

The Ashen  
Egg

A Journal of Undergraduate English Scholarship

Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Vol. 4 (2016)

# The Ashen Egg

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**Submission guidelines:** *The Ashen Egg* is an annual journal publishing critical essays on literature, rhetoric, linguistics, film, and popular culture. Any current Western Kentucky University undergraduate student may submit scholarly work for consideration. Submissions must be endorsed by an English Department faculty member who confirms the submission as a piece produced for one of the faculty member's courses and approves it as worthy for publication. Manuscripts may range from 750 to 3000 words, though exceptions may be made for submissions of stellar quality. Literature, film, and pop culture essays must follow the Modern Language Association style guidelines as defined in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (latest edition); essays on linguistics or professional writing topics may use APA (latest edition). All submissions must be in Times or Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, and be free of typographical and grammatical errors.

**Deadline:** Submissions must be received in CH 135 no later than May 31 and must be accompanied by the cover sheet and endorsement form to be considered.

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## Note on Contributors

**Josh Beal** recently graduated from Western Kentucky University, where he majored in journalism and minored in creative writing. His dartboard of pursued career paths is decorated with trinkets from pop culture studies, graphic design, and photojournalism—concentrations that speak to his desire to engage audiences and to craft a story. During his time on the Hill, Beal served the student body as an editor of the *College Heights Herald* and the *Talisman*. His work has also appeared in *Zephyrus*, WKU's undergraduate literary journal. The alumnus is currently based in Louisville, where he works as a freelance photographer while seeking admission to creative writing graduate programs.

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**Macy Lethco** is in her third year of studying Spanish and linguistics as a self designed major at WKU. She enjoys studying both language and linguistics because they connect her to the very human experience of the creation of meaning, culture, and community. Louisville, KY is home, but she could say the same of many other places, including Spain, where she has spent a portion of each of the past few years. In the future, she hopes to continue travelling, learning, and eating good cake.

**Brandy Meredith** graduated from WKU in December 2015 with a BA in creative writing and literature. Her other publications include "The Patient," a short story appearing in *Zephyrus* (2015), "Mom," a creative nonfiction essay appearing in *Zephyrus* (2015), and "Forget Me Not," a short story that will appear in a forthcoming suspense fiction anthology by Main Street Rag Publishing Company (2016). She was a finalist in the Jim Wayne Miller Fiction Contest in 2013 and winner of the Ann Travelstead Fiction Award in 2015. Her dream is to one day

write a novel fantastic enough to earn a blurb from Stephen King. She wishes to thank Dr. Molly McCaffrey for fanning the spark into a flame, Dr. David Bell for keeping her on her toes and always inspiring greatness, and Ms. Marya Davis Turley for recognizing the exuberant English major trapped inside the confused business management major and for reminding her that true happiness comes from doing what you love most, no matter what.

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**Max Wade** is a Senior in the Literature program at WKU with a double minor in Psychology and Sociology who hails from Louisville, Kentucky. A lover of storytelling, he enjoys examining and creating stories through many different media, such as film or print. In Spring of 2014, he was nominated for Best Screenplay for the short film *Checking For Traps* in WKU's Film Festival. An avid player of video games, he hopes to critically examine their artistic potential, and prove to his parents that he hasn't been wasting his time playing them throughout his life.

**Erin Woolen** is Alice's mother and Nathan's wife. They have too many cats and one dog and they all live together on the top of their own big hill in an old rambling farm house about an hour away from Bowling Green. He works and gardens, she goes to school and makes things—pictures, hair ribbons, witches, boxes. They build towers and sing songs, run, dance, spin till they fall down, and tell stories. There's not so much to say about her—she loves her life.

## Boddy Count: Parody, Pastiche, and *Clue*'s Red Scare Narrative

*Josh Beal*

From its inception, Jonathan Lynn's filmic adaptation of the Parker Brothers board game *Clue* seemed destined for obscurity. The film debuted on December 13, 1985, riding a wave of public ambivalence onto nearly one thousand screens across the United States and scrounging up a modest \$2 million in opening weekend sales (IMDb). Paramount Pictures attempted to entice audiences by offering theaters one of three possible cinematic endings, but despite this marketing ploy the thunderstorm that rages through *Clue*'s plot proved emblematic of its commercial woes: the film ultimately grossed approximately \$3.1 million domestically—a staggering deficit when weighed against Paramount's estimated \$15 million budget for the project (IMDb). What's more, critics showered the film with negative reviews. *The New York Times'* Janet Maslin took particular umbrage with the adaptation's crude cinematic gaze, contending that the repeated objectification of the French maid, Yvette (Colleen Camp), made *Clue* little more than an exercise in vulgarity. Echoing these sentiments, Roger Ebert wrote that Lynn presented a screenplay so insubstantial that his cast "spends most of the time looking frustrated, as if they'd just been cut off right before they were about to say something interesting" ("Clue").

Meaning no disrespect to the prolific Mr. Ebert, critics of 1985 failed in their obligation to decipher *Clue*'s campy exterior. Certainly, the film is an acquired taste; however, to argue that Lynn's work exists outside what Julie Sanders identifies as the "inescapable political or ethical commitment" of adaptation (2) would be a gross lapse in analytical sentiment.

At the most rudimentary level, the film's creation facilitates a relationship with what proponents of apparatus theory identify as society's dominant ideology. Within this context, the director's bold but seemingly illogical decision to adapt a board game into a feature-length motion picture reflects a transitory America. The United States of the 1980s proved equal parts a superpower fatigued by forty years of Cold War tensions and a nation on the brink of globalization (Chafe 429). Significantly, the former identity—a husk of postwar consensus, containment policy, and Communist paranoia— informs the latter and seeps into every aspect of *Clue*. This duality perpetuates what Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni identify as one of seven modes through which cinema engages a society's core values. In their work, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," the authors expound upon films that "seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner" (Comolli and Narboni 27). These texts challenge the dominant ideology, but do so through deceptive, coded means: "If one reads the film obliquely, looking for symptoms; if one looks beyond its apparent formal coherence, one can see that it is riddled with cracks: it is splitting under an internal tension which is simply not there in an ideologically innocuous film" (Comolli and Narboni 27). The accumulation of pressure results in a degradation of the status quo and allows the director to restate the dominant ideology in terms of his or her film.

Indeed, *Clue* reflects sensitivities unique to the Reagan era, which proved to be the capstone of Cold War doctrine. Additionally, Lynn perpetuates the postmodern narrative,

utilizing intertextuality to encourage a sophisticated bricolage, or the "purposeful reassembly of fragments to form a new whole" (Sanders 5). The game's introductory scenario ("Welcome to Tudor Mansion. Your host, Mr. John Boddy, has met an untimely end — he's the victim of foul play. To win this game, you must determine the answer to these questions: Who done it? Where? And with what weapon?") underpins the film's plot. This process only glances off the surface of Lynn's adaptation, though, for the director proceeds to evoke myriad elements of popular culture before assembling them upon the iconic Parker Brothers game board. Beneath its miasma of parody and pastiche, I argue that *Clue* thus subverts the traditional anti-Communist narrative and meditates on American anxieties in a period flux.

If this thesis is to be regarded as having merit, then I must first explore *Clue*'s use of hijinks and the role of its cultural cornerstones. Linda Hutcheon postulates that the tremulous—almost reluctant—enjoyment audiences experience during adaptations stems from variation among the familiar: "Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change" (2). With this in mind, it becomes evident that Lynn supplants facets of the source text with established symbols. In doing so, *Clue* inculcates a nostalgic environment, one that first pacifies audiences and establishes the first traces of a subtextual dialogue. For example, the game's setting, Boddy Manor or Tudor Mansion, translates to screen as Hill House, a Gothic revival estate nestled into an ominous New England hillside. This revision nods first to Shirley Jackson's 1959 best-selling thriller, *The Haunting of Hill House*, which imbues the narrative with sense of foreboding. Secondly, but perhaps more importantly, the setting echoes John Winthrop's 1630 sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," in which the Puritan leader envisions the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a "city upon a hill," a beacon of excellence to be envied by the world (Winthrop).

From the opening scene, Jonathan Lynn grapples with distinctly American texts to legitimize his adaptation. The director further endeavors to create an atmosphere of postmodern comfort by constructing *Clue*'s plot around a dinner party, which is itself a trope that draws from Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1939) and Robert Moore's *Murder by Death* (1976)—seminal texts of cozy mystery and absurdity, respectively.

From this foundation, Lynn embellishes his artistic bricolage with a roster of iconic actors: Eileen Brennan (Mrs. Peacock), Tim Curry (Wadsworth), Madeline Kahn (Mrs. White), Christopher Lloyd (Professor Plum), Michael McKean (Mr. Green), Martin Mull (Colonel Mustard), and Lesley Ann Warren (Miss Scarlet). Consequently, the cast's humorous timbre transcends the parameters of the silver screen and assumes what Lawrence Mintz identifies as the comedian's role as mediator, a filmic agent that expresses the audience's culture:

This role of the comedian as social commentator is surely not a new one. Shakespeare made extensive use of the fool's tradition license to have the innocent but sharp, shrewd observer speak the "truth" which was universally recognized but politically taboo. (76)

Phrased differently, the ensemble functions as an irreverent, Virgil-like guide between *Clue*'s humorous veneer and its underworld of McCarthy-era fears. To understand this responsibility, however, society must first recognize the comedian's "traditional license for deviate behavior and expression" (Mintz 74). Maslin, Ebert, and a number of other entertainment reporters failed to identify comedy's "staged antagonism" (Freud 175), which resulted in a misinterpretation of *Clue*'s parodic heartbeat. The critical breakdown of Lynn's comedic intent proves frustrating, yes, but also duplicates certain arguments used in the 1950s to marginalize comedic meditation. This observation is not meant to demean those who dislike *Clue*; rather, it illustrates the expansive nature of

America's suspicion of all things that deviate from consensus paradigms.

We see this interplay arise with the creation of the board game itself. Waddington, an entertainment company located in the United Kingdom, and the American-based Parker Brothers jointly launched *Clue* in 1949 amidst changes in the calculus of Cold War tensions. The year heralded the Soviet Union's acquisition of atomic weaponry and the Communist Party's ascent to power in China (Chafe 99). The successes of communism abroad dealt a crushing blow to the American psyche, resulting in what Gary Wolfe denotes as "the era of the secret identity" (Wolfe 58). This period of Cold War paranoia ignited massive panic and led to crippling fears of the Kremlin's infiltration of the Western bloc—hearsay that solidified following the arrest, trial, and conviction of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for their role in passing information about America's atomic program to the Soviet Union (Conklin). Senator Joseph McCarthy managed to exploit this scandal to staggering ends. Taking to the podium in Wheeling, West Virginia, the Wisconsin politician instigated a witch hunt that crescendoed into the nation's Second Red Scare.

Lynn positions his adaptation against the tumultuous backdrop of McCarthyism. A dateline, "New England: 1954," looms into the frame as soon as the butler, Wadsworth, enters Hill House in the film's opening montage. Tim Curry's character meanders across *Clue*'s game board, drifting from the parquet hall to the kitchen, where the televised Army-McCarthy hearings play in the background as he interacts with the cook. While subtle, this element of the film offers audiences their first invitation to descend into *Clue*'s rebuttal of Cold War cinema, a tradition steeped in "anticommunist propaganda" that "reflected, shaped, and expressed the buried dynamics of a repressive consciousness" (Rogin 3). The allure of Lynn's subversion grows more obstinate and more complex as the six guests—three men and three women—arrive. Each character

enters the plot under an assigned pseudonym, one pulled directly from the source text's list of player options. Quickly, the narrative reveals that Hill House's guests each hail from Washington, D.C., and are connected to the government in some way. Lynn quickly draws a clear correlation between the Second Red Scare's fear of internal corruption and his enigmatic characters. This parallel grows more substantial once the guests finally realize that the burden of blackmail unites them—a premise that proves reflexive of cinematic traditions in the Cold War context, for it harkens to narratives that "promote the takeover of the private by the falsely private. They politicize privacy in the name of protecting it, and thereby wipe it out" (Rogin 9).

*Clue's* primary antagonist, Mr. Boddy (Lee Ving), thus represents the ubiquitous force of capitalism and an emerging U.S. surveillance state. During Wadsworth's deposition, the "villain" sits before replica of Gilbert Stuart's George Washington portrait. The scene reads like a standard HUAC hearing, wherein the accused answer for their sins and man blackmailing them — the man who, like the FBI, has tapped into their most intimate fears and darkest secrets—sits in muted judgment. The very impetus for the dinner party is foreground in a strain of guilt by association that dominated McCarthyism (Walter 53). Wadsworth, revealing that his wife's Socialist leanings incurred the wrath of Mr. Boddy and eventually led to her suicide, summons the characters to enact justice. The character implements loaded language when recounting his personal tribulations. He wishes to "denounce" Mr. Boddy; he seeks to "collect" the evidence against his guests and to "free" them from the antagonist's grasp.

The prospect of punitive legal action further expresses Mr. Boddy's capitalist, Western bloc coding. Soon, as the guests began to clamor for more answers, the antagonist utilizes a curious facsimile of Cold War containment policy. To check Wadsworth's uprising, Mr. Boddy seeks to appease his victims

by gifting them with weapons. The result, an attempt on the antagonist's life, thus reflects the contentious relationship between *Clue's* subtext and the dominant ideology. Lynn's script all but dreams for a return of the repressed, the redemption of those pushed to the fringes of American society during the proliferation of McCarthyism. For a moment, the film's parody falls away to reveal an undercurrent of sophistication. Through Wadsworth, Lynn laments Hollywood's complacency and the resulting culture of fear that developed during the Second Red Scare.

Lynn quickly withdraws from this precipice, and instead commits to dismantling the anticommunist narrative through laughter, which Ludovic Dugas ironically described as détente, or a relaxation of tension (Freud 180). While critics scoffed at the film's implementation of crass humor, double entendre, and coy innuendo I argue that these devices help to bolster a particular demographic that often shouldered more scorn and evil than the communist: the liberated woman. This objective becomes clear as Wadsworth enumerates the ensemble's transgressions. Miss Scarlet, the madam of a prostitution ring; Mrs. White, the murderous wife; and Mrs. Peacock, the corrupt wife of a high-ranking senator, all defy Cold War cinema's traditional suppression of femininity. From the vantage of a psychoanalyst, this facet of the dominant ideology in the 1950s may be interpreted as a deep-rooted paranoia among the patriarchal order that its influence over American politics, society, and the family had begun to wane. Women's dominance of the suburban home, an authority relegated to mothers by masculine forces, was thus an oxymoronic affront to the husband, a challenge to his complete control. Sociologist Wini Breines suggests that "postwar culture was a culture of containment, with women and black people as its objects. In this perspective, American politics and culture were structured by a defense of masculinity and whiteness" (10). The social scientist finds that America's apparent desperation to maintain its enclave of male

order saw fears of communism fuse with female sexuality, so much so that subversion of the American way was “blamed on women who were too independent or who seduced men, sometimes their sons, into being pawns or agents of communism” (Breines 44). We see this trend in such films as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), which credits James Dean’s character’s behavioral issues on a failed father figure. Coupled with *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), this perpetuation of societal, patriarchal fears permeates films of the 1950s, engendering a nearly constant stream of texts that depict the collapse of American families and society at large.

