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The Ashen Egg

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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). Submissions must be received no later than December 8 and must be accompanied by the cover sheet and endorsement form to be considered.

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"GLORY IN BYGONE DAYS" — *BEOWULF* AND ALT-RIGHT MEDIEVALISM

by Christian Butterfield

When self-proclaimed "QAnon Shaman" Jake Angeli exposed his chestful of Norse tattoos, donned his Nordic-style viking helmet, and slapped on his America-First facepaint, he knew the political subtext hidden within the anachronism: a plea to return a better history, a history that served him. The message was received. In the popular consciousness, the lasting image of the January 6 insurrection on the White House is likely Angeli, the alt-right influencer desecrating the building with his "Q Sent Me" poster, yelling *Deus Vult* — a Latin phrase popularized during the Crusades, translating to "God Wills It." Medieval artifacts littered the Capitol: swords and shields, Celtic crosses, pictorial allusions to *Braveheart*. Look to the Charlottesville riots, the Christchurch shooting, or the Insurrection of January 6, and the scene is semi-reminiscent of an apolitical Renaissance Faire. This visual connection is no accident; rather, it's a potential manifestation of Alt-Right Medievalism, the usage of Medieval Studies as a rhetorical enforcer for white supremacist doctrine. Brandeis University scholar Dorothy Kim explains the phenomena: "the study of the Middle Ages [is] a blank and seemingly de-politicized space, so white supremacists can easily project their fantasies onto the medieval past" (Kim 7).

The potential connection between Medieval Studies and the alt-right centers the responsibility of Medieval Era literary scholars and

pedagogues. The alt-right medievalist gaze reframes medieval artifacts to support ahistorical truth; thus, the consequence of misinterpreting history stretches ignorance into potential violence. Few medieval textual artifacts retain the level of universal recognition and study as *Beowulf*, an Old English poetic narrative popularized sometime before 1000 A.D. From the immediate outset, the poem commands readers to recognize "the glory of bygone days" and proceeds to center the alt-right's ideal narrative: a heroic man blessed with divine supremacy sets out to defeat various monstrous evils (lines 1-2). As the *Broadview Anthology of British Literature* contextualizes, *Beowulf* is often viewed as the archetypal English epic, a narrative framework in which other medieval texts and contemporary users of medieval aesthetics base their conceptions on The Middle Ages (Black 82).

Given the academic and cultural scrutiny placed on *Beowulf*, the epic holds weighty rhetorical power, which mandates literary scholarship to answer a critical question: How might the alt-right medievalist gaze interpret *Beowulf* to support its white supremacist rhetoric? To answer, this paper will first outline the rhetorical model by which alt-right medievalism operates: simplified to a three-step process that allows the alt-right to enforce historical untruths from true historical artifacts. Next, the paper will apply said model to *Beowulf* to analyze how alt-right medievalism could weaponize the text through intentional misreadings. When left unchallenged, the alt-right medievalist gaze holds violent potential. Peter Cjenavonic, violent torchbearer of the Charlottesville Rally, noted afterwards that he was inspired by his Medieval Studies courses, and chief amongst the syllabus: *Beowulf* (Blake 180). To evaluate *Beowulf's* rhetorical potential is to protect the classroom moving forward.

Rhetorical Model

Alt-Right Medievalism is both a manifestation and amplification of the white supremacist desire to create, moralize, and return to a

"favorable" history. The alt-right fashions the medieval aesthetic into false evidence to defend their false history through three rhetorical tactics: establishing the Ascendent West, perpetuating a constructed victimhood, and promoting the divined futurity of white supremacy.

