters' real names or even with their professions. The seeming nonchalance of the names hints at an idea that Nietzsche fleshes out in *On Truth and Lying.* In this work, Nietzsche criticizes positivism, explaining that ideas and conventions of language are arbitrary. He claims that there is no one-to-one ratio of names and ideas, for just "as certainly as no one leaf is exactly similar to any other, so certain is it that the idea 'leaf' has been formed through an arbitrary omission of these individual differences" (Nietzsche 263). A picture of a leaf could show a round red object or a frayed green object, and somehow the one word would still apply to both. A character called "the artist" could mean a brooding Canadian in an anti-American funk, or it could mean a disabled Parisian who painted famous impressions of prostitutes. Somehow, the word "artist" still applies to both.

Nietzsche follows this logic to debunk any assurance of the metaphysical, saying that truth must be only "in short a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified [. . .] truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions; worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses" (263, author's italics). The characters in the story spend their breath "establishing themselves—telling about their jobs and

children and their gardens and their dining rooms" as if they have forgotten that their qualifiers are just illusions and details (Munro 161). They are each "stubborn and insistent to claim [their] turn" with flimsy qualifiers (161). They attempt to define themselves with "inviting bits of showing off" and "glittery layers ready to flake away" (167), even though they are only all "people on the boat" (158). Their collective definition as "the passengers" is more indicative than the details and sometimes the lies that each offers to show their individuality (167). Rather than representing their individual "essence," they are like "coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal" (Nietzsche 263). They have nicknames that associate with the things they do. And even though the nicknames do not represent any innate quality of each of them, the names still replace their birth names. Leslie happens to be embroidering a Tudor Rose pattern, and so her name is Tudor Rose. If she were embroidering a toile pattern, her nickname would be Toile. The circumstantial nickname replaces her birth name and signifies her without signifying any innate identity. She is one kind of leaf among many kinds of leaves, with a name that signifies her only after its use makes it "seem to a notion fixed, canonic, and binding" (Nietzsche 263).

However, only Bugs and Averill are aware that everyone can be assigned a nickname. The rest of their company considers themselves established and defined, and in conversation they will go on explaining what they are not and what they are in order to distinguish themselves further. Averill quotes the passengers' thoughts in her mind, projecting phrases like "*I said*. *I did. I always believe. Well, I don't know about you, but I"* (Munro 161, author's italics). Heidegger covers this impulse in just a few paragraphs of *Identity and Difference,* in which he points out "the necessity of difference to any determination of identity" (271). He explains that difference is merely a convention of defining things rather than a representation of innate contrasts. He

explains, "if we attempt to form an image of it, we shall discover that we are immediately tempted to comprehend difference as a relation. [. . .] As a result, difference is reduced to distinction, to a product of human intelligence" (271). Definitions cannot be made without difference, but each definition holds difference from others in common, and any oppositions dissolve.

The narrator hints at this kind of futility of establishing clear definitions by making the characters' bragging and preening seem vacuous. Nearly all of the characters have abandoned one profession and instead talk about pursuing another, as if their progression away from one identity and toward another will define them more concretely. The man that Bugs calls "Dr. Faustus" was a professor and a biologist at a university, but he "retired early" (158). He associates his different identity with his younger wife, Leslie. Leslie used to be a harpist, but aboard the ship she is a housewife sewing needlepoint covers. Jeanine used to be a radio host and a wife, but she intends to differentiate herself from both titles. Jeanine means to "find out who she really [is] when not blatting away into a microphone. And to find out who she [is] outside of her marriage" (Munro 163). Jeanine, or "Glamour Puss," needs the difference to find out her identity, just like all the other passengers are looking for difference from their past selves as well. They are literally and figuratively all in the same boat.

Logically, if difference cannot determine any concrete definition, then context is needed to make sense of a word, a thing, a person, or any other entity. Derrida claims that "no meaning can be determined out of context" (qtd. in Culler 123), and if the characters were successful in claiming a positive identity and new life, then the change of context that the ship provides would be enough to reinvent each of them. But Jonathan Culler pokes holes in that plan as he explains the limitlessness of possible contexts in *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after*

Structuralism. He explains that words and ideas "must in principle be able to specify every feature of context that might affect what particular speech act an utterance effectively performed. This would require [. . .] a mastery of the total context" (Culler 123). In terms of the story, this would mean that the professor explains every detail of his life in order to prove himself to Bugs. It would mean that Jeanine would have to claim all of the parts of her life, plus the parts outside of her radio show and her marriage, and then somehow explain it, in spite of the fact that she has "forgotten how to communicate" (Munro 163). The Captain seems to be comfortable with the context he has lived in since he was sixteen, but even he lets information pass him by, since he has "other things on his mind" (167). Obviously, this kind of complete knowledge of context is impossible. Culler goes on to say that "total context is unmasterable, both in principle and in practice. Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless" (123). Each character tries to assert him- or herself as a concrete point in time with exactly this set of behaviors and that set of experiences. But they are completely unable to pin themselves down so precisely.

Averill cannot escape her mother's context, as much as she tries. She "could sing in her head. But even in her head she never sang the songs that she associated with Bugs" (Munro 168). Her mother was an opera singer, and even though Averill "is not particularly musical," she still sang one hymn in her head all the time (168). The hymn defined her in that it "wrapped around every story she was telling herself" (169). But she knows the song only from going along with her mother to church when "Bugs was doing a solo" (169). It is her mother's song as well as her own. Later in the story, the narrator explains that Averill married a man "chiefly because Bugs would have thought the choice preposterous" (179). She tries to separate herself from her mother's context by marrying someone very much unlike her. Yet, after divorcing this first husband, she marries someone who "either charmed people or aroused their considerable dislike,"

just as people either think Bugs is charming "or they can't stand her" (160). Bugs claims that "Actually, I intend to hang around making your life miserable for years to come" (157), and in the end the man Averill marries makes Bugs's joking prediction come true. Inasmuch as "Bugs's own nickname may indicate the extent to which she is an irritant to her daughter" (Condé 62), Averill still cannot escape her relation to her mother to define herself within some other context. Instead, she puts on her mother's purple dress, "so that through this, and through her singing, she assumes something of her mother's persona" (Munro 164). Averill finds it impossible to "get away from it all" (160) as much as she wants to leave her mother's presence and influence behind to "feed the fishes" (156).

Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan sum up Derrida's dense essay "Difference" succinctly, hitting on several points that help ultimately to deconstruct any binaries in Alice Munro's story. After moving through the significance of the idea of difference in the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger, Derrida concludes that just as all words and ideas are defined in context and by difference, so the present moment is so colored by its context as to be totally fluid. He explains that "All ideas and all objects of thought and perception bear the trace of other things, other moments, other 'presences'" (Derrida 278). The result is what Derrida refers to as a "'confluence of being'" (279). Just as the interchangeable names of the interconnected characters demonstrate this "confluence of being," so the very ship they are living on symbolizes the story's circular interconnection. The ship in the story does not leave all traces of the past behind as it departs from Montreal; it does not become an independent entity from the past lives of its passengers. Averill realizes the absurdity of the notion of leaving everything behind, thinking "about how sea voyages were supposed to be about getting away from it all, and how 'it all' presumably meant your life, the way you lived, the person you were at home. Yet in all the conversations she

overheard people were doing just the opposite" (Munro 160-61). The ship and its occupants are caught in a "confluence of being," which leads to "a sense that everything in existence is relationally connected. We can sort it out into parts, but we should not assume those parts are pure and original or that they are pure identities" (Derrida 279). Instead, "They are the effects of other processes of relation and differentiation" (Derrida 279). The ship's passengers occupy a liminal space between past and present and between identity and non-identifiability, just as the ship occupies a liminal space between its two ports. The passengers hope that the trip will free them from their previous contexts, but "There is an ironic sense of enclosure about an event which should have been liberating," which is further demonstrated "in the fact that Bugs is journeying only towards death (Condé 61). That irony reverses the hopeful journey of emigrants seeking a new life in the New World. Rather than realizing a hopeful new life at the end of the story, Bugs's final comment about the Royal Infirmary where she dies references the past: 'Doesn't it sound Old World?'" (61). In effect, the "voyage" is circular in every sense. The characters have multiple names and can stand in for each other in their similar roles. They bring their past contexts with them in conversation with each other, and the ship is moving from old to old. The Captain has taken this voyage for ten years, and the passengers are merely "an old story to him" (Munro 167). And even in the narration of the story, "Much is left unresolved and unexplained; the title of the story is not the title of its crucial song, but only a phrase from it, and there is a deliberate refusal to supply too neat an outcome" (Condé 59). The narrator does not reveal whether Averill and her husband have a boy or a girl, though "both of them hoped for a daughter" (179). We never discover how accurate the Captain's story was in comparison to Averill's story, or whether Averill killed her mother and made love to the Captain. The Captain "left off the finale" (178) of his story, and, ultimately, "Averill never saw again, or heard from,

any of the people who were on the boat" (179). To top off the sea of indefiniteness, the boat itself has no name. The story is a mystery, left as undefined as each character and each separate plotline. The title of the story is part of a line from a song that can hardly define Averill independently of her mother. The hymn is the only "barrier set between the world in [Averill's] head and the world outside, between her body and [. . .] the black mirror of the North Atlantic" (169). Averill looks at the sea as a mirror and sings a song to herself that proves her "confluence of being."

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Poetry

Hayden Davis

508

There is a faint stain
in the corner
of the carpet
of the rising
and then
slowing
elevator.

Screen-like metal opens onto a sanitized and muffled and illumined hallway (these
lights have never been
turned off) Your door

a one-eyed sentinel, inside
no smell, no ghost of travelers passed—
tub all plastic, and the water
metallic taste of
rust.

In this pale home for an unfamiliar city
a room where everyone's slept before
it is almost
time.

Tiny bottles, stuttering faucets, soaps,
frantically scrubbing before she
knocking over tiny clattering
so small
(for heaven’s sake how can a person even
clean himself?)
Hurry up please it is almost time it is
time.

Two taps.

(At least the towels are clean *so* clean they won't
belong to anyone, they
will never be owned) Come in come in.

This world is a hotel room
in all the wrong ways—time and objects are purchased,
not experience, not safe cover.

The exchange is solitary: 10,000 dark doves could suffocate
your cell, crush the little mattress and congest
the long halls and oh god fill these
many many rooms to bursting and in the next night it
would all be

n e w
and vacuous,

the
bed
tight and clean and
empty,
anything human harshly purged.

Remember there's
nothing
and
nothing ever happens here.

Lights out,
breathe in,
sleep alone

Poetry

Hayden Davis

Gas Mask

I will pull on the face of the pandemic,
of glass eyes and tar,
of sealing wax and safety.

I will sense the deafening silence,
cracked only by the rhythmic
woosh,
of a dead apparatus
woosh, *woosh,*
sanitizing a universe of venom
into sterile breaths of life.

My sight is limited,
my world the color of
burnt rubber and charcoal.

I know an errant pin would undue every precaution,
would corrupt my skin
(and soon my bones)
and rot me many layers deep.

I must seem a blank-eyed demon, a no-faced
husk in the teary fog,
an artificial artifice.

Underneath this thin film of leather
my impurities are human, my
imperfections natural, and
my synthetic words as
blank and as pitiless
as the moon.

Poetry

Hayden Davis

Ishmael de Silentio

As I run between the shadows of brick-arches
I hear the quarter-hour knell;
looseleaves drop like autumn as I open
heavy ancient doors.

At home my family rises separate
off to school but not to work
individual quiet breakfasts
while chores mask the leaking fridge.

Admiring towers out the window, sunrise skies
atop a conscientious lawn—my mind goes to
Myself and deadlines due.
I am glad to be away, turning symbols into sense;
I was told to stay and study, and I
never voiced dissent.

At home my sister wakes and guides my father
from the bed, down cluttered hall, across warped floors in dusty room
where they do not wake till noon.
People come and go, and our troubles are
well-known, pure disclosure in the den
where the visitors come and go.

I lob my hand into the air and such is my reputation
smiles here are not coerced; any rage
or guilt or doubtfulness is sight unseen,
and thus covert.
—"I think
what Nietzsche says is that
language breaks down—the water
I request cannot be the same water

you envision; language," I say, now with
attention, "language does nothing to make us
human"—

My father on the couch is asking for a drink,
Where my brother is—
no word for water, please,
Or brother,
Son.

My younger siblings disobeyed and stayed nearby, out of familial obligation
and a sense of right and wrong. My father deigns to look them in the eye, accept their
lifts, their helping hands, their
guiding movements, constant care.

I alone obeyed, without an edge of hesitation.

I will not think of home all day.

Poetry

Caroline Reid Donaldson

I Went, Wanting

---

to write to the wild, waving
limbs caging the bustling
sky, freed me—
solace in the smooth buzz
of distant flies hushed
rustling softly,
an easy breeze
rope nest swings, sparrow
and I sing shifting
rhythms of relief as
the quietly welcoming
wild listens,
my silent composition
through them stirring
me, we write
our strikes , untouched in
this moment by
their nettle fingers.

The wren in the willow gives
strength to touch
the crust of blackness.

The heart is harder
than the sharply bending grass blades
that steel
me to be softened. It is
stretched taut on a wire stretched
between light and
darkness,

but in my time beneath the trees
the wind wraps me in wild light armor,
new growth that gives me power
against the deep world of pitch.
I leave full of the willow song
we have written, a war chant
wafting in the breeze.

Poetry

Deborah Rodriguez

I Sometimes Hold It Half a Sin

It makes all
the nonsense in the world—
aloneness, I mean.
I sit in it, sewing
mouths on my skin
until I am nothing but inked
conversation:

octobered smiles and everything
less than wishful. Give me
a word and I'll thread it until
you nor I nor he
can find me. Was it Tennyson
who said words
half reveal half
conceal the Soul within?

I said
I said and you don't
remember. Instead:
wailing silence, and smog—
a drag and a glass until morning.
Perhaps in dark
you will find me.

Poetry

Deborah Rodriguez

Smoking and Parenting Are Symbiotic

Remember whose once-lovely daughter fell
asleep with a desolate cigarette?