Lynn undermines this flow of Cold War propaganda by repurposing the abstract, elusive menace of communism and maternal affections into the tangible threat of murder. The crisis remains internal, but Colonel Mustard presciently notes that, “There are strength in numbers,” when trying to placate the group after what they assume to be the first murder when Mr. Boddy feigns his own death. This line demonstrates the misguided nature of the Second Red Scare: while American society fell into a state of chaos, Lynn’s cast of characters predominantly set aside their fears and worked together to ensure their survival. As Jonathan Lynn would have it, however, death only descended upon Mr. Boddy and his network of informants — accomplices who violated the central characters’ trust and sacrificed them the dominant ideology. *Clue*’s true path to denouement implicates Colonel Mustard, Miss Scarlet, Mrs. White, Mrs. Peacock, and Professor Plum in the film’s six murders, but the characters exit Hill House having provided audiences with a lens through which to redefine American society: In each of the movie’s three possible endings, one character is accused of having ties to communist forces. Each time this repressed fear reaches the narrative surface, however, the characters adamantly profess that “communism is just a red herring.” Though humorous, this line serves as *Clue*’s

coup de grace. Jonathan Lynn presents a narrative of the 1950s that blends comedy with bricolage to highlight the iniquities of Red Scare narratives: proponents of McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare are portrayed as being deceived or otherwise betrayed by their own paranoia and political aspirations. *Clue*, then, posits that the true threat to America wasn’t the Soviet Union. Instead, the malignant force was collective fear: American society itself.

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## Marie de France and Deconstruction in the Breton Lay

*Jessica Brumley*

Twelfth-century Anglo-Norman writer Marie de France utilized the Breton lay as a means of deconstructing the conventional definitions of humanity in medieval society. The lay, as part of the romance genre, is not known to be steeped in intellectualism, but generally serves as entertainment to its audience. The reader must delve under the superficial layer of love story in order to find Marie's commentary on gender roles and the separation of man and beast. In her lays *Lanval* and *Bisclavret*, accepted categories of male, female, and animal pattern behavior blur, leaving the audience the task of determining a distinction for themselves. Relying on ambiguous definition and stark contrasts of character, Marie calls these set ideas into question, deconstructing solidified and preconceived classifications that pigeonhole individuals into a predetermined identity.

Within Marie's writing, the ambiguous definition of characters works to blur any decided identity the audience might assign to them. In *Lanval*, the knight is described as "beauté" (22), a feminine French term referring to a beautiful outward appearance. Its connotation of a fair and docile countenance does not align with the heroic courage generally assumed of a knight and therefore challenges Lanval's position as a masculine knight of Arthur's court. After leaving civilization and wandering into the forest, Lanval encounters the fairy queen, who later becomes Lanval's lover. This same word, "beauté" (96), is applied to the queen's outward countenance. In Marie's rendition of the tale, both lover and

beloved are outwardly beautiful and exhibit a beauty denoted by the use of the same term, thus creating no significant distinction between their beauties. It should be recognized that the courtly love characteristic of this time places emphasis on the outward beauty of both man and woman. But, using the exact term for both underscores the fluid nature of stereotyped gender roles and undermines rigid, gender-normative appearances and behavior. With this fluidity, a man can be both "beautiful" and have "prowess" simultaneously (22).

The stark contrast in character traits also underscores the disregard of conventional gender roles and the fault lines of the gender paradigm. Lanval is portrayed as feminine while his lover, the fairy queen, becomes the dominant partner, a role commonly reserved for men. As Jerry Root points out, this is the first instance in the Breton lays where a woman engages in a love affair without being wooed or courted (17). She is the protector figure, but she also exhibits a certain wisdom that is required of the knightly male figure. At the end of the tale, Marie writes that "Quant la pucele ist fors a l'us/ sur le palefrei, detrires li/ de plain eslais Lanval sailli" ("When the maiden came through the gate/ with one leap Lanval/ jumped on the palfrey, behind her") (638-640). This Arthurian knight gladly rides on the back of his lady's saddle, acting as the rescued while they ride off in lovers' bliss. Riding on the back of the horse suggests that he has not been given the reins and therefore has no control over where he is going. The fairy queen, with a wealth that would rival "emperere Octovien" (85), becomes Lanval's benefactor and savior. Characteristics normally identified as masculine manifest themselves in our female hero, deconstructing the notion of gendered behavior.

Lanval's strong emotional reactions also turn standard gender stereotypes on their head. Patrick John Ireland suggests that after the knight breaks his oath to his lover, he is driven "near the point of madness" (140), remorseful that his defense of her honor should bring him eternal separation from her. During this time period, women were generally seen as more closely linked to the animal kingdom due to their depleted sense of reason. But by acting out in a fit of insanity, Lanval's emotions correlated more closely with his female counterparts. Besides remorse, he also feels divorced from the identity he had

as a fairy queen's lover. Lanval's self-definition depends solely on the queen's acceptance or dismissal of him. Such dependency is not by definition masculine, further separating Lanval from traditional gender roles.

The juxtaposition of contrasting characters for this purpose extends to Marie's other works as well. In *Bisclavret*, the lady's infidelity is a betrayal between lovers, an emotional betrayal against man and woman. As SunHee Kim Gertz summarizes, "Conventional marital bliss becomes so necessary to her well-being that...the Lady can only see all as changed and, as a result, turns to criminal activity in order to re-establish that marital pattern" (403). To remove herself from the precarious social situation her husband's condition places her in, the lady asserts herself in a very masculine fashion, ignoring social constructs and looking for a new lover. In this way, the lady has the power to bring the knight to his ruin ("Lanval" 126). The knight, by divulging his secret, becomes the vulnerable, more effeminate character of the narrative, manipulated by his wife for her gain. The Lady was driven by her carnal desires, unlike the werewolf, with brutish results. Marie de France's work then becomes a deconstruction of what an audience expects from set stereotypes, creating complexity out of stock character.

The comparison of these two lays also dissects the definition of humanity itself. In *Lanval*, the lord's betrayal of a dependent is not only a repudiation of lordly duty, but also a betrayal of one human to another. Lanval is left without the comfort of his community, now a sorrowful wanderer in a foreign land (37). When abandoned by the companionship his lover provides, Lanval becomes so distressed that the other knights are afraid he might "do himself harm" ("Lanval" 414). In this frantic disarray, Ireland concludes that "as a human being, Lanval may lack rational control" (145). His remorse over his lover takes away his rationality and reason, which is the hypothetical distinction made between man and animal.

Marie's *Bisclavret* relies on different translations of a character's name in order to show distinction between the benevolent and the beast. In the introduction to the lay itself, Marie makes the distinction between the "bisclavret" and the "garwaf," noting that "*Bisclavret* ad nun en bretan/ *Garwaf* l'apelent li Norman" ("*Bisclavret* is the name in Breton/ the

Normans call it *Garwaf*") (3-4). But these definitions vary in more than their language of origin; Marie seems to assign these terms separate connotations by suggesting that the word "Garwaf" is a monstrous creature and is not to be confused with this story's "bisclavret" (9). Lucas Wood suggests that "Bisclavret is equivalent to *Garulf*, but *Garulf* is used as the common noun for a species of animal, or more precisely of hybrid wolf-man...into which many men used to transform" (6). "Garwaf" is the term given to the animal species, the vicious creature that has no reason, but the "bisclavret" maintains some elements of humanity that the "garwaf" cannot. The "bisclavret" attacks only those who have done him wrong and follows the king around loyally, much like any knight would be expected to do. Such humanistic qualities of the "bisclavret" erode the stark line between ruthless killing machine and human-like creature.

In *Bisclavret*, the werewolf and his adulterous wife are also juxtaposed, revealing that true humanity is not in appearances. Marie's text tells us that this werewolf does indeed have "sen d'ume," ("human understanding") (154) and his appearance is only "semblance de beste" ("the semblance of a beast") (286). As Wood points out, his wolfish semblance is "only skin-deep... he essentially is and always has been nothing but a man" (4). But this word, "semblance," is seen again in the text. Just like Bisclavret only has the appearance of a beast, his wife only has "feseit beau semblant," ("fair appearance") (22). She is described as a noble woman, but she is only concerned with semblances, appearances rather than actual happiness. She is even less concerned with her werewolf husband's humanity. Her hunt for a new mate, the male that offers her the most status and benefit, appears curiously animalistic. Approaching the love-sick suitor, she offers him her "body" (115) and then quickly "binds him to her by oath" (119). There was no real consideration of the human emotion of love when she offers her body instead of her affection to the next lover.

But even without his clothing, a symbol of civilization and decency, Bisclavret displays a certain level of humanity as a werewolf. His transformation from man to beast does not entirely remove him from the human realm. He does not morph into a wolf, which is traditionally characterized as a vile,

devilish creature. Bisclavret becomes a *werewolf* or man-wolf, which retains some human characteristics. The creature, upon seeing his lord, runs to him and "jambe li baise e le pié" ("kisses his leg and his foot") (148). Bisclavret's action shows his devotion, honoring the lord regardless of his physical state. These characteristics of loyalty and humility depict qualities that Bisclavret's wife could never hope to possess. Noting his wife's serious lack of humanity, it is no wonder that Bisclavret took his time to change back into a human. In his werewolf form, he showed more humanity than the human.

This multifaceted deconstruction of social conventions and blurring of established paradigms is all contained within the short, narrative lay. But these two lays actually complement each other in an effort to deconstruct the expectations of relationships and expressions of love. Wood even suggests that "*Bisclavret* can be read as an inverted *Lanval*," both exhibiting "an initial betrayal that breaks the circuit of reciprocal obligation" (19). Both lays supplement the deconstruction of the other, using the medium of a simple romance, contrasting characters and ambiguous definition to redefine the tradition stereotypes of man, woman, and humanity.

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## Social Responsibility Meets Social Media: The Rhetoric of *Behind the Brands*

*Page Harrison*

The emergence of social media has created a revolution in the way we use technology to communicate with one another. Online communities connect people who may never have known of each other's existence only a few decades ago. This new method of communication is also creating change within the corporate world, particularly in the way businesses create and preserve a marketable, socially responsible, corporate image. Because of social media, businesses are facing the reality that the corporate spokesperson is a waning profession and the power of preserving an ethical image is shifting from one person to the masses. Unfortunately for some less-than-ethical corporations, non-profit organizations are using the current moment to initiate powerful action through the use of social media. Oxfam's Behind the Brands campaign is one such program that is challenging the top ten food producing corporations on the planet by reimagining corporate social responsibility to include the virtual community.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) campaigns are based on the idea that a corporation has a civic obligation to do more than simply make a profit (Taylor 260). A traditional CSR campaign is usually launched by a business to display to the public the way that it promotes positive growth in order to gain *social capital*, which is defined as "the norms, cultural values, and trust intrinsic to groups" (Taylor 260). Strategic communication analyst Maureen Taylor clarifies the importance of gaining social capital to businesses:

Social capital can be understood as the social relationships that involve the exchange of resources. Thus, social capital includes the resources that individuals or organizations can mobilize and profit from because of their roles in a network of relationships. . . Social capital can enhance an organization's capacity for action . . . and it can also contribute to organizational survival. (Taylor 264)

In its essence, social capital is community backing for a cause. A CSR campaign is an attempt to boost a brand's reputation and increase profits within a global community that is growing ever more concerned about environmental and social justice. CSR campaigns traditionally take the form of one-way communication from a corporate spokesperson to the public through a press release or media advertisement that is interwoven with careful rhetoric to convey the image that a company is socially responsible. Taylor explains, "CSR generates significant media and public attention for [an] organization" (269). However, the CSR campaign is currently doing an about-face. Consider British Petroleum's multibillion dollar media response to their massive oil spill in 2010. BP relied on the classic one-way approach to disseminating their message through a single corporate spokesperson, and their image was severely tarnished by the thousands of "spokespersons" shouting their voice in response through social media (Capstick). BP's disrepute is a notable end to the CSR status quo and an invitation for organizations that are *truly* in favor of social responsibility, as opposed to paying lip service, to take creative action in utilizing social media to enforce CSR.

One such non-profit organization that has made a head start in using social media to create positive change is Oxfam. Oxfam is a non-profit organization with a prominent reputation as a highly resourced poverty relief program. In 2013, Oxfam launched the Behind the Brands campaign to impose CSR on the world's ten biggest food producers. Behind the Brands seeks to create positive change in seven categories—transparency, women, workers, farmers, land, water, and climate—and scores the "Big 10" in each category (Behindthebrands). Oxfam's website states its method: to "use digital communication and social media to make information more accessible and

understandable to poor and marginalized groups—especially women and youth—so that they can generate and share their own information, ideas and opinions (citizens' reporting)," and, more specifically, "to provide people who buy and enjoy these products with the information they need to hold the Big 10 to account for what happens in their supply chains" (Oxfam 15; Behindthebrands). Most remarkably, the Behind the Brands campaign's persuasive goal rests solely on the marginalized audience's decision to voice their opinions on social media platforms, which builds social capital by creating a virtual community. This social capital is transferred onto the "Big 10" to pressure them to make progress in their unbecoming behavior, or else promote unethical business methods to an ever growing audience. The Behind the Brands campaign's striking design uses noteworthy methods to gain the valuable resource that is social capital. Behind the Brands first reaches out through platforms that best connect with a marginalized audience, then, the campaign website builds a relationship through infallible ethos, website usability, and emotional engagement in order to persuade the audience that their voice is powerful enough to make a difference.

In the traditional CSR campaign, social media is only a means to extend reach after a singular message has been sent; however, as an inverted CSR campaign, Behind the Brands operates primarily through social media to target a marginalized audience who longs for personal growth. The audience intrinsically wants to "learn new skills and assume new duties" (Markel 184) through, among other things, virtual communities that provide "new opportunities for people to enhance their daily lives" (Cho and Hong 1328). Social media platforms are ideal for these new opportunities because they help organizations "harness collective wisdom" and its relevant discourse via channels that organizations cannot fully control (Ramanadhan et al. 116). When the audience uses social media to voice its opinion on the way the "Big 10" treat women's rights, for example, corporations are better able to "understand the wants and needs" of the audience through active communication (Minton et al. 71). Oxfam offers personal growth to a marginalized audience by providing them with an active and collective voice through social media, a strategy which is a key precept in the campaign website's persuasive

technique. However, social media only offers a real method of building a collective voice if the audience chooses to act, so Behind the Brands must still shift the audience from passive to active participants in its cause by supporting the claim, "the power is in your hands" (Behindthebrands).

To persuade the audience to act, Behind the Brands first creates a compelling sense of trust through sound credibility. Behind the Brands is a sub-campaign of a non-profit organization with a substantial global reputation, and this provides decided credibility. The website also strongly emphasizes accountability and presents a highly professional persona. Oxfam claims that its "convening and connecting ability is founded, in part, . . . [by] powerful, evidence based advocacy" (Oxfam 22). Oxfam presents its research in well organized, highly methodic strategy guides that are directly available to anyone who visits one of its sites. Oxfam also states, "Accountability is closely linked to program quality and anchors our work in integrity and in earning and maintaining the trust of communities, donors, campaigners, and other stakeholders" (Oxfam 22). The Behind the Brands campaign may focus on the questionable ethics of large corporations, but the website homepage pulls much of the audience's focus to the integrity of its own claims. This openness to the public and treatment of integrity as a foremost requirement greatly enhances the character of the campaign's online persona, which builds a sense of trust in an audience who visits the Behind the Brands website longing for corporations to act with the same integrity. Accountability builds trust, and trust creates social capital.

In addition to an emphasis on accountability, the website also meets technical communication analyst Mike Markel's four "guidelines for creating a professional persona," which are cooperativeness, moderation, fair-mindedness, and modesty (194). Behind the Brands shows it is cooperative when it makes its goals for problem solving clear to the public. The campaign uses moderation when it reinforces positive change and speaks of negativities in a way that does not assert total ruin if a company does not change. Rather, the website speaks only of room for improvement, as in the explanation as to why Kellogg received a score of two out of ten in the category of farmer's

rights: "Kellogg has made some progress in understanding and admitting its responsibility towards supporting smallholders, but it has yet to commit to improving the lives of producers in its supply chain" (Behindthebrands). Behind the Brands exemplifies fair mindedness and modesty by ensuring that its language and content are rational and factual. By emphasizing accountability and using a professional persona, Behind the Brands creates an image that is highly trustworthy, which is the first step in building a relationship and persuading its audience to join the cause.