The Ascendant West—In order to defend their white supremacist heritage, alt-right rhetors must first construct an artificial white supremacist heritage from decontextualized scraps of history. The conservative patchwork of historical half-truths often coalesces into an ahistorical actor: Western Civilization. The alt-right's West is a historical bastion of whiteness, one that ignores the variable definitions of whiteness, significant cultural convergences, and temporally separate societies present within the loosely-defined geographical West. The rhetorical construction of The West relies on historical oversimplification, and the artifacts of alt-right medievalism are particularly vulnerable. In his article "Getting Medieval Post-Charlotte," scholar Thomas Blake explains that scholarly conceptions of the "Middle Ages treat time as 'straight' and linear when in fact the Alt-Right draws from multiple mythical pasts to fuel its racist agendas" (Blake 180). Often, one doesn't connote knights or castles with a specific cultural practice, but an ephemeral *medieval-ness*—a malleability (thus, vulnerability) of meaning. As medieval symbols are divorced from their specific historical context and retransmitted into a blanket *medieval* aesthetic, alt-right medievalism is a viable mechanism for fluidly defending the ahistorical Ascendant West.

Constructed Victimhood—After their false establishment of a white supremacist heritage, alt-right rhetors proceed to moralize the adherence to white supremacy through historical subjectivity. Instead of taking an objective view of human history, one that obeys linear chronology and proven documentation, the alt-right offers a subjective view of history, one that frames themselves as eternal victims. Historian A.J. Bauer explains further in "The Alternative

Historiography of the Alt-Right," where he offers that to weaponize "historical subjectivity [is] to universalise and appropriate human suffering, and to lay historical claim to movements that their antecedents…attempted to brutally suppress" (132). In framing themselves as historical victims, the alt-right gains leverage to propose, as Bauer puts it, "a historical argument for ahistoricism" (134). Due to the often misunderstood chronology of The Middle Ages, the events of the time are easily recontextualized to defend not only the supremacy, but the false victimization of whiteness. For example, Bauer posits that a common ahistoricism lies in the false comparison of Coptic Christian persecution and The Holocaust, paired via connotation to the modern alt-right dog whistle "Never Again Is Now" (132). When extended to the artifacts of alt-right medievalism, the aesthetic practice of medievalism is paired with the newly moralized adherence to alt-right victimhood. Thus, to bear a knight's armor is not only to celebrate a vaguely-defined medievalness, but to protect it (and by extension, the self) against persecution. The decontextualized Medieval Era papers over alt-right violence with false narratives of alt-right victimhood.

Divined Futurity—To white supremacists, the false construction and defense of their white supremacist heritage points towards a singular goal: provide a history to which to return. The rhetorical value of the amorphous West is that its symbolic fluidity allows it to take on a superpowered quality. If the West is anything the rhetor needs it to be, eventually, the West becomes a power so great, it must be inevitable—a divined futurity. Within alt-right rhetoric, the desire to return to the ahistorical past isn't subtext; it's text. The alt-right fetishization of the past includes nation-level callbacks to the past, like *Tea Party* or *Make America Great Again* and broader historical callbacks, such as alt-right influencer Richard Spencer's consistent promise to "start history all over again" (quoted in Bauer 123). If the alt-right is searching for a specific aesthetic marker of the historical situation they seek to manifest, the Middle Ages provides a malleable landing. Blake outlines the ready-made

connection, explaining that "white nationalists anachronistically armed with clubs, swords and shields carrying medieval-inspired heraldry" is no accident, but a result of a desire to return to a historical place rooted in ahistorical logic. Once falsely established and falsely moralized as medieval, the artifacts of alt-right medievalism are inevitably framed as inexorable. To wear the knight's armor is to return to a world that promises knighthood.

Application To *Beowulf*

If filtered through the gaze of alt-right rhetoricians, the narrative of *Beowulf* holds vast potential to amplify alt–right medievalist rhetoric through biased interpretation. As Beowulf is a historical artifact: it would likely be used to falsely validate the model's rhetorical process: establish the West, justify its victimhood, and promise its return.