Remember? Misremember.
Disremember.

I have no trouble
spotting myself, Papi: I am ashtray thighs and stretched
thin over rib bone.

Perceive! perceive!
your eyes have scabbed over.

But perception leads
to perception, Papi—
see what the grass would
see if it had eyes, didn't I
say so? I am a language
you are ashamed to speak.

So my unencumbered grey
breath merely dissipates
into the right blend
of light, and heat, and noise: watch the smoke
rise and make a day, Papi.

Rise. Encore.

Short Story

Jake Hamilton

Still Kinetic

He loved the irony. He loved that his job was the absence of work, that art was supposed to represent the life-full, and that he represented the lifeless while his heartbeat bounced around in his ears. He stood in the same spot every day, stony and metallic, the gentle, intermittent clink of coins at the bottom of the plastic cup gently fertilizing his ears. The paint wasn't too bad. Sometimes he would go home and just leave it on his face, sleeping on a pillow covered in saran-wrap. His bathtub looked like it was made out of graphite.

He had used the same position for six years: grabbing his silver hat, looking down at the ground, legs slightly splayed into motionless walking. His suit, painted silver, stiffened with wires and old paint, kinetic, catching the wind that did not always blow. Some people would toss a coin into the wide-mouthed cup and wait, expecting to receive a reward for their payment—a movement, a wink, an extended flower. This is what his lesser colleagues did—shattered their stillness to encourage monetary reward. A cheap trick. This is why he preferred looking down from his cylindrical pedestal. He liked watching people watch him, waiting for him to break his stance.

He also liked looking at her. She'd walk by every weekday, to and from work, sometimes coming by en route to lunch. There were people he recognized after six years, and he would notice when they were gone: sick, pretending to be sick, on vacation . . . something. Not her. Every day, passing him within five minutes of eight o'clock and 5 o'clock every day. He could always pick out the click of her heels; it sounded meaner, more determined with short deliberate

steps, intentionally working harder than everyone else to get the same result. Blonde hair wrapped up tightly in a motionless bun, forbidden by bobby-pins and beige hair-bands from touching her endless combinations of power suits. Today was no exception.

She was coming again. She brightened momentarily, vibrating into the center of his vision, and fading out of the gray corners of his peripheral. The clicks lowered in pitch, obeying Doppler. A click without a clack. The missing beat suspended in his ears like a forgotten step on a dark stairwell. It started again, the staccato crescendoing with progression. She stopped in the middle of his vision, looking at him, and tossed a coin to the cup. It missed, rolling on the ground and bouncing over the depressions in the grey brick. The sound spiraled like the coin as gravity finally pulled its face to meet the silver bricks. He broke his stare, glancing over momentarily, forgetting to keep his eyes fixed at the base of the tree that he had watched swell and expand for so many years. They had made eye contact. She had seen. There was the dissonant scraping of a swiveling shoe on the brick as she turned, leaving her quarter on the ground, continuing her commute.

She didn't come by for lunch. The five gongs announcing the end of the work day were deprived from the usual accompaniment of her heels. She had taken a different way home. The usual crowd passed by in the peeling sunlight, some silencing their jingling pockets in front of him. After the dinner rush and endless combinations of hand-holding couples, he waited for complete silence and no eyes; he released himself from his stance. He descended quickly, scattering several birds that were patrolling the thin cracks in the pavement, searching for rogue crumbs from jostled blueberry crumpets or croissants. He hoisted his cylindrical pedestal underneath his arm and walked home. He walked, even though the subway would take him within six hundred feet of his apartment. Cheaper, kneading his knotted joints, avoiding the

stares that a walking statue collects. During working hours, stares were compliments. After hours was stealing. He was off duty, for God's sake. No free looks.

He could always find his door from the other end of the hallway. Thirty-nine copper door-knobs lined up down the hallway, one silver. He opened the door, applying another layer of silver paint to the slowly swelling knob. Keep the suit on. For two hours of every day he worked on his project, bending the wire frame into his practiced, congealed position. Twelve hours every day made him an expert. Every day he came home with a refreshed idea of how to bend, of how to force the wiring into the proper contours of tension. No one knew this prison better than he: the bulging calves of the left foot fruitlessly pushing off the ground, the right foot planted firmly on the ground just in front of him. Afterwards, dinner wrapped in saran for the microwave, pillow wrapped in saran for bed. Up at six. In place by seven.

There they were. The click and clack. He picked his spot on the base of the armored tree trunk, resolving not to look away under any circumstances. She stopped, centered in his vision, and approached quickly. Keeping his vision fixed, the blurry form hunched slightly, dropping something into the cup. There was no clink, no familiar sound of a metal coin hitting the tapestry of loose change. She had dropped in a bill. A rare, generous gesture. If it was a twenty dollar bill or larger a spoiled teenager would probably pick it out from the metal mosaic of its lesser cousins while he stood and watched—his stance threatening to approach, but contained as potential.

Scattering pigeons flecked with blinking eyelashes of sunlight. Pedestal in his arm, he bent over to pick up his wide-mouthed, extra-large combo cup and paused. A flag of irregularly torn, yellow notebook paper was held erect by surrounding copper and silver. He pulled it out and read.

You leave at 8. Wait until 8:15.

He waited. She came. Her speech was like her heels.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

He said nothing.

“You have been here every day for the past two years, haven’t you?”

Nothing.

“If you’re so committed to getting money every day then why don’t you get a job?”

The same as before.

“Piece of shit.”

She brought her high-heel covered foot back, as if about to kick, but seemed to remember and think better of it. He had flinched a little bit. She had noticed. It would have been a bad day, but it was Friday. No work tomorrow.

He worked all weekend in his glinting apartment, adding tension in the final wires of his synthetic frame. He missed Monday. Dividing his body into sections he spread papier mâché over his face, hands, and arms. He let it dry, peeled it off, and attached it to the frame. He missed Tuesday. He added detail: iris, pupil, fingernails, creases in the skin. He missed Wednesday. He worked through the night, applying the familiar, silver paint to the mâché. He worked through the night. He dressed his mâché in his silver jacket and pants and slid the shoes onto the hardened feet. At 5 A.M. he walked to his usual spot, set his likeness on the pedestal, and put the cup down in front of his work. He sat on the bench opposite and watched at 8:00 when the power suit and bun walked by, rolling her eyes and dropping a handful of change into the bulging cup.