The next way that Behind the Brands ensures the effectiveness of its argument is through a strong focus on website usability. Effective campaigns use a "low-cost, high reward" technique (Rice and Atkin 42). Campaigns influence behavior "strongest when only small cost or effort is necessary" (Minton et al. 72). Additionally, Markel states that "most people resist an argument that calls for them to work more" (184). The importance of this appeal is reinforced in the website design community by a strong emphasis on usability, which is, essentially, enjoyable navigation. After a thorough experiment to uncover that which persuades users to donate money to universities via websites, Alicia Hatter concluded that "usability needs to be a primary concern if designers wish to create interfaces which interpellate and persuade users"—to interpellate is to convince a user to join a community (240). The Behind the Brands website appeals to the audience's need for usability in its minimalist, one-page design that is effortless to navigate. The campaign's argument can be presented in a matter of five well-guided clicks, and navigation works in a way that, at any point between these five clicks, the user can click again to act by posting a pre-designed message into their personal social media account, thus becoming social capital to be utilized by the campaign's efforts. A call to report through social media is the finale of each channel of navigation; the Behind the Brands website is embedded with social media links throughout each page, and a fixed social media toolbar rests on the right side of the page, meaning it stays in that exact position no matter the amount of scrolling the user does. The website even posts under each social media option the amount of seconds it takes to act; for example, Twitter takes two seconds, while Facebook requires a more committed five seconds

(Behindthebrands). Ease of navigation makes the Behind the Brands message more understandable to a marginalized audience, and little time investment makes the campaign easily adaptable into the audience's everyday lives. These factors also make the Behind the Brands website a model of enjoyable user experience, which in turn is a significant factor in its persuasiveness.

Usability is also important in engaging the audience, or using "relationship-building communication," which is where the Behind the Brands website appears strongest (Taylor 269). The website engages the audience by using selective and substantive material and attractive style to provide personal relevance to the audience (Taylor 269; Rice and Atkin 9). This corresponds with Oxfam's broader goals to "ensure our messages are relevant to the public and become faster and 'lighter' in our public engagement" (Oxfam 23). Maureen Taylor explains how engagement persuades: "engagement builds trust, commitment, autonomy, mutuality, satisfaction, and loyalty" (265). Taylor also explains that social capital is created through engagement because at the basis of both is the idea of an ongoing relationship, in this case between the audience and the Behind the Brands website, and, by extension, between the consumer and food producer (269). The Behind the Brands website engages the audience by making its message personally relevant and by evoking a sense of community through selective content.

Behind the Brands first makes its message personally relevant by targeting the audience's interests. Markel states that "people resist controversial actions that might hurt their own interests . . . even if there are many valid reasons to support the argument" (184). The Behind the Brands website supports the audience's interests on its homepage when it is made clear that "You don't need to stop buying your favorite products to make a difference. Instead, make your voice heard" (Behindthebrands). Behind the Brands also makes its message personally relevant to the audience by creating a goal that appears achievable. The above-mentioned study of donor websites and the techniques that put the audience in a "giving mood" stresses the need for the goal of the sum total of donations to be both "worthy" and "attainable" (Hatter 238-

239). Behind the Brands places the number of "actions taken so far" at front-and-center of its homepage. This number, as of November 2015 is 706,499 and the established goal is to reach only 750,000 (Behindthebrands). A realistic goal creates the incentive for the audience to act because they can see that any contribution is not likely to be unnoticed. By providing support and recognition to the audience, Behind the Brands engages the audience and strengthens the claim that "the power is in your hands" (Behindthebrands).

The website also engages the audience by creating a sense of community through inclusive language and human images. Inclusive language is basically "demand[ed]" by users in persuasive website design studies (Hatter 239). The word 'you' in its various forms is repeated thirteen times in only fourteen full sentences on the Behind the Brands homepage, as in the statement "Your favorite food brands care what you think!" (Behindthebrands). Inclusive language is key to personalizing claims and hailing the audience into a community (Rice and Atkin 9). The Behind the Brands website enhances this sense of community by positioning human images into its argument. Human-centric images simulate human contact and create a "social presence" that causes a website user to perceive the site as "warm, personal," and "sociable" (Cyr et al. 541). The most effective images are ones that the intended audience can "write themselves into" (Hatter 236), and ones in which facial expressions are "affective properties that entice emotion" (Cyr et al. 544). Behind the Brands includes a smiling farmer and a thoughtful shopper to provide relevance to a marginalized and consumer audience, make them smile, and also encourage them to more seriously consider the campaign's argument. By selectively using inclusive language and relatable human images to create an emotional connection with the website user, Behind the Brands makes a solid effort at engaging the audience and finally persuading them to act on behalf of the community of which they find themselves a part.

The Behind the Brands campaign has proven itself highly effective in that it has elicited direct responses and positive action from some of the top ten producers such as Kellogg, General Mills and Nestle, and it has effectively encouraged change by consistently updating an online scorecard where

these companies can compete for the top, most ethical, spot (Behindthebrands). Behind the Brands connects to a marginalized audience with social media, then the campaign website provides credibility, makes its argument accessible through usability, and, finally, reinforces a relationship through engagement, to inspire website users to join its movement. This social capital is then used to facilitate a “Big 10” corporation in meeting its social responsibility and keeping its newly acquired social capital, which sequentially should increase profits, or the corporation can continue to disseminate a negative image that could hurt its bottom line (Taylor 261). By turning the traditional CSR campaign into real action with the incorporation of an online community, Behind the Brands has taken on the ten biggest food producers on the planet and created a win-win or the corporations lose situation.

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## High-Class Actors: Class Performativity in *Great Expectations*

David Haydon

Dickens's *Great Expectations* is one of the most well-known Victorian novels, creating a place for itself in both popular fiction and the literary canon. The *bildungsroman* storyline is classic, but Dickens grips the reader by using plot twists throughout the novel. Paired with the coming of age story is a coming of class story in which Pip must not only grow up but grow into his new wealth. This creates a complicated situation for Pip as he must learn to navigate his new status. Pip's place in the class system is widely debated due to his behavior—such as erratic spending and latent low-class language—and the ending of the novel. Scholars disagree about Dickens's representation of class in the novel. Critics including Kirsten Parkinson, John Kucich, and Gail Turley Houston see the novel as a conservative demonstration of class, calling the novel representative of "the victimization of the lower classes at the hands of the wealthy" (Parkinson 123). Others see the novel as having a more progressive stance on class. Peter Capuano concludes, "Those who fail to adapt and change never truly make any progress, and Dickens has some fun with this idea as he concludes the novel" (206). One way to interpret this disagreement is through the lens of the theory of performativity.

Theories of performativity have wide ranging effects and implementations in academia, and the meaning of performativity spans these applications as well. In this paper, I apply the principles of performativity to class in order to examine the ways in which Pip and Joe constitute notions of self in a class-based system. In arguing this notion of self, Erving Goffman's explanation of performativity provides the best operating

definition. He argues that performance / performativity operates in this way:

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the tasks that he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be (qtd. in Clarke 511).

Viewing performativity in this way allows us to see the dependence on interaction and expectations that create performed selves. The (re)creation of identity relies on the ideology of difference, rather than the actual presence of it. In believing these differences to be true, one must use the elements of performance to create such a self. Clarke posits that "if we take the principle of performance, then we may use stage props – desks, academic attire, white coats for doctors – in order to manage a 'front'" (512). In this way, the identity is not intrinsically created, but rather externally orchestrated.

While there are elements of class performativity throughout the entire novel, two interactions are the most poignant in their depiction of the struggle. The first interaction is Pip and Joe's meeting with Miss Havisham, and the second is Joe's visit with Pip in London. These two scenes are significant in exploring class performativity because of the character contrast of Pip and Joe as well as the in/ability of both characters to perform in these situations. Through these scenes, we see Joe's failure to perform class properly, while Pip tries to recreate himself in these social contexts. I assert that in *Great Expectations* Dickens creates characters who perform class in order to create high-class versions of themselves in appropriate cultural contexts. While these performances are respected and create a community of class performers, Dickens's depiction of these characters represents an innate class division that is rigidly maintained, indicating Dickens's conservative stance on class in the novel.

Pip's dramaturgical self is created through encounters with the class system at Satis House, even before his visit with Joe. It is not until he has been exposed to upper-class ideals that Pip is

aware of his own low social status. However, Pip attempts to find his place within the class structure by mimicking the behaviors of Miss Havisham and Estella, who define class in his opinion. His attempts to play card games indicate his desire to be a member of the upper-class. The first card game Pip plays is beggar-my-neighbor, a game played primarily by children. Kirsten Parkinson asserts, "Dickens chooses to call the game beggar-my-neighbor, although it is also known as beat your neighbor out of doors and strip jack naked. While all three names imply humiliation of one's opponent, only beggar-my-neighbor puts that humiliation in explicitly economic terms" (123). This explanation sheds light on the value of Pip's interaction. He is identified as lower-class because he cannot beat Estella despite the fact that the game is a game of chance. It is statistically unlikely that Estella would win every game, but this allows Dickens to show the ways in which it is impossible for Pip "to win" in a conservative class system. While Pip believes his performance mimics the behaviors and features of the wealthy, there is an unspoken agreement to allow him to exist in this way. This tension exemplifies Gail Turley Houston's argument that "Satis House may represent a fundamental contradiction of the Victorian economy." Satis House relies on the poor for its appeal and power, particularly for Pip. Had his upbringing been different, Pip may not have found the class of Miss Havisham and Estella alluring.

The cultural boundaries that Pip crosses are extremely important because he adapts to fit the expectations of his current class rather than his desired class. However, in doing so his desire for higher class status manifests itself. Pip plays the part of a poor, uneducated boy, which he actually is. As he looks at his hands, he says, "My opinion of those accessories was not favourable. They had never troubled me before, but they trouble me now, as vulgar appendages" (Dickens 75). Pip's visit to Miss Havisham manages, without knowledge of later events, to lock him into a low-class life as Joe's apprentice, particularly through the imagery of hands. Peter Capuano points out that in Dickens's own magazine, *All the Year Round*, the article "Our Nearest Relation" compared gorillas to low- and middle-class industrial workers. Capuano argues, "[T]he Victorian ideology that defined masculine 'work' as physical and muscular induced an anxiety in middle-class males who no

longer worked with their hands amidst a society transformed by bourgeois industrialization" (196). Even Pip's hands become elements of performance, unconsciously creating a low-class image of himself. While his hands are masculine, the association between the brute and masculinity still existed, suggesting Victorian males, such as Pip, were presented with a conundrum: either work as a brute or become upper-class. This conundrum represents the class struggle during this time. Chris Vanden Bossche points out that "growth and maturation were key metaphors underlying not only ideas of self-development, but also ideas of social progress" (95). In viewing Dickens's novel through this metaphor, one can see the way that class maintains society: if the class structure changes rapidly, society may not adapt as quickly.

In Chapter 13, Pip's performativity is based on his desire to separate himself from Joe by emphasizing his own "proper behavior," while simultaneously expressing his discontent with Joe's impropriety. He uses gestures and body language as a means to indicate to Joe how to act. Pip tells us, "It was quite in vain for me to endeavor to make him sensible that he ought to speak to Miss Havisham. The more I made faces and gestures to him to do it, the more confidential, argumentative, and polite, he persisted in being to Me" (108). In acting this way, he attempts to define himself to Miss Havisham by distancing himself from Joe, who uses him as a middle-man. Joe's insistence on speaking to Pip indicates he is closer to him than Miss Havisham, which Pip does not want because of his attempts to become "better." In this case, Joe's interaction with Pip, as opposed to Miss Havisham, ruins both of their performances.

However, their visit does create the continuum of performativity within the novel. Pip literally serves as a middleman between Joe and Miss Havisham, who can both be cast as representatives of their respective class. Joe has attempted to create himself as at least middle class, but he has ultimately failed. In order to perform, Pip explains, "It was a trial to my feelings, on the next day but one, to see Joe arraying himself in his Sunday clothes to accompany me to Miss Havisham's" (Dickens 106). Pip reinforces the class boundaries established through performance as he wishes Joe would act

like himself, what John Kucich calls “reverse slumming.” He explains, “‘Reverse slumming’ designates a mode of middle- or lower-middle-class performance that mimics upper-class behaviors so as to reaffirm social hierarchy in the very process of denaturalizing it” (472). This definition points to Joe’s performance of class; he is clearly low-class, but he wishes to appear higher class than he is, but in attempting to do so, he shows his inability to adapt to high-class structures. Dickens’s presentation of Joe in this way creates a complicated perception of class, which is difficult to untangle initially, and it is only through later interactions of various natures that we as readers are allowed to conceptualize social class as Dickens and his characters do.

In the first visit to Satis House, Joe initiates his class performance for Miss Havisham, desiring not only to please her but to create himself in relation to Pip. Pip has already created a classed version of himself through his previous visits, but Joe has not, and as such, he creates a cross-cultured version of himself. Like a Sunday performance of religious nature, Joe finds himself unworthy to be in the presence of the upper class. Pip tells us, “I knew he made himself so dreadfully uncomfortable, entirely on my account, and that it was for me he pulled up his shirt-collar so very high behind, that it made the hair on the crown of his head stand up like a tuft of feathers” (107). Brent Shannon says that “[s]tiff soaring collars were so popular then” (6). Joe can obviously not afford the most popular trends, but he attempts to in order to appear high class and must reverse slum. Kucich argues, “Unlike satire or caricature, it [reverse slumming] upholds distinctions of rank even while mimicking them, thus suspending social critique” (472). Joe’s decision to attempt to conform to the standards of the rich reinforces the structures that suppress him, but in a way, it forbids Miss Havisham from criticizing him. Pip says, “Miss Havisham glanced at him as if she understood what he really was, better than I had thought possible, seeing what he was there” (109). This revelation on behalf of narrator Pip indicates to the reader that Miss Havisham recognizes Joe’s dramaturgical self, but in maintaining the performance, she plays along. In this way, reverse slumming reinforces the superiority of wealth and status, while attempting to join through external manifestations as opposed to an expected

moral difference. Joe’s performance is not believable, but the attempt shows a respect for wealth, and as a result, it is valued. This exemplifies the traditional model of class, in that it allows the poor to straddle social categories without disrupting the economy and class system.

The second instance of performance is Joe’s visit with Pip in London in which Joe’s performance once again fails while Pip must maintain multiple performances. In this scene, Joe attempts to appear more educated by trying to use upper-class behavior, language, and clothing. Upon entering, Pip asks, “Joe, how are you, Joe?” and Joe replies, “Pip, how AIR you, Pip?” (Dickens 210). This interaction displays Joe’s inability to perform class without initiation, simultaneously showing skill and the lack thereof. Joe adapts to social situations, making him a skilled communicator and performer. However, his inability to do so on his own proves his low-class status. His language also shows an attempt to mimic high-class patterns when he uses words like “contrairy” (212) and “architectooralooral” (213). Joe’s effort to code switch shows his knowledge of language and its importance. His desire to speak in this way indicates the value Victorians placed on education. In this way, Joe’s performance outside of the familial context is successful, but once again, Pip’s place on the class performativity continuum makes Joe’s performance a failure.

In his interaction with Herbert, Joe again attempts to mimic high-class behavior. He is rather passive with Herbert, allowing Herbert to make decisions, but Joe feigns indifference in order to avoid appearing low-class. When Herbert asks whether he would prefer tea or coffee, Joe replies, “Thankee, Sir...I’ll take whichever is most agreeable to yourself” (212). Joe attempts to repeat the manners he has seen displayed, but in the process maintains a respect for wealth he does not possess. This interaction is pivotal for Joe. Because he and Herbert have not met before, Joe has the opportunity to execute a flawless performance and “trick” Herbert into believing his charade. However, in showing Herbert favor over himself, Joe reveals his cross-class performance. In this way, Joe shows that although he attempts to appear high-class, he ultimately is still the same Joe.