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Julie Steward, PhD

Review of *Her*, Dir. Spike Jonze

"She Blinded Me with Science"[1]

One month before Valentine's Day, Hollywood released *Her*, a "Spike Jonze love story," yet *Her* is no more a Valentine than *The Wolf of Wall Street*, released on December 25, is a Christmas movie. *Her* is an inhumane film made to seem humane. Lush cinematography, Scarlett Johansson's voluptuous voice, and Joaquin Phoenix's sad puppy dog eyes seduce the audience into romantic identification. With so much cinematic time and focus placed on Theo, we can't help but share in his pain and longing, which would be a humane empathetic response if the object of his desire were human. But she/it isn't. Samantha is an operating system, a fact that the romantic ache of the film requires us to repress. Their love *feels* so authentic. Never mind that, like the pre-feminist plot of a Harlequin romance or any episode of *Mad Men*, Samantha begins as Theo's secretary until she graduates to lover. Sure, her intelligence is artificial but her affection is real. She recalls another screen siren, Jessica Rabbit: "I'm not bad. I'm just drawn that way" (*Who*). Samantha isn't bad. She's just programmed that way. And herein lies the rub. Jessica Rabbit is a cartoon, and she knows she is a cartoon. The audience laughs with the joke. Samantha, on the other hand, becomes in *Her* a "legitimate"

[1] See lyrics to Thomas Dolby's hit song, "She Blinded Me with Science": "It's poetry in motion / She turned her tender eyes to me / As deep as any ocean / As sweet as any harmony / Mmm – but she blinded me with science. . . ."

object of desire to the point that the film asks us to suffer alongside Theo when boy meets OS, boy loses OS, but boy never wins OS in the end. Obviously, the conceit of the film points to the isolating effects of technology, but *Her* tries to have it both ways. We desire real human connection, but we cheer for the love of man and machine as they twirl together at the carnival.

I want to ask all of the people who walked out of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, "Yeah, but did you sit through the love scene in *Her*?" Most film reviewers respond positively to the sex scene between Theodore and Samantha, finding it to be vulnerable and erotic. This was the precise reason I found the movie so creepy and offensive. We have to project a kind of humanity into the cyber-sex scene; we have to believe in the attraction of the characters since Jonze structures the film according to the classic romantic genre. Within these terms, if the film fails, it fails only because the audience, like a bunch of Peter Pan rejects, lacks the heart to believe. Every time a child says, "I don't believe in operating systems," there is an OS somewhere that falls down dead. Clap your hands! Don't let Samantha die!

The movie makes it very easy to get swept up into the intimacy of Theo and Samantha, especially as Jonze contrasts that openness with the rest of Theo's relationships. The love feels so *real* between artificial intelligence and boyfriend, or, to put it another way, between product and owner. Shouldn't we question what is at stake when human isolation is cured by a computer? If we don't, then aren't we just as lost as Theo?

Had the sex scene been played as satire, I would have, in the spirit of belief, clapped my hands. Instead, it felt creepy and wrong. The only sub-plot in the film more disturbing is Theo's occupation. Movie reviewer Glenn Kenny admits, "I'm still torn as to whether the idea of a business specializing in 'Beautifully Handwritten Letters' is cutely twee or repellently cynical" (Kenny). The answer, Mr. Kenny, is the latter. Imagine the poor fool who receives one of Theo's

letters and thinks that he or she is in a relationship with someone beautifully articulate. There is a word for that in my profession. It's called plagiarism. Theo's occupation is repellent, cynical, and immoral. It is no more "twee" to fake a love letter than it is to, say, copy someone else's story for your own short film and then plagiarize your apology. Shia LaBeouf, I'm looking at you.

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Taylor Burgess

Review of *Her*, Dir. Spike Jonze

Her and Why Real Relationships Are Fake

There's an achingly painful moment near the end of Spike Jonze's *Her* when protagonist Theodore Twombly's (Joaquin Phoenix) ex-wife and childhood friend, Catherine (Rooney Mara), accuses Theodore of the inability to sustain an emotionally mature relationship with another adult. This is because Theodore, eyes beaming and voice warm, has just told her that he is in love with a sentient computer operating system.

To many, Catherine's response may seem the only rational one. And her accusation is, in fact, correct, but not for the reasons she or like-minded audience members might think. Jonze is much cleverer than that. For one, he's not in the business of casting judgment on his characters. Given the same narrative, an inferior director might have patched together a trite indictment of our attachment to technology. Be careful: if you open your web browser just one time too many, you may develop an insatiable longing for URLs and ethernet ports. Some may interpret the film this way, but they would miss Jonze's more empathetic aim. The many lingering close-ups of Theodore's face cause us to care for rather than make an example of him.

But if Jonze presents Theodore as a person for us to relate to, not learn moralizing lessons from, how can Catherine be correct? Her words contain more and larger truths than she realizes. Earlier in the film, before meeting Samantha the operating system, Theodore goes on a date with

a woman with whom he is both passive and stilted. His relationship with Catherine has eroded simply because they drifted apart. Undoubtedly, Theodore's romantic life until now has not included breathless triumphs and fiery failures. Instead, he floats toward and past women, inert.

However, when he meets Samantha, Theodore's lethargy transforms into subtly glowing passion, accented by the film's inviting, orange-dominated cinematography. Theodore is not capable of an emotionally mature relationship with another adult human, as Catherine recognizes without fully grasping the implications. His ideal partner is of another substance entirely. Or entirely substance-less. It's why Samantha's attempt to hire a surrogate human to help them physically consummate the relationship fails painfully and leaves Theodore shaken.

Still, if Jonze had just made a film about the importance of identifying and accepting outsider sexual preferences, then it would be no more unusual or profound than the bland technological cautionary tale it also could have been. Instead, the film succeeds by bravely emphasizing the artificiality that is the foundation of every intimate relationship.

An interesting post-production footnote highlights this truth. Samantha was originally voiced by Samantha Morton, who was always on set for her scenes with Phoenix but confined to a sound booth where Phoenix could not see her. However, once shooting was complete, Jonze decided Morton was not the right actress for the role and re-cast Scarlett Johansson as Samantha. Johansson then dubbed over all of Morton's original lines. This means that every poignant moment in the film, every intimate connection Theodore seems to make with Samantha, is in fact Phoenix interacting with a completely different actress than the one we hear in the finished film.

This relational switch, combined with the film's subject itself—a man in love with an operating system, which we are inclined to believe is impossible—could add up to a very cynical evaluation of love. If Theodore can love a disembodied voice, and Phoenix can appear to have

chemistry with someone with whom he did not once interact, then love is clearly just a hollow surge of hormones, and the highs and lows of our relationships are only illusions of successes and barriers that we ourselves create. We construct our own relational artifices.

If this perspective seems inescapable, it's because it is. We cannot empirically prove that love is anything more, and the film implicitly acknowledges this. However, rather than brood on the loss of this metaphysical ideal of romance, Jonze instead chooses to explore what positive insights can come from the acceptance of underlying romantic artifice. At the surface level, Theodore's relationship with Samantha the operating system—or Samantha's relationship with Theodore the human—is no less alive and real than an ordinary heterosexual, homosexual, or other romantic configuration. Some may find this plurality morally precarious or repulsive, but, if seen from the perspective of the otherwise-lost Theodore, it is liberating.

Further, the embrace of artifice allows Jonze to make the point so often made in other romantic films—that we are all in this together, and that we all experience the same gut-wrenching romantic upheavals—but in a way that does not feel sentimental or forced, but fresh. When we are faced with a relationship that is so transparently based on artificial conditions, we become defamiliarized to the usual romantic beats we expect from a film love story. So when we suddenly recognize a familiar, painful situation playing out before us, we see it writ exponentially larger because it is in a new context. When Samantha tells Theodore their love is changing because she has concurrent intimate relationships with hundreds of other humans and operating systems, including the reconstructed consciousness of Alan Watts, we feel the stabs of heartbreak much more acutely than normal. Though none of us have had to compete with Alan Watts for a lover's attention—an absurdly intimidating rival—we empathize more deeply because it reminds us more strongly of our failures. Even if our own rejections are more

mundane, for more pedestrian or even logical reasons, they throb just as deeply in our souls.

This empathy without an accompanying complex ontological definition is crucial. The film questions what we essentially are, and what love essentially is, without providing a clear answer, as to do so would weaken its strengths: Jonze reminds us how deeply we do feel depression and joy in our souls, while wisely choosing not to tell us what the soul actually is. *Her* affirms us because we feel. While this is a much simpler and more humanist (or pantheist) heart than that found in much of Jonze's other work—particularly when collaborating with Charlie Kaufman—it is enough.

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Megan Burr

Review of *American Hustle*, Dir. David O. Russell

As the Oscars draw near, it is time to reexamine those nominated films that made us laugh, cry, and pretend we cared about them for the sake of sounding cultured. One such film, David O. Russell's con-movie *American Hustle*, is up for ten Academy Awards. These include Best Picture, Best Director, Best Production Design, and, astoundingly, all four of the Acting categories. Whether or not the film will win any of these is still up to the Academy (and your stay-at-home Oscar ballots), but now comes the question: *should* the film win any, or all, of these perspective awards? We shall see.

Since *American Hustle* focuses on the thrilling tale of the FBI's Abscam sting operation that occurred in the 70s and 80s, the film drips with the decadent, ridiculous quality of the time. The film's tone is immediately established with the disclaimer. While most "real life" films feature a serious disclaimer for the events portrayed, *American Hustle* simply states: "Some of this actually happened." From the costumes and set design to the music, everything fits with this opening note, turning what could have been unintentional melodrama into a level of campiness that works only because of the sheer dedication of all involved parties.

The acting in *American Hustle* is excellent across the board, as evidenced by the Academy's acknowledgement of all four major actors and actresses in the film. Every character was convincingly portrayed to the point of forgetting their previous work (a problem all too

apparent in the age of IMDB™). Christian Bale's portrayal of Irving Rosenfeld is a particular standout, especially when it comes to Bale's dedication. I never thought I could ever justify a film having an extended sequence of a man constructing an elaborate comb-over, but Bale has me convinced. Beyond the sheer physical humor of his part is the surprising compassion that he drums up in the audience. By the end of the film, I wanted him to get a happy, crazy Jennifer Lawrence-free ending, whether or not he deserved it.

Despite this, the film certainly has its faults. I am a firm believer that a film should not be over two hours in length unless absolutely crucial, and I was unconvinced that *American Hustle* needed its 138-minute runtime. Several scenes could have and should have been trimmed if not cut entirely, and Russell's well-known characters-over-plot way of directing does not suit this necessarily plot-heavy film. Although the portrayals are spot-on, the film's plot and pacing suffer from the time dedicated to fleshing out the characters and their intricate personalities. The twists and turns required in this kind of film should have taken precedence over character construction, and the lack of focus causes a general muddiness in the plot by the third act. Russell's tone might have been consistent, but his film most certainly was not.

Overall, I believe that the film deserves an Oscar or two, especially when it comes to its Production Design. Russell, I am near certain, will not win, but should the actors and actresses? If this film existed in a vacuum, I might say, yes, but given the numerous stellar performances among the nominees this year, I am tempted to say, no. There is no way to determine where the Academy will lean, what with the Oscar bait that dominates the awards every year, but I feel as though the cast of *American Hustle* stands a fighting chance. Who knows? They might end up stealing the awards as their characters stole the money. They did, after all, get *really* into character.

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Carlo Chiarenza, PhD

Review of *La Grande Bellezza* (*The Great Beauty*), Italy,

Dir. Paolo Sorrentino

In 1960, fifteen years after the end of WWII, Italy was in the midst of what was known as the "economic miracle" and was rapidly transforming itself from a defeated and destroyed nation into one of the strongest economies in the world. The Communist Party was losing its grip on over 40% of the Italian workers and farmers who, after twenty years of Fascist dictatorship and the horrors of the war, were quickly welcoming the unexpected wealth and the chance finally to acquire those material goods—cars, refrigerators, TV sets—that only a few years before would have been an impossible dream. In other words, the Italian working class was happily becoming the new middle class, the middle class was becoming the upper class, and the conservative aristocracy could regain some of the privileges lost in 1946 with the fall of the Monarchy.

In the same 1960, a film appeared in Italian, European, and American theaters that caused all sorts of extreme reactions, from the most enthusiastic critical reviews to the most violent accusations of immorality; and, especially from Italian critics of the Left, the accusation of having betrayed the sacred rules of Neorealism. The film ended up by winning the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, plus about ten other prestigious international prizes. We are talking, of course, of Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, the film that projected Fellini into

international stardom and changed the history of cinema, in Italy and elsewhere, once and for all. Further, it was a film that served as an ideal introduction to what is universally considered the most successful example of "cinema of the self," that is, *Fellini's 8 ½*.

These short historical notes are necessary to introduce another Italian film, Paolo Sorrentino's *La Grande Bellezza*, released in 2013, winner of the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film and nominated for the 2014 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. According to many Italian and American critics, Sorrentino's film is heavily indebted to both *La Dolce Vita* and *8 ½*. And this is definitely true: Fellini is present in many ways and on different levels of meanings. But what many critics, mostly Italian, seem to have missed, is that this "Fellinian presence" is not a limitation but an intentional and programmatic choice. Like Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*, Michael Radford's film *Il Postino,* and Jorge Luis Borges's collection of short stories *Ficciones,* the presence, and utilization, of the tradition in one's own work is a postmodern strategy that enriches the text with many different levels of interpretation. This is, after all, what Sorrentino's film is all about: the reading of the present through the presence of the past.

But let's now see, first, which are those "quotations" from Fellini, what Sorrentino's intentions are, and, mostly, how successfully he has achieved his ambitious project. The similarities with Fellini are as obvious as they are intentional. As in *La Dolce Vita,* the protagonist of *The Great Beauty* is a writer, but while in Fellini's film he is a young journalist who aspires, unsuccessfully, to be a novelist, in Sorrentino's he is a sixty-five-year-old novelist—Gep Gambardella—who, after writing one successful novel as a young man, ends up by being a gossip and high-society reporter. For both characters, the reason for their failure is the "distraction" caused by the society in which they live. For Fellini, it was the affluent society of

the economic miracle, made of rich industrialists, Italian and American movie stars, and the debauched representatives of the aristocracy. For Sorrentino, it is the post-Silvio Berlusconi society, made of a vanishing aristocracy, pseudo-artists, and the rich representatives of a lost and confused intellectual Left. Another obvious element the two films have in common is the absence of a traditional narrative: both are a series of frescoes of a society, painted without an apparent logic of cause and effect, with the background of an astonishingly beautiful Rome. The photography is outstanding and, together with the acting, beginning with the amazing Tony Servillo, is probably the main reason for the global success of the film. Most of the images of Rome are captured at night, when the middle class sleeps and the "beautiful people" drown their unhappiness in alcohol, drugs, and meaningless sex. It is the representation of an Italy that has ceased to create, to believe, and that now survives thanks to its glorious past. Every sequence is a meta-cinematic metaphor, and while it would be clearly impossible to examine all of them, it might be useful to analyze at least a couple, in order to provide the viewer with a key to decipher the rest of the film.