His dress in the scene with Herbert also creates tension in his class performance, as he continues to place high-value on

rather low-class items. Upon entering, Pip requests his hat, and Joe "wouldn't hear of parting with that piece of property, and persisted in standing talking over it in a most uncomfortable way" (211). By retaining control over his hat, he holds onto something of high value for him. This incident is a kind of repetition from Joe's first class performance at Miss Havisham's. The hat serves as a conduit of class; it shows the man as dignified, and Joe's desire to keep it allows him, in his mind, to maintain the appearance of higher class. Shannon argues "the new accessibility and affordability of clothing and accessories once available only to the elite blurred class distinctions" (10). Joe's ability to dress rich is a historical possibility. Furthermore, holding the hat, which to others may seem ridiculous, is a crutch for Joe's performance. He feels that without it, he will appear low-class. Pip catches onto Joe's attempt as he claims, "Joe's hat tumbled off the mantel-piece, and he started out of his chair and picked it up, and fitted it to the same exact spot. As if it were an absolute point of good breeding that it should tumble off again soon" (Dickens 212). In orchestrating the hat falling repeatedly, Joe calls attention to it as well as his class.

In this case, Pip must attempt to maintain the performance of his new class status while he now must save Joe's face, despite his desire to distance himself from Joe. Turley Houston explains, Pip has "learn[ed] only to consume or be consumed" and his actions "indicate [his] sense of self as devoured or devouring." In this structure, Pip attempts to do neither, saving himself and Joe. Pip acts as if Joe is a dignified guest, and in doing so, he accentuates his own class. Pip says, "Utterly preposterous as his cravat was, and as his collars were, I was conscious of a sort of dignity in the look" (Dickens 214). As an upper-class male, Pip must now respect Joe's efforts to perform for him, while he also performs. Capuano asserts, "Pip suffers from a form of *habitus* which legitimates (and delimits) categories in a society that encourages people to recognize as valid the kinds of everyday ritual, dress, and actions [*sic*] which make particular individuals appear to be the flesh-and-blood incarnation of social roles" (201). While Pip doesn't describe himself, his actions and behavior in previous chapters indicate his growing ability to perform as upper-class. In this scene, he is a gentleman because he does not allow himself to voice his discontent with Joe until they are in private conversation,

despite his numerous thoughts indicating otherwise. Kucich points out, "The delicate balance between affectation and goodwill produced by [Dickens's] authorial reverse slumming sustains the complex attitudes toward social boundaries that made Dickens's prose so magnetizing, particularly for middle- and lower-middle class audiences" (481). His characters are careful to avoid devaluing faces, which to his readers comes across as caring. Pip respects Joe's dramaturgical self, but he doesn't allow himself to be associated with him because it will destroy his own performative self.

However, in private conversation, Pip reassures Joe of his value in his performance. During their conversation, Pip says, "Joe, how can you call me, Sir?" (213). Pip's question appears to create an equal playing field, but actually destroys the performance that Joe has orchestrated. In doing so, Pip boosts his performance as a member of the upper-class. Conversely, Joe questions his role in Pip's development when he says that Pumblechook goes around town "giving out up and down town as it were him which ever had your infant companionation and were looked upon as playfellow by yourself" (Dickens 214). But Pip assures him, "Nonsense. It was you, Joe" (Dickens 214). This reassurance restores a bit of Joe's face, bestowing a bit of morality and power on Joe's decision to bring him up. Pip gives Joe credit for the role he played in his life.

Dickens's creation of class in this way creates a societal infrastructure that consists of people, class, and context. The only true depictions of upper-class are in Pip's younger years, indicating that while elements of Dickens's novel are progressive, he retains a conservative stance regarding the true value of class. Upper-class characters are created as benevolent actors, playing along with middle- or low-middle class actors. They approve of their decision to attempt to be better but know that individuals creating themselves in this way are not truly upper-class. Kucich argues, "[D]ecidedly non-genteel social climbers like Swiveller and Pip" prove that "authorial reverse slumming implied that organic fraternalism emanates primarily from middling social actors" (482). This argument has its merits in that readers were encouraged to cross-culturally perform. Reading popular works such as Dickens allowed them to see the value in performing for their social superiors. However, the

novel leaves Pip isolated and alone. His successful performance creates distance between himself and those who have not been able to perform class. The novel's characters still respect class so much that they are unable to abandon it despite seeing its harmful effects. For Dickens, the sudden disruption of class is dangerous, as seen through Pip's descent back into the lower-class, and his writing "reflect[s] the Victorian desire to imagine the resolution of class conflict" (Bossche 94). Dickens' novel presents the complicated notions of class that troubled society, such as what defines "true" class? And the answer we are given is an equally complicated one. Class is both innate and performative, a matter of birth and of behavior; class is a convoluted, tangled mess for the Victorians. One should read Dickens's novel as a warning, which encourages slow, steady class change as opposed to rapid social mobility. Ultimately then, the novel suggests that class is necessary, and those who disrupt it are no longer part of the community.

Class performance is key to the creation of self in *Great Expectations*, and as a result, a community of performance is created. While this community is functionally important, performance of class is not enough to deconstruct the class system, but rather reinforces its power. Pip's entrance into Satis House begins a journey to become upper-class by creating a higher-class self. However, lower-class behaviors indicate his low-class status, and as such his performance is not respected. He is placed as a middleman when he visits with Joe and both performances are honored because of the unspoken rule of respecting high-class performance. In this way, while high-class culture is appropriated, it increases the value of high-class behavior, emphasizing the difference between upper- and lower-class individuals. Pip mimics Miss Havisham's behavior when Joe visits him, respecting Joe's performance despite knowing the truth. In doing so, Pip performs as upper-class, while attempting to identify with Joe. Dickens's representation of class in this way creates a community of performers and seems to respect their efforts, but in doing so, he makes the boundaries between classes known. While one may be able to perform upper-class, he/she is not, but he/she must respect the upper-class through performance.

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## Language and Gender

*Macy Lethco*

Gender as a concept is controversial and elusive. For this paper, the term “gender” will be used to describe the traditional personal and social category of male and female as separate genders. Because of apparent and underlying differences between males and females, the implications of gender for education and language acquisition are of particular interest to researchers and language learners, with opinions ranging from complete innate biological basis for gender to complete social enculturation of gender beliefs. Gender’s role in language acquisition stems from a wide range of contributing factors, particularly the differences between males and females in biology and cognition, individual learner method and motivation, and sociocultural expectations of gender-appropriate behavior.

While males and females are different, neurological and psychological research has been contradictory and inconclusive to show how and to what extent those differences affect language use and acquisition. Studies appear to reveal that women are better at learning and using language, which only adds to public perception of females as the more talkative and more linguistically inclined gender. Male brains are 10% larger than female brains, which may appear to support the belief of greater intelligence in males. However, less grey matter in the brain actually leads to more efficient processing, which may be the cognitive difference in male and female language use. Burman, et al. (2008) discovered that males and females use different parts of the brain to process linguistic input when it is presented audibly or visually. Male brains processed audio input and visual input through their respective association

cortices, while female brains processed bilaterally so that both sides of the brain are activated, when language stimulus was presented in audio or visual form (Burman, et al. 2008).

This cognitive difference becomes an issue if language instruction, for both native and foreign languages, relies heavily on a single type of input and does not foster the development and understanding of both written and spoken language. The disparity in male and female scores on standardized language exams may be due to the environment of language instruction and its reliance on either visual or audio language input. The 76% of teachers in U.S. schools who are female, if not trained to address a difference in cognitive language processing, will leave their male students at a disadvantage in the classroom. It would be helpful for teachers of foreign languages to be trained in the understanding of gender-based language acquisition differences in order to meet the needs of both male and female students through their awareness of processing methods that may differ from the way they personally learn and process. They could then vary their method of input to include visual and audio input as well as output to foster more efficient processing and usage of the language in all their students by helping them make deeper connections with the language through varied opportunities of application.

Teachers and parents may see differences in performance or draw on public perception of females as better with language and actually contribute to the gap in language development between genders. They present different exposure and opportunities to develop certain skills. Eliot (2010) points to research that reveals the playtime preferences of baby boys and girls as the beginning of the gap. Around age two, boys will be more attracted to active toys involving movement and spatial thought; girls will be more attracted to “verbal-relational” toys and activities involving interaction and emotion (Eliot, 2010). Parents supporting these choices as gender-appropriate (or exclusive) begin reinforcement of gender separation. Male and female identity may not be unfounded in biology (the boys and girls chose active/relational toys without prompting), but it is certainly encouraged by social interaction. Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory describes different aspects of intelligence and ability that are affected by such social reinforcement. A

combination of intrinsic motivation, parental reinforcement, and opportunities to engage in social activity falling along culturally appropriate gender lines supports visual-spatial and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences in males and verbal-linguistic and interpersonal intelligences in females. Parents and teachers should provide male and female children with access to both active and relational toys and games and be aware that their reinforcement of gender appropriate play will affect the child's willingness to choose the toy or game again. Consistent play with active and relational toys and games will develop those types of intelligences. Parent and teacher feedback and reinforcement usually lead the child to choose either physically active or verbal-relational play, which will encourage the development of one intelligence and stunt the growth of the other. Both spatial/kinesthetic and verbal/interpersonal skills are desirable and valuable for the success of the child in the future who will be confronted with further opportunities to develop them and will have a foundation for doing so from the initial support of early caregivers.

Male brains complete cognitive development one to two years later than female brains, and males begin to talk around one month later than girls (Eliot, 2010). This small time difference has larger consequences though, in terms of linguistic production. The average female has more time to practice speaking and by reaching the developmental stage of producing speech earlier than males, will continue to progress through stages before the average male. Earlier language use will elicit a greater parental response, found in a 1998 study, as mothers spoke more with young daughters than sons, thus encouraging their verbal skills (Eliot, 2010).

To be sure, this is not a prescriptive analysis of all boys and girls, but on average, boys engage in more risk-taking, physical competition and girls engage in more cooperative role-playing (Eliot, 2010). These choices build up a gender identity that is male or female and that rewards gender-fitting behavior. Parents support risk-taking physical activity in boys and discourage "gender-inappropriate play" (Eliot, 2010). Children learning what they like and what is acceptable go to school or interact with peers and develop specific types of play, if the groups consist of only one gender. They are reinforced with a

social network of peers also trying to play in acceptable ways. Female-only groups will practice language use through interpersonal play and will be encouraged to develop intrapersonal skills and express their feelings. They will benefit from the extra time (over boys) spent talking with teachers and parents and develop greater "phonological awareness" (Drinkwater & Martin, 2003, p.78). 20% more girls than boys in third grade will be proficient in their grade's reading level. The gap grows steadily through high school, when 47% more girls than boys read proficiently (Eliot, 2010). Earlier phonological awareness helps girls become reading proficient earlier than boys, giving them another time-related advantage in language use. Many boys, involved in sports activities and building will see reading as a more female activity, which contributes to the later statistic concerning teenage boys, of whom only 25% say that reading is a regular hobby (Eliot, 2010).

These biologically founded, socially encouraged gender identities affect language acquisition and reading proficiency in the first language and method and motivation of acquisition in the second language. For simultaneous bilinguals, the same issues of parental, teacher, and peer attention aiding linguistic development in females exist for the second language (L2) as well as the first (L1).

Lan & Oxford (2003) outlined the methods and strategies involved in second language learning and, in an inventory, tested elementary age students in Taiwan regarding their usage of cognitive, memory, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies for learning English (p.353). Finding a significant difference in strategy use, where more females employed more learning strategies, is dangerous to the ultimate acquisition of the target language (TL) by male students. There was a strong link with proficiency level, liking the TL, and strategy use; the students with high proficiency levels and general interest in the TL used more strategies, which in turn led to higher levels of proficiency (Lan & Oxford, 2003, p. 365). If students are not taught to implement strategies for language learning, males (and females) who do not already use them to process, organize, remember, and apply new linguistic information will fall behind in the TL classroom. Those students who have mastered a wide range of strategies will continue to

develop fluency and motivation, and those who have not will struggle to achieve greater proficiency, if other contributing factors remain unchanged. Teachers can help students, both male and female, by explicitly teaching language acquisition strategies by the way they introduce vocabulary, illicit recall, and connect linguistic and cultural knowledge to prior learning.

Females used cognitive, memory, and metacognitive strategies more than males in order to process the language input and manage language-learning tasks (Lan & Oxford, 2003, p. 362, 364). Because the female brain processes linguistic input bilaterally, females are able to make connections with language, whether it is heard or seen. With each connection, the brain remembers and relates the information to prior learning, allowing females to process the language input deeper and remember it longer. Females also exhibit notable differences in self-regulation and organizational tasks (Eliot, 2010). Elementary school age girls have been found to "sit still, pay attention, and delay gratification" better or for longer periods than boys (Eliot, 2010). Self-regulation skills foster the development of metacognitive language learning strategies in order to stay on task, allot time for language practice, and seek out opportunities to use the language, especially with native speakers (Lan & Oxford, 2003, p. 372). These abilities help females in second language learning, where self-regulatory behavior is crucial to success, especially in a traditional classroom setting.

Lan & Oxford also found that female students spent more engaged time practicing the sounds of their target language than male students (2003, p. 372). They employed many modes of media to hear and analyze TL phonology, which may be a result of early awareness of their L1 phonology and an attribution of language proficiency levels to learning the sounds of the language (Drinkwater & Martin, 2003).

Politzer (1983) found that social and compensation strategies were used more by female students in an English as a second language (ESL) classroom (Lan & Oxford, 2003, p. 343). In social strategy, females were able to use the interpersonal skills they had developed during childhood to ask more questions and network with classmates and native speakers to practice language use. Male ESL students were less likely to

seek out chances to use the TL, in media at home, with parents, with classmates, and with native speakers (Lan & Oxford, 2003, p. 367, 379). This may be because they lacked integrative motivation, the desire to connect with native speakers and TL culture, and so assigned less importance to TL practice and fluency. Cooperation, another feature of early play for females, may have encouraged negotiation for meaning, specifically with the use of gestures and utterance approximations. An interesting feature of both the compensation and social strategies was the admittance of dependency in learning. Female learners were more willing to ask for help, clarification, and repetition if they did not understand (Lan & Oxford, 2003, 353). Female learners were willing to admit a lack in knowledge and understanding, which is a difficult but necessary step in language learning, a process of humble identity negotiation as a beginner level student of another culture and language.

Males and females both used affective strategies in similar ways, showing that the encouragement of intrapersonal development in females did not impact strategies regarding the affective domain in language learning (Lan & Oxford, p. 364). Managing the factors of the affective domain include controlling and overcoming anxiety, constructing values of self, and protecting personal identity. This similarity between genders is evidence of a growth based mindset, with which a student will push through obstacles and take risks for the sake of learning, even though identity and learner beliefs may be challenged.

Learners who use more strategies with the TL also tend to have higher self-efficacies. Self-efficacy is a learner's belief in his or her own ability to achieve a set goal, here, TL acquisition. It is an integral part of individual motivation in language learning, along with identity. Heinzmann (2009) found that female learners have more motivation to study foreign languages than males, partly because of their beliefs in linguistic ability and in ultimate success in attainment (p. 34). Belief in the stereotype that females are better with language than males does not positively affect female motivation but does negatively affect male motivation (p. 30). In addition, Heinzmann (2009) found "achievement-related self-concept" to be one of the most important predictors in language attitude and successful acquisition because it was closely linked with motivation (p. 22).