One of the most "traditional" characters of the film who, because of his age, his accent, and his status within Italian cinema, is an obvious symbol of an older Rome, is Gep Gambardella's closest friend, an adoring, and somehow pathetic, dramatist—not casually called Romano—who is desperately trying to stage a one-character play that should convey his existential anguish. Unable to find a theater willing to host his experimental play, he turns to Gep. When, thanks to his friend's intercession, he finally finds one, at the end of opening night he realizes that his text is all rhetoric and no content, and he decides to leave Rome to return to his small native town, in search of his roots, conscious of his inability to compete with a glorious past. He blames his failure on Rome. And in a way he is right: the ancient Rome, the Popes, the

Renaissance, and the Baroque provoke an unbearable conflict with the mediocre Italy generated by twenty years of Berlusconi's values and vulgarity: because *The Great Beauty* is, above all, a long, tortured, and beautiful farce on the mediocrity of contemporary Italy.

Redemption is possible, but only through a complete detachment from the present: in Augustinian terms, through a vertical transcendence from time and space, as suggested by many images of the film. In this sense, the character of La Santa (the Saint), who appears at the end of the film and is closely inspired by Sister Theresa of Calcutta, is the final metaphor and the only hope of salvation. Totally detached from any mundane reality, she can command a flock of flamingos with a puff of her breath, and when asked how she can survive eating only roots, she replies, "roots are important," offering the last meta-linguistic metaphor of the film. The last sequence, before the gorgeous scenes of the ending credits, is of her, mortified in her ultra-centenary body, claiming the holy stairs of the Saint John's basilica on her knees, painfully slowly, one step at the time. Temporality is dilated, and the destination seems unreachable. The absurdity of the undertaking is the last open question of the film. All that remains is beauty, the great beauty that reappears in the morning, day after day.

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Alyssa Duck

Review of *Philomena*, Dir. Stephen Frears

"Did you enjoy your sin?":

Christianity and the Problem of Female Pleasure in *Philomena*

Feminist critics of Christian cultural practices have long condemned the semantics of shame that have traditionally surrounded Biblical interpretations of female sexuality. Many critics argue that while the Church's rhetoric of imposed female modesty and sexual chastity effectively promotes social cohesion, this rhetoric posits both the female body and its sexual capabilities as inherently shameful in its temptation to male congregants and its capacity both to provoke and engage in sexual "sin." This rhetoric of shame effectively silences dialogue between women about their bodies and their sexual capabilities, shrouding sexuality in a veil of mystery and ignorance masquerading as righteous purity. Unsurprisingly, this lack of sexual education denies women the sexual agency enjoyed by men, whose bodies, free from the practical fear of pregnancy, experience spiritual shame only at the instigation of the temptation of the female body. Feminist critics have noted that this shame is epitomized in the Church's propensity to portray women as members of one of two mutually exclusive sexual identities explained by Freud in his theory of the "Madonna-Whore Complex."[2] This binary presentation

[2] See *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XI (London, Hogarth Press, 1957).

of women in the religious socio-symbolic severely limits the range of sexual and individual identities available to young women and, consequently, the development of individual female sexual identity.

The film *Philomena* addresses both the practical and spiritual concerns of a young pregnant woman who, upon abandonment by her family, turns to the nuns of Rosecrea Abbey for help. Philomena, seduced and impregnated by a handsome young man at a carnival, must perform harsh, degrading domestic labor at the Abbey and ultimately give up the rights to her child in exchange for her lodging. While the nuns of Rosecrea theoretically perform their Christian duty of caring for the young impoverished mothers, the nuns ensure constant physical and emotional punishment for their dependents by creating a culture of female body-based shame in which the young mothers, deprived of personal identity outside the consequence of their sexual rebellion, are clearly positioned and treated as symbolic "Eves." The cinematography of Philomena's seduction both symbolically situates her within the Christian tradition of female ignorance and shame surrounding sexuality and prefigures her situation as an "Eve" figure in the Abbey. Upon first meeting her unnamed sexual partner, Anthony's father, she playfully admits that her aunt "told her (she) wasn't to speak to strange men like you." Philomena ignores this advice, however—a decision that speaks to its ineffectiveness—and kisses her seducer, dropping in the dirt the apple that she had been eating. Philomena's decision, sealed by the image of the Biblical "forbidden fruit," signifies her transformation from spiritually sanctioned Mary to ecclesiastically dangerous Eve. More practically, however, it signifies the failure of the Christian tradition to provide adequate practical sexual education to females. While Philomena's Roman Catholic aunt warned her to ignore and suppress her sexual desires, it is clear that any further sexual education was completely absent from both Philomena's home and

Catholic school. While confessing her pregnancy and pleading for help from the Nuns at the Rosecrea Convent, Philomena tearfully explains her complete ignorance of the process and consequence of the sexual experience: "They don't teach us about babies in school!" Interestingly, the Nun's vicious response deals with neither Philomena's physical pregnancy nor her spiritual state: she demands, instead, "Did you enjoy your sin?" Philomena's situation is problematic to the Church neither because of her physical pregnancy nor its implications for her soul but because of her renegade sexual pleasure. Philomena later admits to the journalist Sixsmith that she "enjoyed it. The sex." It is clear even to Philomena that the problem of her pregnancy centered on her renegade exploration of sexual pleasure.

Philomena's captivity at the Rosecrea abbey symbolically redeems her womanhood by punishing this sexual pleasure with the consequences of Church-sanctioned female sexuality in marriage: housewifery. Traditionally, female sexuality has been sanctioned by the Church only within the context of bearing children for one's husband and, ultimately, for the perpetuation of future generations of congregants. Philomena, along with the other young mothers incarcerated at the Abbey, becomes the wife not of a male congregant but of the Abbey itself, serving as a laundress and housekeeper in exchange for a home and ultimately producing a child for the financial benefit of its proprietor, the Abbey. It is clear that the Abbey is not a generous patriarch: in fact, Philomena's description of her time at the Abbey fits almost all of the National Coalition Against Violence's markers of an abusive domestic situation. Philomena is consistently "isolated" and "humiliated" by the nuns of the Abbey, she is fundamentally "seen as property or a sex object rather than as a person," and the Abbey certainly "threaten(s) to take (her) children away" (Helpguide.org). Although Philomena admits to Sixsmith that "no one coerced" her to sign the waiver forgoing access to her child, it is clear that she "signed of (her) own free will"

only as an alternative to abandonment. Like many survivors of domestic abuse, when asked why she did not escape the convent with her child, she demands, "Where else did I have to go?" Philomena's abusive marriage to the Abbey casts an ominous shadow on the parallel institution of traditional Christian marriage: operating under the same principles of female sexual shame, sexual objectification, and domestic subjugation, is Philomena's ill-fated "marriage" any different?

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Special Series:

Reviews of Oscar-Nominated Films

Spring 2014, Issue 3.2

Keya Kraft, PhD

Review of *Fruitvale Station*, Dir. Ryan Coogler

Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale Station* opens with jumpy, unedited footage from a cellphone that captured the shooting of Oscar Julius Grant III on the platform of a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station in Oakland, California. Taken by a bystander in the early hours of January 1, 2009, the one-and-a-half minutes of footage depict a highly charged encounter between four young black men and two white BART transit authority police, which ultimately ended in the fatal shooting of Grant by one of the officers, Johannes Mehserle. The incident and the cellphone footage sparked outrage and protests in the Bay Area at what was widely seen as a case of police brutality, culminating in a two-year sentence of manslaughter for Mehserle.

Coogler's first feature-length film, *Fruitvale Station*, fictionally reconstructs the day leading up to Grant's death, depicting him as generous and loving, frustratingly irresponsible, headstrong, and desperate to provide for his girlfriend and daughter but lacking the wherewithal to do so. Over the course of the day, Grant, played by Michael B. Jordan (*The Wire* and *Friday Night Lights*), endears himself to a young female customer at the Farmer Joe's grocery store by helping her at the fish counter, tries and fails to get a job back that he has lost for chronic lateness at the same grocery store, initiates a deal to sell marijuana but then dumps it into the bay, tries to make up with his girlfriend Sophina for having an affair, is in constant contact with his

mother (Octavia Spencer), and lovingly dotes on his well-adjusted if financially ill-provided-for daughter Tatiana. Through a series of flashbacks, the film fleshes out Grant's past, which includes a stint at San Quentin State Prison for selling marijuana. In the film, which won both the Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award at the 2013 Sundance Festival, Coogler reminds his audience that tragedy has traditionally involved deeply flawed characters who gain their audience's sympathy despite real human failings.

By opening the film with the raw footage capturing Grant's killing, Coogler infuses a relentless sense of fatalism into the events of an otherwise ordinary day in which Grant aimlessly but also harmlessly roams the city in which he lives. The inevitability of Grant's death is juxtaposed with the story of the last random person he meets as he and his friends celebrate New Year's Eve in the streets of San Francisco. Perpetually endearing himself to strangers, Grant negotiates the use of a private bathroom for a pregnant woman and spends a few minutes discussing marriage with her husband. When her husband says he had no money when they got married, Grant asks how he paid for the ring. "I stole it. I told you, I had no money. I used to be good with credit cards," the man answers, before explaining that he bought her the ring she wears now with money he made as the owner of a successful web design company. The scene highlights the redemptive power of the American Dream to erase the mistakes of the past, even as the film makes it evident that Grant will be denied this opportunity.

Although Grant is the film's protagonist, the camera rarely aligns with his perspective, denying the viewer the illusion of self-identification with him. Instead, his character is depicted most often in medium close-up shots captured with a hand-held camera at the remove of several paces, often following the back of his head as he navigates Oakland. The viewer rarely accesses his perspective with the degree of identification that films typically employ to garner our

sympathies for their main characters. And through the use of the rough hand-held shots juxtaposed with scenes of the city, Coogler also denies the filmgoer the consolations of an omniscient view of the unfolding events. Our perspective is limited, and our knowledge is narratological (we already know how the film ends) rather than visual. For instance, we, like Grant and his friends, lack an objective or omniscient view of the events that unfold on the platform, and we are just as panicked as they are. Perhaps the perspective we most clearly inhabit is that of the bystander on the train, documenting the fatal shooting with his or her cellphone and requiring the film to help us understand what we are actually witnessing.

When the film opened in theaters in July of 2013, it garnered Oscar buzz particularly for Michael B. Jordan's compelling depiction of Grant as a loveable if frustratingly irresponsible protagonist. Perhaps more significantly, the film captured the attention of an American audience seeking catharsis in the wake of the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, another incident involving a young black man killed by an individual who had only a tenuous claim to the authority to mete out justice in the street. As *Fruitvale Station* appeared in theaters, Zimmerman's trial was concluding in an acquittal, and it is impossible not to see the film as a commentary on the way these and other cases tell a story of the ironic inversion of a stereotype of young black men as violent offenders. These are stories about young black men being disproportionately targeted by violent offenders. For some critics, the social-justice message of the film feels heavy handed, veering too quickly towards pathos, particularly in a fictional scene in which Grant holds the body of a dying pit bull in a gas station lot after it has been fatally hit by a speeding car. If the parallels between Grant and the dog are too obvious—pit bulls are a breed with an outsized reputation for violence—it is perhaps a message the public needs to keep being told in an obvious way.

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Katie Little

Review of *12 Years a Slave*, Dir. Steve McQueen

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12 Years a Slave relates the true story of a freeman of New York named Solomon Northup who was deceived, kidnapped, and enslaved in the pre-Civil War South. It has been showered with critical recognition: receiving an astounding 129 award nominations across the globe including nine for the Academy Awards.

Most recently, it was awarded Best Film at BAFTA.[3] In accepting this award, director Steve McQueen told the audience: "Right now there are twenty-one million people in slavery as we sit here, twenty-one million people" (Brown, n. pag.). When Chiwetel Ejiofor, who plays Solomon, accepted his BAFTA for Best Leading Actor, he pledged to his newborn niece and nephew that "we will endeavor to make a world that you are proud of" (Beaumont-Thomas, n. pag.) These statements call attention to the fact that these award winners did not set out simply to make a good film; they set out to make a good society.

This film is as uncomfortable as it is beautiful. It focuses all of its auditory, aesthetic, and dramatic powers into forcing the viewer into the story. In an interview with CBS, Ejiofor explained that Solomon's story is compelling in that we can identify with him as a free, educated individual and are then swept more into the pathos of his suffering as he is stripped of his human rights and tortured into submission. If the narrative does not awake your pathos, McQueen and

[3] British Academy Film and Television Awards

cinematographer Sean Bobbit make sure that you are unable to escape Solomon's condition through the mise-en-scène. The most painful scenes of the film are also the longest. Solomon's captors beat him incessantly for an entire minute of film time. There are multiple nude scenes in quick succession where the slaves are forced to bathe in front of their captors or are put on display for market. As these captors stand around as voyeurs to this humiliation, we are also implicated as voyeurs.

The two most excruciating scenes of the film are the scenes where the physical abuse peaks towards Solomon, and then towards Patsey (Lupita Nyong'o).[4] Before and after these scenes, the action slows down to as close to real-time as possible to make us invest in the characters and the action. As retribution for fighting back against his master, Solomon is hanged. But before his persecutors can kill him, the overseer comes to stop them—not to save Solomon's life but to protect the landowner's property. The overseer leaves him tied to the tree in near suffocation for over four minutes of the film (all day in the story). The soundtrack is generally unsetting, but its absence in this four minutes is much more so. The silence exposes the choking and gasping sounds from Solomon's mouth and the squishing sounds from his feet trying to keep his balance in the mud. The length of this scene and the painfully realistic sights and sounds of Solomon's suffering make it impossible for the viewer to escape the action. The scene where Master Epps whips Patsey is even longer and more painful in certain ways. Again, the lack of music leaves no buffer between the audience and the heinous violence on the screen.