When female students incorporate linguistic aptitude into their personal identity, they are more motivated to study an L2 and more likely to attribute their success to ability and effort, rather than luck or other external factors. Male language learners who face obstacles are more likely to blame a lack of personal or gender-wide ability for difficulties and develop a failure orientation (p. 28). If this attribution occurs early, male students will be significantly less motivated to continue foreign language study in the future, believing their difficulty learning language to be an intrinsic, uncontrollable attribute.

Next to self-concept, Heinzmann (2009) determined that learner attitude toward the TL, its native speakers, and its culture was the highest predictor of motivation and language success (p. 30). Female students had more positive attitudes toward the TL they were learning and had greater integrative motivation with the desire to connect and communicate with TL speakers and culture (p. 20). There was not only a gender difference in the degree of integrative motivation, but also in the desire to learn specific target languages. Socially constructed beliefs about gender-biased languages affected even elementary aged students, who considered most Romance languages more feminine and most Asian and Slavic languages more masculine (p. 21). Of particular interest are learner attitudes toward English and French.

English, which was formerly favored as more masculine in nature and chosen by more males learning a foreign language, may be becoming gender neutral in terms of motivation to learn, which was found in a study by Holder (2005) but not confirmed in Heinzmann's research (p. 19, 32). Dornyei and Clement have predicted, based on their research revealing the shrinking difference in attraction to English as a foreign language between males and females, that it will become equally appealing to both genders (p. 21). The attribution of global-language status to English and the greater availability of media and communities of native speakers contribute to the neutrality in motivation.

French, however, was considered effeminate in a study done by Dornyei in Hungary, by Holder in Switzerland, by Williams et al. in Britain, and by Carr and Pauwels, "at all levels and in all participating countries" (Heinzmann, 2009, p. 21; Kissau,

2008, p. 403). Encultured perception of foreign language study in general as feminine and of particular languages as more feminine leads to low intrinsic motivation and low enrollment of males in language courses, especially in French. In Australia, only 23% advanced French students were male, a trend which continues through collegiate level studies and teaching; in Ontario, only 10.7% of French teachers were male (Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008, p. 403). Whitehead (1996) described the potential cause as the construction of gender identity during adolescence, the time when males begin choosing science and math courses that fit their visual-spatial skills and their culture's stereotypes of gender appropriate courses (Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008, p. 404). While teachers and parents encourage boys to follow societal gender values, it is peer pressure that reinforces "proper" gender behavior. Martino (1999) found that boys, in their peer communication, used homophobia to control and "enforce the traditional view of masculinity" (Kissau & Wierzalis, p. 405). Such fears of acceptance were discovered in a study by Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (2000), in which male students reported that social acceptance was a factor in oral communication in French class, where the males consistently performed poorly (Kissau & Wierzalis, p. 405). Likewise, Court (2001) found failure or "underachievement in foreign language [as a] way for boys to assert their masculine identity" (Kissau & Wierzalis, p. 405). Social perception of the TL greatly influences individual student desire and motivation to learn the TL, found by Heinzmann to be one of the greatest indicators of ultimate acquisition (2009, p. 30). Through social reinforcement, learners acquire and construct their gender identity and behave accordingly.

Gender impacts both motivation and ultimate acquisition because it is inextricably tied to identity. The identity and attributes of a certain gender that are socially constructed or influenced will, to a degree, determine the social identity of the language learner. The demands of security and social identity will encourage "behavior that converges with gender-normative expectations" (Henry and Cliffordson, 2013, p. 288). In this way will gender differences existent in society influence and predict the behavior of males and females toward language acquisition and use. Likewise, the expectations and opportunities of a particular sociocultural context toward gender will regulate the

motivation and behavior of males and females in the second language, though behavior will not always adhere to cultural norms.

Personal gender identity may be more malleable than was shown in research by Kissau and Wierzalis (2008). The formulation of an identity is impacted by L2 socialization and by teaching materials used in the TL. A culture's view of gender will influence the learner's ideal self in the L2, which determines the future-time orientation of the student (Henry, 2013, p. 274). If a student sees his or her ideal self as a proficient TL speaker and places importance on future interaction with the TL community and culture, motivation and effort to learn will be high; if a student sees the future self as negatively affected by TL proficiency in terms of personal and social identity, motivation and effort will be low and the student will develop a failure orientation or work-avoidance strategy (p. 274). The setting in which students study the TL impacts second language socialization and the restructured identity of the learner, specifically with regards to gender identity. The students will recognize the perceptions of gender appropriate expectations in the TL classroom and whether or not they conform to students' preexisting identity and a potential future identity as a fluent TL speaker. Male and female students need to be able to 'see themselves' in the TL, by having gender correspondent models available in their foreign language teachers, in authors, in characters in differing media, and potentially in language partners in order to connect their social and gender identity with a positive view of TL fluency.

The learner, when confronted with the TL and its culture, is also confronted by the link between language and power. Bourdieu (1991) determined that "linguistic resources," and the ability to communicate with the native TL community are "economic and social capital", the access to which impact gender relations and power status, specifically in cross-cultural contexts (Shi, 2007, p. 233). If the environment of linguistic input is favorable toward males or females, one gender will become more proficient and have greater access to TL social networks. Opportunity to learn literacy skills, have explicit language instruction, and practice using the language all impact the success of TL acquisition. In immigrant situations, males tend to

have greater access to linguistic environments in the workplace and community and develop the identity of economic and social power in "frequently inequitable social structures" (Shi, p. 234).

Access to nontraditional gender-centered texts also impacts the construction of personal identity. Chi (2011) found that presenting texts in the TL featuring "alternate versions of femininity" allowed students to improve self-confidence and efficacy in their ideal self in the L2 (p. 424). With so much evidence pointing to the social reinforcement of gender roles and behaviors as a determinant of foreign language study and success, research has also found that "young adult learners do not simply accept undesirable identities that are handed down to them, but rather behave as agents who resist, negotiate, change and transform themselves and others" (p. 424). This is encouraging to foreign language instruction as a field to know that individual gender identity and cultural perception of gender in a TL can be altered to include more positive, inclusive, and empowered attitudes.

Gender may predict the development and motivation to attain an ideal self in the second or foreign language. Personal identity and self-construal (identity in relation to others) are impacted by social and cultural expectations and by the internalized goals and values of the individual. Caregivers, the primary source of input for the L1 and teachers, who will likely be a strong source of L2 input, should be aware of the importance of giving reinforcement and providing opportunities for male and female children to develop a personal and social identity in relation to the L1 and L2, which sees the acquisition and application of both as desirable and appropriate. The value of interdependence in relationships as both an aspect of future identity in the second language and a motivation for learning is found in and associated more with females; the value of intrapersonal self-construal and independence is found in and associated more with males (Henry, 2013, p. 275). These traits are not inherent or guaranteed to be gender specific and exclusive, but research has shown a difference in the attitudes and behaviors of males and females largely due to differences in self-construal. Establishing an ideal or future self in the second or foreign language involves "negotiating identities, cultures, [and] power relations," which

are products of a socially and individually constructed gender identity, in order to develop motivation and attainment of the target language (Xingsong, 2006).

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### Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Cry the Children" and the Deaf Ears of Corruption

#### Brandy Meredith

Elizabeth Barrett Browning spent much of her adult life writing political poetry in opposition to the subjection of the impoverished and oppressed. It was such a common theme in her writing that many readers and critics became accustomed to studying her work through a political lens. However, another important influence to her writing that critics sometimes overlook is her dedication to faith.

Barrett Browning's spiritual devoutness can be traced back to her childhood. Ranen Omer chronicles her religious upbringing in an intensely Evangelical atmosphere. Citing evidence from an unpublished memoir and her letters, Omer claims that Barrett Browning read the Bible daily and considered all great poetry to be religious in nature (103). In one of her letters, Barrett Browning says, "We want the sense of the saturation of Christ's blood upon the souls of our poets because it is only 'the Blood' which heals and saves" (109). In another letter to Mary Russell Mitford, Barrett Browning writes, "Human interest is necessary to poetical interest and religious interest is necessary to perfect the human... Christ's religion is essentially poetry—poetry glorified." She goes on to say, "The heavens and the earth grant the same vocation to both mother and poet: namely, to carry out the most necessary work of developing the human soul" (qtd. in Taylor 153). Clearly, Barrett Browning acknowledges a dependence upon religion to guide her writing for the express purpose of developing and influencing other human souls.

Nevertheless, literary critics often undervalue the impact her religious passions had on her writing. Omer observes that

critics “tend to ignore her Christianity almost entirely” (99). Likewise, Linda Shires argues against critics who portray Barrett Browning solely as a poet of feminist political commentary. In one example, Shires cites editor William Makepeace Thackeray, who responded to the submission of Barrett Browning’s poem, “Lord Walter’s Wife,” by claiming it was unfit for the female and young audience. He attempted to appeal to her nature as wife and mother, suggesting she write poems that reflect who she is as a woman (331). But as Joyce Zonana explains, “The Elizabeth Barrett Browning who has her protagonist at the end of *Aurora Leigh* proclaim that ‘HE (Christ) shall make all new’ is not the ambivalently woman-centered poet some of us have sought to make her” (116). The inability of editors like Thackeray and some critics to recognize her ability to write anything more substantial than feminine morality poems explains how the social and political analysis of her poetry was widely misread until the 1850s and, in some cases, is still misconstrued today.

One of Barrett Browning’s poems that has been most widely considered a social and political poem but should be read religiously is “The Cry of the Children,” published in 1842. According to Simon Avery, “The Cry of the Children” was written in response to a parliamentary report on child labor published by the Children’s Employment Commission in 1842. Recognized as an impressive and rousing response to the oppression and abuse faced by child workers, most critics and readers over the years have labeled the poem political in nature, the assumed targets of Barrett Browning’s admonishments being the factory owners and political leaders. Certainly, “The Cry of the Children” is indeed a political poem, but it is also a critique of the leaders of the Church of England for allowing material focus to eclipse spiritual interest and status obsession to pull focus away from others and onto themselves, preventing them from fulfilling the responsibility to provide sanctuary and salvation to the children who were swallowed whole by the same industrial expansion the Church profited from.

In nineteenth century Britain, people practicing religious vocations ranged from bishops and priests to uneducated laymen. However, the rules for obtaining a clerical position were status-centered, allowing men who lacked true sincerity of

faith access to positions within the Church. According to Kristine Krueger, “many Victorians understood themselves to have a religious vocation whether they enjoyed institutional recognition or not, while others held a clerical title but felt no sense of vocation whatsoever” (141-142). These lax requirements resulted in “too many benefices [being] held by the younger sons of aristocratic families... for whom the clerical life was little more than a means of supporting their hounds and horses” (Krueger 144). Consequently, Dissenters complained of being expected to support a clergy that neither represented nor served them, claiming that men of the Church were more concerned with their professional statuses and governance than with their pastoral duties (Krueger 143).

The connection between the government and the Church was undeniable. Headed by Queen Victoria, the government appointed clerical leaders to run the Church. These government-appointed leaders often delegated most of the work to curates who received much lower pay, while the leaders enjoyed the status and spoils of their clerical appointment. It seems only natural that a church system built on wealth and status would breed corruption. The religious leaders with the power to aid the poor gained money from the industrialization that held workers captive in their poverty. Their lives of privilege and status were so far removed from the lower classes that they felt no need to help, while the clergymen who actively worked with the public were often overworked and poor themselves, and they were so low on the rungs of the hierarchy, they had no direct connections with political leaders or legislators who could make changes.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was not alone in her frustration over the Church’s failure to recognize the needs of the poor during the Industrial Revolution. In 1866, George Claude called upon the Church to reach out and help the poor. He brazenly states, “We are... anxious for the extension of Sunday school privileges... to the now neglected offspring of the wretched and degraded. Society has the right to demand this at the hands of the Church; nor is this beyond [the Church’s] power to perform. [The Church] has wealth enough, and a membership numerous enough, to bear Christ’s gospel to every boy and girl in the land. [The Church’s] failure to do so is from lack of will, not of

means" (451). The Church's size, power, and wealth afforded the institution the ability to bring about the kind of change that could have helped the victims of industrialization. Not to mention, Church doctrine clearly states that providing help to the poor and mistreated is a specific duty of the religious leaders and institutions, while an individual's desire for status and riches is considered sinful.

There were a few independent religious sects that attempted to provide Sunday school for the poor; however, the Church of England and the Anglican Church, as a whole, focused the majority of their resources and manpower on industrialization and the subsequent growth of the Church. In fact, religious leaders celebrated industry and commerce. At a Mission in Central Africa in 1859, Bishop Samuel Wilberforce said, "Commerce is a mighty machinery laid down in the wants of man by the Almighty Creator of all things, to promote the intercourse and communion of one race with another, and especially of the more civilized races of the earth with the less civilized" (qtd. in Krueger 148). Ironically, the Mission was focused on promoting commerce and industry as a means of allowing more civilized races to communicate and aid less civilized races, and all the while the underprivileged people in his own country were starving and working themselves to death for the sake of industry.

This corruption and oppression had been going on for years when a parliamentary report titled "Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children and Very Young People in Mines and Factories" caught Elizabeth Barrett Browning's attention in 1842. The report detailed information about the working conditions of the children, including interviews with some of the child miners and textile workers. Avery affirms that it was this explicit information concerning "the long hours, the grueling nature of the work, the lack of basic safety, the poor food, and the expanding slum areas in which the workers lived" that pushed Barrett Browning to take such a strong interest in the cause. According to Jane Humphries, the report claimed over ten percent of children between the ages of five and nine and over seventy-five percent of children ages ten to fourteen were in the workforce (177). In fact, children made up fifty percent of the workers in textile

factories and between twenty and fifty percent of the workers in mines (Humphries 179). Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor claim children were working up to sixteen hours per day with as little as thirty minutes for a dinner break (396). Interviews with the child workers told of abusive and grueling work environments. In the report itself, one girl admitted to being beaten by the overseer when her performance slowed down, and a boy told of many children who attempted to run away, including himself (Great Britain). There was no place of salvation for these children. Not only did their families need the meager sums of money the children made, but the parents were often so busy working that they were unavailable to teach or take care of their children. This is where the Church failed to step in. At the very least, it was the Church's responsibility to offer working children the chance to learn about God and how to pray.

However, the hierarchy of the Church made it a veritable branch of the government, and this corrupt connection wasn't lost on Barrett Browning. Linda Lewis lends insight into Barrett Browning's opinions concerning the connection between the government and the Church: "For [Elizabeth Barrett Browning], religion and politics prove to be as inseparable as religion and aesthetics" (89). Barrett Browning was aware of the state of affairs concerning the hierarchy of the Church. However, she held firmly to her faith despite the corruption within the Church itself. In fact, she often used her religious beliefs to argue against the crimes of the Church. Lewis says, "Repeatedly, Barrett Browning invokes her religion in the issues of government: tyranny and rebellion, democracy versus various forms of elitism, the individual and the masses. Religion is consistently the basis of her insistence upon liberty and self-determinations" (89).

An examination of the religious elements in "The Cry of the Children" clearly reveals an artfully crafted critique of the Church's failure to recognize the need for religious intervention in the lives of the child workers and to focus the Church's wealth of resources and time toward providing the children with the right to know God. Of the religious symbolism within the poem, the most striking are the images of hell and how Barrett Browning employs them to symbolize the children's

living and working conditions and to communicate the dire need for religious intervention. The words and descriptive phrases include: "pit," "dark," "coal-shadows," "coal-dark," "underground," "burning," "black flies," "they live... under you," "blindly in the dark," "midnight's hour of harm," "they have never seen the sunshine" (41, 63, 74, 83, 96, 100, 114, 135). The dark terms are then contrasted with nature imagery, representing life and the real world in which the children are wholly unfamiliar with. Barrett Browning tells the children,

Go out, children, from the mine and from the city—  
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do—  
Pluck you handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty  
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through.

(57-61)

Later, she addresses the Church, directly connecting the idea of nature to religion when she pleads for the children's liberty. She says, "They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory / Which is brighter than the sun" (135-136). Not only does this call attention to the fact that the children haven't received any form of religious teaching, but it raises the question, who deserves to experience the glory of nature more than the innocent?

This idea of innocence connects to the beginning of the poem where Barrett Browning compares the children to other forms of youth, introducing them as representatives of purity and innocence.

The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;  
The young birds are chirping in the nest;  
The young fawns are playing in the shadows;  
The young flowers are blowing toward the west—  
But the young, young children, O my brothers,  
They are weeping bitterly! (5-10)

These children, as young and pure as lambs and fawns, should be running and playing, yet their situations are much more dire. The stark contrast of the children crying conveys the message that the innocent should experience carefree life in nature, yet they live in a hellish environment. Again, she raises the question: whose job is it to protect the innocent and pure and to offer them salvation, if not the Church's?

In fact, the only solace the children imagine is in death. Again, contrasting the dark, Barrett Browning uses images of light, happiness, and rest when referring to the children's perception of death. Not only are the children unconcerned about dying early, they welcome it. When speaking of Alice, a girl who died, the children say, "We looked into the pit prepared to take her— / Was no room for any work in the close clay: / From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her" (81-83). Notice first that their visions of death have nothing to do with a bright and beautiful heaven where they're free to play. Instead, their ideal heavenly experience is sleep and rest. Additionally, the children feel death is their only way to reach God. When speaking of Alice, the children say, "And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in / The shroud, by the kirk-chime" (49-50). She rests peacefully, and the shroud symbolizes being wrapped and safe. This is followed by the mention of church bells, suggesting the children believe death is the only way to become protected by the Church and connected to God because they have seen no sign of either during their dreary lives. This connection to death and God is again confirmed when the children speak of their own anticipated deaths: "(For they call Him good and mild) / Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely, / 'Come and rest with me, my child'" (118-120). Having no religious education, the children's belief or faith in God is limited to his calling them at their time of death.

Barrett Browning blames the children's lack of religious education on the inattentiveness of the Church. She focuses much attention on how little the children know of religion. For example, they only remember two words of prayer—"Our Father," which they "say softly for a charm" (116). If anyone has taught them the rest, it's been so long that the children have forgotten. This suggests a disconnect between the Church and its people. Barrett Browning solidifies this idea when the children say,

Who is God that He should hear us,  
While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?  
When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us  
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word. (105-108)

They don't believe God hears them, doubt His existence, and refer to people as "human creatures," which only reiterates how

removed from the world they are. No one has introduced them to God or helped them pray. What job did the people of the Church have that was so important, if not that? According to Krueger, “the ordained clergy participated in secular activities as scientists, philologists, historians, and literary authors” (141). In other words, they enjoyed their statuses as ordained clergymen while shirking church responsibilities to lead their own lives and maintain their careers outside the Church.

Barrett Browning boldly reminds the leaders of the Church of their jobs when she tells them,

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,  
To look up to Him and pray—  
So the blessed One, who blesseth all the others,  
Will bless them another day. (100-104)

She made this plea to the “brothers” of the Church with the belief that in order to be blessed and freed, the children needed to be able to pray to God. She’s literally begging for their souls, much like when she pleads, “Let them feel this cold metallic motion / is not all the life God fashions or reveals” (93-94). Because rather than finding peace or being saved by the Grace of God’s salvation, their souls simply “spin on blindly in the dark” (100). For God is not accessible to them without someone to spread His word and to offer His salvation. From the children’s point-of-view, when they look up, “Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all [they] find” (126). They look to the sky and an image of industrialization is all they find—not salvation, nor love, nor rest.

Who are these “brothers” Barrett Browning addresses, if not her brothers under God—religious leaders who have abandoned their duties in exchange for the greed of a nation fueled by the suffering of children. It becomes obvious she is, in fact, referring to the clergy as her “brothers,” when she boldly accuses them of living against the word of God and the Bible that they are meant to preach when she says,

Do ye hear the children weeping and disproving,  
O my brothers, what ye preach?  
For God’s possible is taught by His world’s loving—  
And the children doubt of each. (129-132)

These men of the Church are meant to preach of God and his love. Instead, the innocent children live bleak lives without the means to learn of God’s existence and salvation. According to Barrett Browning, this goes against and disproves the word of God—the same word that is supposed to be preached by the Church, by the “brothers.” God is supposed to be found in the love within His world, and the children have experienced neither God nor worldly love, so there is certainly a disconnect between the Church and their duties to the poor.

Barrett Browning not only seeks to call attention to this disconnect, but she attempts to discover the cause by first wondering if the men of the Church have even noticed the children’s plight. The children say, “When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us / Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word” (107-107). Is it possible that, like the other adults, the clergy has become disillusioned by the new luxuries afforded them by industry that they fail to notice the child workers at all? Barrett Browning asks her brothers, “Do you question the young children in the sorrow, / Why their tears are falling so” (13-14)? Also, she says,

But the young, young children, O my brothers,  
Do you ask them why they stand  
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,  
In our happy Fatherland? (21-24)

After asking if they’ve even bothered to speak to the poor children or to inquire about their wellbeing, she draws another connection to industrialization—“Our happy Fatherland” referring, sarcastically, to the booming luxuries of industry that the leaders of the Church and the upper-classes enjoy.

Throughout the poem, Barrett Browning references the materialism of the country by speaking of the constant turning of the factories. It never stops, not even for a day. And in the end, she boldly states,

‘How long,’ they say, ‘how long, O cruel nation,  
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child’s heart,  
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,  
And tread onwards to your throne amid the mart?  
Our blood splashes upward, O our tyrants,  
And your purple shews your path’ (149-154)

The cruel nation, headed by the Church, which is run by the government, enjoys the movement of industrialization at the children's expense. The mailed heel of power holds them in their place, stifling their cries and keeping them prisoner to industry, as those in power, symbolized by purple, the color of royalty, make their way through the mart, purchasing goods and enjoying their secular professions and clergymen statuses.

Unlike the majority of Victorian poetry, blood does not refer to the blood of Christ leading to God's salvation. In this case, Barrett Browning puts the literal blood of the children on the purple robes of power worn by the tyrants who've enslaved them and left them alone and without God. One has only to remember Lewis' comment, "For [Elizabeth Barrett Browning], religion and politics prove to be as inseparable as religion and aesthetics. It is unalterably God's will that individuals be free, but human institutions have all too often enslaved them" (qtd. in Zonana 116) to realize that she holds the Church and the Crown equally responsible for the suffering of the children, and as textual evidence proves, "The Cry of the Children" is, in fact, directed toward the corrupt Church of England and its failure to perform God's work.

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## Satirical Humor: Satisfying or Ineffective?

McKenzie Stinson

Through its use of humor, satire can be a successful tool for encouraging an audience to begin thinking about important social issues. Because humor can help an audience recognize the ridiculous nature of a common practice or belief, it can be more effective than a non-satirical piece arguing a similar point. This is due to satire's ability to use humor to make a critique of the audience's perception about a topic in a gentler, less offensive manner. However, it is possible that satire can be taken literally, which would likely lead to readers feeling offended and disagreeing with the literal point that they feel is being argued. Surprisingly often, satirical pieces are misinterpreted by readers and are assumed to be entirely factual, truthfully representing the views of their authors and publishers. One website, *Literally Unbelievable*, chronicles these misinterpretations by allowing social media users to submit screenshots in which their online friends have shared posts from *The Onion* alongside comments that show they have missed the entire point of the satire. Recently, a user on *Literally Unbelievable* shared a misreading of a satirical piece claiming that distracted driving results in over 5,000 unfinished texts per year. The piece goes on to explain that these unfinished messages "were brief and still had many words to go." It argues that drivers should avoid texting while driving so that they no longer put their texts – and the texts of others – at risk ("Distracted Driving"). The commenter whose post was shared on *Literally Unbelievable* is appalled that the article "[compares] text messages to lives." He or she states: "It is disturbing that there are over 5,000 injured or lost lives due to distracted driving. It is also disturbing that the number of unfinished text messages holds even a slither [sic] of import-

ance." Rather than understanding that this piece from *The Onion* is satirizing cell phone dependence, this reader believes its creator is truly concerned about these messages remaining unfinished. Scrolling through the archives on *Literally Unbelievable* reveals how often misinterpretations like this one happen—and how entertaining they can be to readers who are able to understand and appreciate satirical humor.

A satirical argument is most effective when readers both recognize that it is satire and fully understand the point that is being made. If these two things happen, it is more likely that readers will engage with and appreciate the piece. It is also more likely that the piece will act as a jumping off point, leading them to internal reflection concerning the issue presented in the piece and how they, as well as society as a whole, perceive the issue. This could also inspire them to begin discussing the issue with others, spreading the argument made in the satirical piece to a broader audience. In order to explore these complex dynamics, I sought responses from four readers to analyze their perception of satire. I predicted that the humorous nature of the satirical piece used in my study would signal readers that it was satire. I also expected that though they understood it was not meant to be taken literally, they would engage with the satirical piece more deeply and consider it more effective than the non-satirical piece because of the way it uses humor to change their perspectives.

To test my prediction, I used two pieces about the impact of homelessness on children. One piece was from the satirical newspaper *The Onion*, while the other piece was an excerpt from *The New York Times*. Each piece attempts to make the true nature of homelessness clear to the audience, though they use different methods of doing so. The piece from *The Onion*, for example, relies on humor to essentially warn against the common perception of homeless people, including homeless children, as lazy. The *New York Times* piece, in contrast, details the life of a homeless child in New York to argue that homelessness is a matter of circumstance rather than a product of laziness. The results of my exploration were mixed. I was confident that my readers would prefer the satirical piece to the non-satirical one because of its humor and accessibility. However, though they all recognized that the piece from *The*

*The Onion* was satirical, two of my four readers preferred *The New York Times* article because they felt it was more engaging and more effective in helping them understand homelessness on a deeper level.

I based my original prediction on Kenneth Burke's ideas concerning the comic corrective, which are presented in the article "Interrupting the Machine: Cynic Comedy in the 'Rally for Sanity and/or Fear'" by Ronald A. Placone and Michael Tumolo. Burke focuses on the persuasive potential of humor to argue that satirical texts have the potential to redirect the thought processes of their audiences. In this way, reading a piece of satire becomes an interpretive event, using laughter to introduce new ideas and purge preconceptions (18). For this study, this would mean that the piece from *The Onion* could help introduce the idea that society viewing homeless people as lazy freeloaders who are simply unwilling to accept available help is ridiculous. It paints this perception in a new light, making the audience more aware that this is a commonly held opinion in society that needs to be redirected. It could also show readers who may be guilty of feeling this way about the homeless that they need to reconsider the validity behind their conceptions.

Furthermore, the piece from *The Onion* could make it possible for the audience to transcend the situation and no longer be confined by its own views concerning homelessness. This is another idea presented by Burke to explain how satire can effectively make an audience question the norm of the status quo. The humor used in the piece helps to relieve tension so that readers do not become offended by the critique of this view (19). For example, a non-satirical piece critiquing the perception of homeless people as lazy would likely offend readers who agreed with its literal interpretation because they would perceive it as harsh. It could cause them to ignore the piece's argument because of how directly it criticizes and challenges their own opinion. Because the piece I selected from *The Onion* uses humor, people who are guilty of viewing the homeless population as lazy are less likely to be offended. Instead, it could help them see the humor within their own conventions and begin to consider whether these conventions

are actually valid or whether they are as ridiculous as the article presents them.

This transcendence of a situation due to the thought-provoking nature of satire, however, does not always take place. "Missing the Joke: A Reception Analysis of Satirical Texts" describes how audiences sometimes define satire as merely "for entertainment" or "trying to be comical" (413). This perception of satire as merely an entertainment outlet can cause an opposite effect than that identified by Burke. In fact, it can lead an audience to simply reading a satirical text because they find it funny and then giving its point no further consideration. Though satire is typically meant to convey a message, using humor to draw an audience in and make its message more appealing, audiences tend to misunderstand an author's intention (413). This means that they might assume there is no message involved in a satirical text at all and that because it is not meant to be taken literally it is also not meant to be analyzed more deeply. Therefore, an audience approaching a satirical text with this preconception would be unlikely to come away with a redirected thought process concerning the issue being presented in the piece.

With these concepts in mind and my prediction formulated, I chose four readers who represented both genders and a wide span of ages and educational backgrounds. Each reader was given two articles for the study. One was an excerpt from *The New York Times* entitled "Girl in the Shadows: Dasani's Homeless Life," which they were instructed to read first. The other was a piece from *The Onion* with the headline: "Homeless Child Apparently Unaware He Lives In Nanny State." *The New York Times* piece is a profile on an 11-year-old girl in New York named Dasani. It describes the decrepit shelter that Dasani and her family live in and reveals that Dasani views school as her only temporary refuge from poverty. The article details how Dasani's living situation and the hunger that she experiences daily make her feel unsafe. It also provides many statistics that show the true impact of poverty and homelessness on children in New York and argues that these conditions are a product of circumstance, not the result of Dasani's family's unwillingness to change their situation.

The piece from *The Onion* describes another 11-year-old homeless child living in New York. The piece gives the boy no name, but labels him as "lazy" and claims that he essentially has no reason to remain homeless because his problems are fixable. It argues that Americans have free health care, housing, and food stamps available to them if only they are willing to stand in a line long enough to receive them. It then concludes that the child's homeless and malnourished existence is his choice because he is too lazy and unwilling to stand in line in order to receive free government handouts, so he chooses to sleep in an alleyway instead.

Other than their titles, the two articles had no distinguishing elements, and the readers were given no information about them or about the sources they were chosen from. They were simply asked to read each article, marking anything that stuck out to them as interesting or important. After they finished reading both pieces, I asked each reader to discuss what he or she felt the purpose of each article was and to classify one as more engaging. After discussing their answers to each of these two questions, I told them the sources of each article. I then explained, to those who were unfamiliar, that *The Onion* is a satirical newspaper. After presenting them with this new information, I asked them to discuss their opinions regarding which piece argued its point more effectively and which piece made them feel more sympathetic for the homeless. They were also asked if they could identify specific things the piece they labeled as less effective could do to fulfill its purpose more successfully. I discussed the responses with each reader, often asking them to explain their opinions further and provide specific examples from the text that swayed these opinions.

During my study, there was one reader whose responses aligned exactly with my prediction. Mike immediately recognized the piece from *The Onion* as satire, and though he appreciated the depth of the detail in the non-satirical piece, he still felt that the satire was more effective. He said, "The article is so ridiculous that it makes you think about the plight of children like this." He even said that *The Onion* piece made him feel more sympathy for the homeless than the depiction of Dasani's life in *The New York Times* piece because "it makes you aware that people actually think like this, and that is really sad."

Though all three of my other readers understood that the piece was satire, whether they were familiar with *The Onion* or not, they had very different opinions than Mike and, therefore, disproved my prediction.

Paul, like Mike, felt that *The Onion* was more effective in fulfilling its specific purpose because "it was funny and readers can relate to it and understand it better." However, he felt that it was less effective than *The New York Times* piece in making him understand the true conditions that homeless people in America are suffering from. He said that the non-satirical piece made him feel more sympathy for the homeless because it showed how hard their lives really are and helped readers understand that their trials are a matter of circumstance that they often cannot control. He said it made him think about the issue on a much deeper level because "In America, we try to help people in other countries who live in poverty, but we ignore the people suffering around us because we think the government gives everyone free handouts, and that is not true."

The other two readers, Beth and Kathy, each felt that the piece from *The New York Times* was more effective in all aspects than the piece from *The Onion*. Kathy pointed out that *The New York Times* piece drew her attention because it was telling a story of what life is really like for a homeless person. She appreciated that it included statistics about how many children are suffering from homelessness and poverty and said, "It helped me understand how big the problem really is." After reading the two pieces, she said she felt sympathy for children like Dasani because of these statistics and images, not because of the way the satirical piece attempted to get her to reconsider the common perception of homelessness.