McQueen adds further discomfort to these scenes in the form of voyeurism. Both torture scenes are full of witnesses. There are voyeurs who watch with indifference or contempt (the overseer, Mistress Ford, Master and Mistress Epps). The rest of the voyeurs (the other slaves)

[4] Screen Actors Guild award winner for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role

watch these atrocities knowing that they are powerless to change them. We as audience members can choose which type we will be, but we cannot escape the responsibility we incur by witnessing these atrocities.

Solomon is rescued in the end. He got to see his family again and spend the rest of his life in dignity serving the Abolitionist movement. However, there are millions who spent their entire lives in slavery and whose stories we have not heard. The American memory likes to edit out the uncomfortable pieces of history. Europe is littered with concentration camps converted into museums; these relate the shameful and devastating period of the Jewish Holocaust and encourage visitors to learn from this dark page of human history. Slavery in the United States involved the oppression of millions of people as well—the majority of whom were treated like cattle (sometimes better and sometimes worse) for the entirety of their lives. We have no monuments. We have no museums.[5] You can visit plantations galore across the South—but it is unlikely that your tour guide will give you sobering accounts of the enslaved people who lived and died there. The American memory is often short and selective, so we need films such as *12 Years a Slave* to remind us of the shocking truth that 150 years ago, these atrocities were quotidian for our country.

There is a long moment towards the end of the film where Solomon remains fixed in an emotional stare and then looks straight at the camera as a sort of silent soliloquy. It is as though his eyes ask us the question that he has just asked another character, "Do you believe in justice? That slavery is an evil that should befall none?" The energy of this film seems to be devoted to inculcating empathy in its viewers, and this scene stands as the final plea for justice.

[5] The United States is working to rectify this. The Smithsonian plans to open a museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C. A National Slavery Museum has been in the works for over a decade.

We are powerless to aid Solomon and Patsey, but we are capable of seeking justice for the twenty-one million modern slaves of whom McQueen spoke. In addition to this material cause, in many interviews Ejiofor expresses a desire that this film would generate a higher degree of "human respect" for society in general (*Bristol Post*). Slavery may be an uncomfortable piece of our history and our present, but we must endure discomfort to commemorate the millions of people who have been and are still the victims of a lack of "human respect."

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Reviews of Oscar-Nominated Films

Spring 2014, Issue 3.2

Ryan Plemmons

Review of *Wolf of Wall Street*, Dir. Martin Scorsese

The Vicious *Wolf of Wall Street*

I've seen *The Wolf of Wall Street* three times now, and each time, people have left the theater in frustration or revulsion, probably a little bit of both. This fact might seem unimportant, tangential at best to dissecting the merits of *Wolf*, but I think it's important. Why did many honest, decent, American moviegoers hate this movie enough essentially to waste their money and leave? I haven't interviewed these people, but if their experience was like mine, I can hazard a guess: people left because they felt complicit in Belfort's debauchery, and they can't help feeling that Jordan Belfort and his cronies represent a trend in American society that affects both Wall Street and Main Street. And it disgusts them. It should. I was disgusted too, mostly with myself for loving every second, for rooting for Belfort until the bitter end, for thinking *I want what that guy has* as Belfort indulges his vices. We're uncomfortable with this film because it is the full embodiment of our selfish, psychopathic, materialistic, I-want-it-now culture. *Wolf* sucked me in and viciously spit me back out three hours later, feeling equal doses of elation and horror, and I can't help thinking that *Wolf* wasn't a morally ambiguous or amoral film at all. It's the most morally centered film of 2013.

I think I need to make my terms clear, here. By morally centered, I think that the film sees things in terms of right and wrong. It's a binary opposition; there isn't room for the "shades

of grey" which are in vogue on TV shows such as *Breaking Bad, True Detective, Sons of Anarchy,* or *Justified.* No, Scorsese's world takes a clear moral position. His films often follow the demented, psychopathic, and evil, but he never endorses these people's actions. He observes the world's evil, but his films always have this split between right and wrong, good and bad, and they exist as universals. It's always wrong to murder, to extort, to cheat, but that doesn't mean that the people who do these things aren't fascinating. They're interesting in a skewed and warped way until they reap the consequences of their heinous actions. In Scorsese's universe, evil has a kind of entropy to it, and nowhere is this entropy more apparent in Scorsese's films than in *Wolf*. We have fun watching Jordan Belfort steal, lie, and cheat his way into wealth, but we also can't help but notice how empty it is, how dependent he is on substances or sex to fill a chasm created by his vacuous soul. He has power, but he always wants what he can't have. Why else would he visit a dominatrix when he's got complete power over his life? Why would he demand that his yacht be driven into the midst of a squall? Why does he abandon people who love him? Why does he not quit while he has a chance?

Because he's evil. In this universe, evil is destructive, and it consumes people, but it mostly just empties people of all life and feeling. I've talked to a lot of people who think the movie was too long or too repetitive, but it isn't. The cycle is the point. It's evil working its way slowly through Belfort's life until he's alone, left to rot riding the self-help circuit. The time to play ends. His choice to indulge, to be Scorsese's version of evil, is fun only until it isn't. Though Belfort's punishment is relatively light, he's lost his business, his wife, his kids, his friends. Jordan Belfort becomes a wisp of polluted air. Now that's morally centered.

And Scorsese's binary between good and evil extends outward, to the audience, to you, me, the consumer of his product. I mentioned before my complicated and contradictory

emotional reaction to this film, and I think it's important to understanding the film. If people leave the film thinking (I'm sure I wasn't the only one) *Jordan Belfort is my hero, and I want to be him*, then that viewer engages in a kind of evil. Scorsese won't let you off easy in this film because *how* you watch it is important. It's easy to watch passively, to get swept up in the drugs, parties, the easy sex, but Scorsese also halts the momentum in sudden, sickening ways to great effect. Take the film's most famous scene, where Belfort takes too many Quaaludes and struggles to get home. The moment is uproariously funny because Belfort, never a stranger to an addled consciousness, is out of his depth, unable to speak or walk, but as the scene goes on, the humor stops, and we grow to be disgusted with this man. He crawls, like a helpless child toward his million-dollar car, and he can't get the door opened. We see it all happen at once: his long, pathetic attempts to perform simple human actions. In this moment, we see the full debasement of this person; only he's ceased to be human, to be relatable, and becomes just sad. We want to live the easy life, Jordan's life, but we can't. It would keep us from being human. By the film's end, we recognize this fact, but Scorsese punishes the viewers for liking this film, for letting him dupe us. Scorsese is *Wolf's* master trickster. He wants to see how low we'll sink before we feel something other than admiration for these monsters.

That's why so many people hate this movie, because Scorsese rails against our incapacity to feel anything real. We want thrills, we want laughs, but we don't want to look in the mirror, to see the vicious darkness lurking inside of us. *The Wolf of Wall Street* doesn't suit all tastes, but it is for everyone. Watch the movie, examine your own moral darkness, and know that this movie is the movie we need. More than that, it's the movie we deserve.