Beth, who was the only reader familiar with *The Onion* prior to the study, felt that the satirical piece was not effective because she said, "I think people who know what *The Onion* is are going to read this article really quickly, think it's funny, and not pay much attention to it." She admitted that she is guilty of reacting to satirical pieces this way and, because of this, felt that *The New York Times* piece made her think about homelessness on a deeper level than the piece from *The Onion*. She pointed out that the way *The New York Times* piece "tells the story of homelessness through the eyes of a child" made her feel more

sympathy than a piece which she immediately knew was not meant to be taken literally. She believed that if the piece from *The Onion* had also presented the issue from the child's perspective, with him identifying himself as a "lazy freeloader," it would have been more effective. She also said that she believed people would be likely to simply agree with *The Onion* piece and not recognize it as satire because of how common the perception of poverty it presents is, a belief that completely contradicts my original prediction.

I expected my four readers to, for the most part, react to the pieces similarly and provide me with similar responses. However, the results of my study proved that my prediction was almost entirely incorrect. I was correct in assuming that my readers would all recognize the piece as satirical, though one of them pointed out that she believed most people reading it would take it at face value. The similarities between their responses, however, ended there. Even when they agreed on which piece was more effective, they reached that conclusion for different reasons than the other readers. Though satire is useful for helping to redirect an audience's perception of an issue, as Burke argues, it is not always the most effective way of doing so. The results of my study suggest that a detailed, engaging piece that presents an issue from a literal, non-satirical perspective can be just as effective, if not more so, than a satirical piece which attempts to accomplish the same goals through the use of humor.

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## Because You Wanted to Be a Hero: The Psychology of *Spec Ops: The Line*

Max Wade

One of the most iconic scenes from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is Kurtz's dying whisper, "The horror! The horror!" (98), which leaves the audience questioning just what was the nature of the horror that Kurtz endured or committed, a horror so extreme that it could drive a man as great, as we are told, as Kurtz into the barbarism we see in him. The scene is recreated in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, which offers a little more clarity as to the nature of the horror being the savagery of the Vietnam War. In Yager Studio's *Spec Ops: The Line*, the effect is taken one step forward by having the player be an active participant in that horror. By using the interactivity that the medium of video games affords, *Spec Ops* explores the psychological impact of war on both the characters and the players themselves, while highlighting the genre of games by which it is defined. In doing so, *Spec Ops* allows players to step back and question what they are doing and what their actions say about them outside of the game.

*Spec Ops* serves as an excellent example of how video games can use traditional themes and methods of storytelling in a way that no other form of media can produce by using active immersion. In this instance, active immersion will be defined as the suspension of belief that the character and the player are separate entities; in practice, active immersion refers to the feeling of identity the players has with the characters that they are controlling and how it allows them to cease to view the events of the game as being detached from themselves. The extent of the active immersion within a game relies on multiple factors, such as the music, visuals, sound effects, and mechanics

of play. As James Paul Gee writes in his article, "Why Game Studies Now?", "the experience of playing the game is closer to living inside a symphony than to living inside a book" (59), detailing how the music in *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* draws players into the world in which they participate. This is similar to how film uses these elements to hold audiences' suspension of disbelief, but in the case of video games, the audience must be both the witness to the events as well as the actor; this requires a greater deal of immersion to keep players invested in behaving the games actions, despite them not actually performing the acts themselves. Knowing this, *Spec Ops* is designed to use these conventions to simultaneously increase and decrease the immersion of players by keeping them an active focus both as the actor of the character and as the audience of the events.

At the start of the game, the player is presented with a very generic and standard depiction of shooter games. The controls are familiar to anyone who has played the genre before, without introducing any new mechanics that would set the game apart from competitors in the market. The characters are easily recognizable as the "Joker" squad mate, Lugo; the "Serious" squad mate, Adams; and the first enemies shown being masked Arabic men pointing guns at the player. Even the use of Nolan North, a voice actor well known for multiple roles in shooter video games like *Uncharted*, is familiar to any veteran of these games. Introducing these generic elements immediately at the start of the game builds an expectation for the player of what the game will entail, namely, that it will be a similar "run-and-gun" affair of shooting down waves after waves of nameless ethnic targets as the Western soldier emerges heroic over the brutality of a conflict they did not want to be a part of. This expectation is built so the developers can quickly have it come crashing down, leaving players in a daze as they struggle against what they have come to expect, from both *Spec Ops* and of the genre itself.

As the player leads Captain Walker and his squad mates Adams and Lugo through the ruins of Dubai, the game calls upon the typical conventions of the game's subgenre as a "Modern Military Shooter" against the player; for example, in *Spec Ops: The Line*, the enemies the player is most often in

conflict with are American soldiers whom the player character has ostensibly been sent in to rescue, being a member of the American Army themselves. This is a prime example of how the game uses the “texts...that are overflowing with multiple and often conflicting meanings” (Balkin 3). The objective the story gives to the player is to rescue the soldiers, but the mechanics of the game (i.e. the player being unable to progress until the soldiers are killed) demand that the player take action against that objective; this creates an inner conflict within the player between performing what the game demands and the morality of the action itself. To better emphasize this point, several instances occur in which the player is able to eavesdrop on hostile non-player characters (or NPCs) conversations, where they discuss very mundane things, such as sharing a piece of gum. This serves as another reversal on the standard military shooter game where the player conventionally faces wave after wave of faceless NPCs, rather than reminding the player that the enemies they are shooting at are supposed to be actual people.

This is not the only way the developers use traditional game mechanics to put players into a state of discomfort without causing them to separate themselves from the immersive experience. The use of the loading screens, which appear in between levels of the game while the software loads the next section, is a standard limitation of games in general. Typically, loading screens break immersion, as the player is taken out of the mentality of playing the character and are fed tips about how to play the game while the next section is loading. *Spec Ops* follows this trend of giving advice for the majority of the game, until the screens start to become captioned with questions directly aimed at the players themselves, such as “How many Americans have you killed today?” and “Can you even remember why you came here?” The use of these captions for the loading screen breaks the fourth wall, without taking the player completely out of the experience, as it forces players to continue thinking about the actions they are performing in the game, and the consequences that result from their actions.

Of particular note in these loading screens are the quotations “To kill for yourself is murder. To kill for your government is heroic. To kill for entertainment is harmless” and

“The U.S. military does not condone the killing of unarmed combatants. But this isn’t real, so why should you care?” are used as an indictment for games which ask, like *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield*, that players engage in a form of “hero fantasy” without much regard to the damage they cause with fighting. In one of the most jarring moments of the game, the player is forced into using a white phosphorus mortar from the view point of a drone (a gameplay mechanic that was first introduced and popularized in the *Call of Duty* series) to fire down on the infrared images of enemies. The player then has to walk through the devastated camp, complete with dying cries of soldiers, to see that one of the targets the player actively shot was a mass of refugees the enemy soldiers had been caring for. The impact of this sequence would have been impossible to recreate with the same impact were it not for the interactivity that the game provides. By making the player an active, if not always willing, participant to the resulting war crime committed, the player becomes directly responsible for that act, all while under the thin veneer of trying to be a hero.

The notion of what makes a hero is a major question the game poses to its audience, as well as the danger in blind hero worship that ignores the flaws of those paragons. Captain Walker is shown in the prologue to have an unwavering loyalty to Colonel Konrad after Konrad saved Walker in Kabul, refusing to believe he had any part in the actions taken by the Damned 33<sup>rd</sup>; however, “Konrad” questions him on what exactly it is that makes him so heroic, asking, “Because I saved your life? I saved many lives. I’ve ended many more.” This acknowledgement of the bitter side of pictured war heroes goes beyond the relationship of Konrad and Walker, going straight to the player himself; what makes the player a hero in games like *Call of Duty*—the fact that they kill the “bad” guy? If so, what about the thousands of people they killed along the way to the bad guy, the countless killed in the supposed name of justice or morality? More importantly, who should take responsibility for the actions of players and the virtual slaughter they commit? This mass killing of civilians runs parallel to the infamous “No Russian” level from *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, in which the player must participate in the mass shooting of a Russian airport; however, instead of using this as a simple plot point, as *Call of Duty* does, it forces the player to question who is really

responsible for their actions in the game, the player or the developer?

The responsibility for one's action is another major theme explored in the game. One of the universally regarded triumphs of *Spec Ops: The Line* was the depiction of the mental condition of the characters the audience is presented with, and how the events of the story affect their mental stability. One of the most notable cases of this degradation is through the use of what Freud outlined as "repression," the resistance of unwanted ideas or memories being denied conscious acknowledgement (193). Captain Walker's refusal to acknowledge the responsibility of his actions throughout the game can be attributed to his repression of the events, as well as relying on several other defense mechanisms detailed by Freud, including "denial" and "projection." As revealed by the ending of the game, all of the actions that Walker had been attributing to Colonel Konrad were dissociative episodes to relieve Walker from blame, rationalizing that Konrad was forcing him to act. Even Lugo and Adams' continuation to follow Walker despite his obvious mental instability can be explained psychologically, both with Freud and Stanley Milgram's experiment on obedience; as Milgram explains, "the disappearance of responsibility is the most far-reaching consequence of submission to authority" (605). By allowing themselves to follow Walker's orders, they are able to place all of the blame for their actions onto Walker and relieve themselves of any repercussions; a specific example of this can be seen shortly after Lugo is lynched by the mob of refugees, where Adams repeatedly asks Walker for permission to open fire on the unarmed civilians, despite obviously desiring to attack and the degradation of their military hierarchy that would require Walker's permission.

The agitation and anger that Walker displays is increasingly shared by players the longer they continue to play. The developers were able to achieve this through the taunting from the Radioman, the "Allowed Fool" much like Conrad's Harlequin Russian or Coppola's photojournalist character, who would antagonize the player over the radio; in one such instance, while the player is fighting through waves of enemies, the Radioman cries, "Jeez, man, where's all this violence coming

from? Is it the video games? I bet it's the video games." Another notable aspect used by the developers to carefully agitate the player is through the use of the game's mechanics. One thing many critics have commented on is that the game play of *Spec Ops* was not fun by most reasonable standards. This limitation was implemented on purpose, however, to better convey the question of whether or not a game such as this should be fun, when the majority of its body is killing countless numbers of people. The player never receives a satisfying feeling of reward upon clearing an area of enemies, unlike in similar games like *Battlefield*; the combat encounters themselves feel burdensome and tiring, rather than providing the player an intense, high-adrenaline effect. The result of these tools leaves the player heavily engaged in the story, but agitated and frustrated by the events being played out before them.

This technique was used so that when players are presented with moral decisions in the game that require them to respond in a quick fashion, they are in an emotionally compromised state of mind; these moral choices are left ambiguous as to how to overcome them, with many options not being immediately present. For example, at one point, players must disperse an angry crowd before they swarm the play. In an agitated state that the game puts the player in, one may go for the quickest solution, such as firing directly into the crowd, as opposed to a more reserved, subtle option, such as firing into the air. As studies have shown, emotion has a large influence on the effects of decision making, often causing subjects to respond with harsher punishments and to be less likely to lend aid (Grežo and Pilárik 62). *Spec Op* uses game play to put players into situations in which they must make difficult moral choices while in a compromised emotional state; this is to emulate how soldiers can make decisions that would be considered immoral to witnesses, all while showing that the player is responsible for the act itself.

Walker's immorality and descent into evil follows what psychologist Philip Zimbardo outlined in his book, *The Lucifer Effect*, as seven processes that lead to evil. The most important one of Zimbardo's social processes is the toleration of evil through inaction; this is a key component of the interactivity that video games like *Spec Ops* affords as it makes players

themselves guilty of the action, or more accurately “inaction.” The writer for the game, Walt Williams, has gone on to explain that, while many people have complained about the apparent lack of choice in the White Phosphorus sequence, there is another, more subtle option: “putting the controller down, and saying ‘No, this is too much for me, I’m done with this’” (Klepek). By continuing the game, despite witnessing and performing increasingly horrific actions present in the game, the player becomes guilty of inaction in the face of evil; this is directly demonstrated in the climactic confrontation with Konrad, as he tells Walker and the player that “None of this would have happened if you just stopped.”

Walker’s descent into madness is also represented visually throughout the game by how the use of background scenery in key locations in the game, typically at the start of a new chapter, as well as the level designs for the chapters themselves. For the majority of the game, despite beginning the game walking on the ground, Walker and his team are shown descending heights, skipping over any evidence of them travelling upwards through buildings or other obstacles. While traversing the ruins of Dubai, Walker is shown coming off a height, either in a cutscene or being prompted by the player, reflecting how his mental state is constantly crashing down. It is not until the very end of the game, when Walker takes the elevator up the Burj Khalifa, that Walker’s psychosis is broken and he is confronted with the fact that he is ultimately responsible for all of the actions in the game.

This psychosis is first introduced to the player outside of the immediate gameplay through the use of another loading screen, giving the definition of cognitive dissonance: “cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable feeling caused by holding two conflicting ideas simultaneously,” paraphrased from Leon Festinger’s *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (18). This loading screen will first start appearing after the player completes the White Phosphorus section, which serves as the turning point for Walker; after this point, he is conflicted with the idea of himself being a hero trying to save people and the facts presented to him that he directly caused the deaths of innocent civilians. This dissonance forces him to shift blame on the perceived “Konrad,” going so far as to develop auditory hallucinations of

Konrad speaking to him via a radio. At the game’s conclusion, this illusion is shattered, as it is revealed that the radio had been broken from the moment Walker found it, and that the real Konrad had killed himself long before the events of the game started.

Hallucinations, as well as the dissonance itself, highlight the inaccuracies of the so-called “Modern Military Shooter” games in their depiction of war. In all of these games, the audience is never shown any lasting damaging psychological effects from their actions in war; the closest we come to is the image of the grizzled, jaded veteran character typically depicted as someone to be respected and emulated, like Captain Price from *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*. Beyond their cynicism, they show no damage from the years of violence and killing of which they have been a part, whereas *Spec Ops* shows how damning even a few hours of such violence can be on a person’s psyche. The game uses the suspension of disbelief that we lend it as part of our immersion to show the effects of PTSD first-hand through the eyes of Captain Walker; by using the pixels and images that we have already established as being representations of enemies and environmental dangers, and by changing the consequences of some events, the game disorients players and puts them into a similarly unstable state of mind, such as that in which Walker finds himself. In one such instance, Walker hallucinates an enemy who appears as Lugo, who had just died, and accuses Walker of leaving him behind before fatally shooting him; the interface of the game makes this scene appear as if they have actually been killed in the game, like a ‘normal’ enemy, but instead it reloads to moments prior to the hallucination. This changing of the rules that the player has grown accustomed to is similar to the disorientation and destabilization of the world view of Walker, and many others who suffer from PTSD.

This marked onset of mental illness is a rather ironic incident in the realm of video games because of the implications it has on all the characters of the genre. As Brendan Keogh writes in his book, *Killing Is Harmless*, “*The Line* isn’t about Nathan Drake going insane; it is about how Nathan Drake was always insane to begin with” (14). Because we see Walker’s mental state slowly change throughout the game, it makes us question what the mental state of other characters who witness

and perform similar acts of destruction must be to remain so very unchanged; perhaps even more importantly is the question it forces players to raise about what the game says about us, that we willingly continue to play these games despite the apparent sociopathy the characters we choose to inhabit display. If we find entertainment in wanton slaughter, even if it is thinly justified with the rationale that it isn't real and therefore is inconsequential, what does that say about our society and culture?

These quandaries are all present to the player to examine on two levels: what it means for Walker and what it means for the player. Only through the interactive element of video games was Yager able to put these perspectives and ideas into the player's line of vision and question the implications of the characters' actions, which have become the player's own acts. By immersing the player in the events of the game, the audience must take part in everything that Walker experiences through his eyes, instead of abstractly reading or viewing it externally; this effect is crucial, as it holds players responsible and allows them to suffer it firsthand. This use of active immersion to give wide audiences the opportunity to witness and reflect on events that would normally render its victims horrifically traumatized is a tool that can be used by games to show greater artistic expression and understanding of another's frame of mind.

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## Comin' thro' the Rye, the Rye, or the Rye?

### Erin Woolen

In the late 1800s, Robert Burns' 1782 song "Comin' thro' the Rye" inspired a string of international debates over whether or not the rye referenced in the song was truly a field of grain or a reference to a small stream in Burns' home county. There are copies of old newspaper articles and letters dating as early as 1883 from sources including the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. These provide a record outlining the two stances on the debate, which began in the UK before making its way across the pond to America (Todd 9). Revisiting the dispute provides a wide range of views, both scholarly and personal, on life and literature in Scotland both in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The debate, however, subjects the song to a purely literal interpretation, and does not discuss any potential metaphoric interpretations of the rye, either grain or water. This deficit of interpretation leaves questions of the nature of the rye and the character of Jenny unanswered. Beyond providing a setting for the poem, the rye marks Jenny as a member of the rural working class, and it also marks her state of being. The traditional methods of growing rye in Scotland dictate that rye literally inhabits a liminal space; therefore Jenny as she passes through the rye, is a girl passing through a liminal space or time.

In a letter to the *Cleveland Leader*, A. B. Todd, a "well-known authority on Scottish literature," addresses the debate over the literal interpretation of the nature of the rye in Robert Burns' poem "Comin' thro' the Rye" (Todd 9). The debate, he says, sprang up "a few years before" in some Scottish newspapers, placing the beginning of the debate sometime in the 1880s. The rye, some say, is not grain, but "a small, insignificant stream of

that name" that runs through Ayrshire (Todd 9), the county where Burns lived and farmed with his wife Jean before he got a position as an excise man in Dumfries (Glass 3). An article in the *Chicago Tribune* from 1883 asserts that reading the rye as a stream makes more sense than reading it as a field crop ("Comin' Thro' the Rye" 16). First of all, it asks, how is it acceptable to go trampling through a grain crop, a valuable, labor-intensive resource? The song implies that the rye is crossed with some level of frequency, often enough for a potential chance meeting. The article concludes that the image of the rye as a grain is "a popular misconception," and that the song, in truth, refers to a shallow, bridgeless stream, or burn, in which boys could steal kisses midstream ("Comin' Thro' the Rye" 16). It refers readers back to Burns' original chorus, which states

Jenny's a' weet  
Jenny's seldom dry  
She draiglet her petticoats  
Comin' tho' the rye.

Todd and others refute the claim, saying just because the song is about meeting in a grain field, this does not mean that "Jenny and her 'brisk young wooer' were wandering through the growing rye like escaped sheep or cattle" (Todd 9). Rather, they would have been traversing the footpath in the field. It was common practice to leave these paths so that people wouldn't be forced to go around or tramp a pathway through the field (Duff 22). Those who hold to this argument state that if Jenny were passing through this narrow way when the rye was wet with rain or dew, as it would often be, she would of course wet her petticoats to the waist, or as Todd put it, she'd be "draiglet to the oxters," that is, wet to the armpits, just as he was when coming through those tight pass ways as a boy (9). Many of those who contribute to the debate cite personal familiarity with this type of path (Todd 9, Duff 22) and Burns' inevitable experiences with such paths as a resident and farmer in Scotland (R.H. BR555, Duff 22). Moreover, these letters point out, the theory that the rye is a stream simply doesn't make sense. Kissing is not a very practical midstream occupation, (Todd 9, R.H. BR555, Duff 22) and the Lowland streams are so

shallow, and often so narrow, that they are easily forded by stepping stones or a quick jump across, with no danger of wetting one's feet, let alone a petticoat (Duff 22). None of the letter writers venture into the potential sexual implications of Jenny's wetness, nor of her mussed petticoats.

Some who support the idea that the rye was a stream have suggested that rye was not even grown in Scotland (Collins, James BR442) but many of those who weighed in refute this notion, claiming that while rye was not widely grown throughout Scotland, it was grown in Ayrshire, where Burns farmed, as well as in Aberdeen and other places in the Lowlands (Todd 9, Duff 22, Collins, James BR442). Also, Burns likely appropriated the song from Scottish folklore, and Scotland is known to have grown rye grain as early as 1546 (Collins, James BR442). Even if somehow Burns was personally unfamiliar with rye grain, it would not have been out of the question for him to use rye in his song about a woman in the Scottish countryside.

Those who doubt Scotland's production of rye do have good reason for their doubt, however. Barley and oats are the cereal crops most often grown in Scotland (Collins, E. 103), and its rye production has been minimal through the last five centuries. The question of Scotland's rye production arose in a more recent scholarly debate over the potential role of ergot poisoning in 16<sup>th</sup> century witch burnings in Scotland (Whyte 90). During Burns' time and up to the agricultural census of 1866, there was little direct data collected on the UK's cereal production (Collins, E. 97). Rye does grow well in Scottish soil (Duff 22, Whyte 89), but, though some contend that rye food products would have been a common article in any working class home (Todd 9, R.H. BR555), Professor Ian D. Whyte holds that rye would have been grown more for its sturdy straw than as a food staple. The dried stalks of rye make excellent thatching and bedding, uses that would still have been relevant in Burns' time for laboring rural people (R.H. BR555, Duff 22, Whyte 89). Its hay also makes good fodder. Old records including "descriptions of topographers, estate records, and teind (tithe) returns, [indicate] rye was cultivated" throughout many parts of the Lowlands, including Ayrshire (Whyte 89).

Rye grows thickly together and has sturdy stalks; consequently, Whyte points out, it was typically grown as a wind screen to protect other crops. Rye was also thought to deflect poultry. More than being grown for its own sake, rye would have been planted around more delicate and valuable crops (Whyte 89), creating a border, a kind of buffer zone, not highly valued, or even officially recognized as a crop in the crop rotation. The fact that people have to debate whether or not it was even grown reflects this disregard for rye. The rye field marks a transition between one recognized and valued place and another, like the barley or oat crop and the main yard.

The nature of the space that the rye inhabits has an impact on the metaphoric reading the songs, both clean and bawdy, that Burns wrote. If a woman is coming through the rye, she is inhabiting a liminal space, a space in which her body is her own, as seen in line 16 of the bawdier version, "cunt's a body's own." Thus, it is clear that Jenny is a young woman in between childhood and marriage, a dangerous and vulnerable age for a woman in a society in which a woman's value is determined in large part by her chastity. For many, including Burns, renowned for his 15 children, only 9 of whom were born to his wife (Glass 3), this was a time to celebrate and exploit. This never dying tradition is still carried on by singers and song writers to this day, (for an example, see Billy Joel's song "Only the Good Die Young.")

This double standard for men and woman put the sexes at odds as the socially active women writers of the age, including Mary Wollstonecraft, point out. In fact, at this time there was a call for a full societal attitude shift. Activists pointed out that condoning and celebrating promiscuity among men and condemning it in women is wrong, and that Christian values dictate that both men and women be chaste and adhere to their marriage vows. It is doubtful that people of this school of thought would appreciate this song's implications or the idolization of its writer who, it seems, lacked any semblance of self-restraint when it came to women (Glass 3). However, the song may have been made somewhat more acceptable because in employing Jenny as the standard woman to meet in the rye, the song does not present middle- or upper-class women as viable candidates for this kind of encounter. It is the rye itself

which distinguishes Jenny from these women. Though upper- and middle-class women undoubtedly pass through their own transitional places, rye fields and their functions would be foreign to them. Rye has little to no relevance to life outside of a certain culture and class of people, the culture and class who thatch their roofs and stuff their beds with rye.

Interestingly, this image of the young promiscuous country maid is a standing character in songs from the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Preston 315). The figure of the maid features in many widely circulated songs and both draws from and reinforces “a stereotype of the rural female laborer as a sexually promiscuous woman” (Preston 315). This precedent places Jenny even further from the middle and upper lass’s expectations of chastity. It also calls into question the rigidity of the taboo against premarital sex for women of Jenny’s class. Perhaps certain places, like rye fields, lent themselves especially well to weakening the already tenuous hold such a prohibition has, thus allowing couples to indulge in their desires and test their ability to produce offspring before committing to a life together.

Some argue that whether the grain was rye or not doesn’t matter, that Burns may simply have selected rye for purposes of rhyme and meter more than a representation of actual life in Scotland (R. H. BR555). In fact, there is at least one French language edition that does not translate the lyric as “comin’ thro’ the rye,” instead translating rye as *orges*, barley (Collins, James BR442). Though the Romantics in general tended to favor the sense of the poetry over the importance of small literal details, for less literal interpretations of this poem, the particular detail of the type of grain is very important. Here, the nature and placement of the grain through which Jenny passes extends to Jenny herself and her placement in life and relation to her lover. If Jenny were passing through wheat, or barley, or a turnip patch, the image and the meaning conferred would be quite different than passing through a field of rye. Wheat, for example, while not unheard of as a Scottish crop, was rarely grown and very valuable at the time. It could be refined to make soft white breads and was highly priced and in demand among those who could afford it. Wheat was historically the food of gentry, and considered a luxury, “reserved for the more ‘respectable,’ more ‘genteel’ tables” (Collins, E. 107). Were Jenny

making her way through a wheat field, she would be metaphorically unavailable, rare, and refined, or at least refineable. She would be desirable, but perhaps not attainable. People would be much less likely to roll about in and damage a valuable crop like wheat than a cheap crop like rye. Can a body kiss a body coming through the wheat? This implies much different considerations than the same question applied to the rye.

Reading the term “rye” as a stream also changes the potential interpretation of Jenny her interactions with her lover. A stream could still be read as a kind of liminal space, though it loses the sense of also being a buffer zone that comes with the protective growth of rye that goes so nicely with the comparison to adolescence where one is physically becoming an adult but is not yet ready for marriage. If one insists on reading the rye as a waterway, the encounter and the kiss become easier to read as a kind of toll, rather than the willing experimentations of a young women wet for reasons other than stream water. Disturbingly, the more explicit acts outlined and implied in the songs take on a darker meaning, as it seems unlikely that a girl would consent to a roll in the stream, especially an oft forded stream, quite as willingly as she would consent to a roll in the nice tall rye grass.

The imagery of Jenny as a young woman passing through this time of sexual availability is compounded by the sexual innuendo in both the cleaned up and explicit version of the song. In the explicit version, not only is the question of kissability upgraded to what some might refer to as do-ability, but there are other references to either sexes’ reproductive organs. For the woman’s part, line 16 claims “cunt’s a body’s own.” This self-possession of her sexual self indicates either her unmarried state, or perhaps, more generally, women’s right to own their bodies. In line 7 there is a more veiled reference to the man’s physical contribution to their roll in the rye hay when Jenny meets “a staun of staunin’ graith,” that is, a stand of standing tools. Of course, Jenny might just have come across a couple of abandoned shovels and a hoe, but in light of the context, the double meaning of this phrase is clear.

There is, additionally, a double meaning in Jenny’s bedraggled petticoats. According to Webster’s online service,

the word “bedraggled” indicates something is damp or soiled from contact with something wet. Jenny, then, might simply have wet her skirts passing through the damp grain, but laying on the damp earth from which the rye grows would also bedraggle one’s petticoats pretty thoroughly. Also, just mentioning her *petticoats* is in itself suggestive. Petticoats are an undergarment meant to shield women’s lower body and all its allure from view. To draw attention to them is to draw attention to those parts they are meant to shield.

Jenny’s wetness and the fact that she is seldom dry presents, at minimum, a trifecta of potential interpretations. There is, of course, the literal reading in which this merely references those bedraggled petticoats wet with water, be it dew, rain, or stream water. This is undoubtedly the most observable meaning behind this line, but there are more abstract ways of interpreting Jenny’s persistent wetness. First, and also obvious considering all the kissing and messing about that goes on throughout the songs, there is the kind of wetness that a female experiences either in anticipation of sexual activity, or post sexual encounter. There’s also another less literal meaning readers might apply to these lines. Jenny’s being wet might be a reference to a proclivity to imbibe in alcohol. The rye she is coming through might refer to grain whiskey, rather than, or in addition to, a literal field of rye. This would fit with the idea of Jenny as being sexually available, as people generally become more open to kissing when they consume alcohol.

Like reading the rye as a stream, reading the rye as whiskey changes the Jenny’s role, and not for the better. Under the influence of alcohol our oft wet rye reveler loses a large measure of her fun, bright innocence. Alcohol consumption, especially for women, is fraught with moral implications. To be a bright young woman engaging in a bit of fun in the rye field would not *really* be acceptable in Jenny’s society, but to be a drunk and a promiscuous woman leaves the realm of youthful fun and implies deep character flaws, especially as the song indicates that Jenny is consistently wet.

Though the word for whiskey in Scots Gaelic is *usique beath*, or “the water of life,” which fits with the idea that Jenny’s wet state could be caused by whiskey (Storrie 97), from its beginnings, Scotch was produced with barley and to a lesser

extent bere, a coarser variety of barley (98). The distillation process the local stills employed was unable to utilize “cheaper grains” like rye; with industrialization came the ability to produce whiskey from a variety of grains using a pressurized oven, and thus rye whiskey was born—34 years after Burns’ death (100). Though Burns was by no means a stranger to Scotch, as his reputation as a heavy drinker and his career as an excise man reveal (98), he was a stranger to rye whiskey. However, though this information precludes rye as being a symbol for whiskey, Jenny could still be seldom dry in the sense that she is seldom sober, an interpretation that casts considerable doubt on the popular image of the bright, prurient country maid. Jenny is an enigmatic figure, neither confirmably pure nor confirmably corrupt, but poised somewhere in the middle.

Furthering this, the song, clean or explicit, is notably ambivalent to the sexual encounters it describes. The verses, structured as if the speaker were addressing a would-be lover in the third person, are wrought with questions, asking if “a body meet a body / ....Gin [if] a body kiss (fuck) a body” then, “need a body cry,” “need the warld ken [know],” and “wad a body tell.” The speaker assumes that this kind of encounter might be cause for shame and tears and that it’s something that ought not be made known to the world outside the rye. At the same time, there is an implied invitation to engage in these activities, should the opportunity arise. In the explicit version, the questioning stanzas alternate with a stanza meant to persuade the body that giving in to the wooer is desirable. In the second verse, “my jo,” comes upon the standing tools, setting a precedent for the encounter the speaker desires, then in verse 4, the speaker assert “Cunt’s a body’s own,” giving the listener the right to decide for herself, as opposed to letting some sense of duty, society, or morality decide for her. Finally, verse six claims:

Mony a body meets a body,  
They dare na weel avow;  
Mony a body fucks a body,  
Ya wadna think it true.

This verse conveys that, though this kind of sex is normal, people simply don’t talk about it, therefore listeners may not be

aware that this form of behavior is acceptable as long as it's kept secret.

Looking back at the different interpretations of the text, the one which best preserves the ever-important spirit of the song remains the one of Jenny passing through a literal field of rye, not a barley or wheat, and not a waterway. This rye and her place in it appropriately signifies her place in life as a woman between worlds, developing her sense of sexuality as she comes to know men and to know herself and her body as a woman. Jenny serves as a model to the would-be-lover the speaker addresses; she is a standard that the speaker holds up for the pursued lover and therefore for all qualifying women as a desirable norm. The rye sanctions the sexual encounters in the song, both by providing a literal shield of privacy and by the metaphoric inhabitation of a liminal space, in which some boundaries may be crossed, taboos questioned, and desires attained.

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