The Ascendant West—On the textual level, *Beowulf* could be interpreted to defend two critical components of the Ascendant West: religiosity and geography. Though the epic narrative takes place within a paganistic social order, modern readings of *Beowulf* likely stem from religious adaptations of the oral tradition, leading to moralizations from the Christian narrator. In his seminal article, "The Nature Of Christianity in Beowulf," scholar Edward Irving observes that "it is the poet-narrator who, in his 6-7% of the poem, makes about 65% of the references to Christianity" (9). Though the text offers a relatively unbiased account of paganistic religions coexisting within the narrative, the Christian narrator has the power to frame Beowulf within an ahistorically religious light, such as the implication that, after his death, Beowulf's "soul [would] seek the judgment of the righteous" (line 2820). The narrator's leverage over the narrative could be used to support the false notion of a unified Christianity, one whose values pervaded culture through Divine Right, even if the Bible had yet to arrive. In addition, the text centers homelands and invasion, as Beowulf imagines a unified culture that

recognizes his divined supremacy despite his various travels across large swaths of sea (lines 422, 2360). The narrative seems to justify a false sense of unified place, implying that the vastly different Nordic regions featured in the text are unified through a basic recognition of *Beowulf*. Alt-right medievalism survives on the notion of a falsely-unified history, and *Beowulf* contributes to a conception of the past devoid of religious or cultural pluralism: a blank slate in which the Ascendant West can arise and the fantasy of epic can persist.

Constructed Victimhood—When read through the alt-right medievalist gaze, *Beowulf* perpetuates a historical subjectivity through competing characterizations of violent actors. Specifically, *Beowulf* universalizes attacks against the protagonist's version of the West by framing interlopers as monstrous and violence as mandatory. In the alt-right's rhetorical framework, Grendel is a likely candidate for racial metaphor. The impulsively violent creature is "bloody-minded, swollen with rage"; he is described as a "shadow-goer" who passes "in the dark night" (lines 701-2, 724). Grendel's mother can similarly be viewed as a critique against women who enter masculine roles, her grief labeled as "greedy, grim-minded" (lines 1726-28). Notably, Grendel is an intruder, a "marsh-stepper" who invades Heorot's mansion. In response to their intrusion, Beowulf invades the marsh of Grendel's mother, the out-of-bounds space characterized by, again, its darkness. The monstrous antagonists of *Beowulf* fall in line with common rhetorical dehumanizations made by the alt-right: non-white bodies framed as *savage*, *impulsive*, or *animalistic*. Given the recognizability of these racial tropes, an alt-right interpretation may easily frame Grendel as dog whistle for the type of figure that invades, that cannot belong. Beowulf commits similar acts of violence to his antagonists; however, his violence is framed as canonically necessary, as "death is better for any warrior than a shameful life" (lines 2190-91). The grief of those within the geographic bounds of *Beowulf* are treated as righteous, the anger in comments like "some son or other of your father's killers" considered heroic rather than antagonistic (lines 2053). The narrative

implication persists into modern alt-right belief: when we are attacked, we are victims; when we attack, we are warriors. To construct an Epic requires an assumed heroism towards the protagonist; however, when used as rhetorical artifact under the alt-right medievalist gaze, assumed heroism becomes a conduit to understanding interlopers as aggressors, a mindset that justifies white supremacist violence into modernity.

Divined Futurity—By design, the narrative Epic depends on the inevitable success of its protagonist. If Beowulf could be misinterpreted as a morally-righteous archetype of the Ascendant West, the narrative celebration of Beowulf, even in death, argues for the inevitable persistence of the Ascendant West. Throughout the text, Beowulf's supremacy is only challenged by those who the text frames as morally unworthy. Scholar Stuart Elden writes in his article "Place Symbolism and Land Politics in Beowulf*,"* the narrative is a story about place, homeland, who belongs." Belonging is partially defined by immediate respect and submission to Beowulf, a virtue implicitly espoused by the narrator through the Divine Right of Christianity. Though the narrative explicitly claims to critique Beowulf's self-importance, the prologue forecasting that "the sharp shield-warrior...must understand the difference of both words and deeds" (lines 287-89), the protagonist rarely boasts without action. When he fights the Dragon, he notes: "I could fight with grips according to boast, as I once did with Grendel; but I there expect battlefire, hot breath and venom; therefore I have on me shield and armor" (lines 2520-23). To sum, Beowulf defeated Grendel through boasts, then he boasts about his humility to the Dragon, where he proceeds to achieve the valor of death, while boasting. No matter what, *Beowulf's* heroism is inexorable. His boasts are not dissimilar from the loud jeers of the January 6 insurrectionists; both believe in the inevitable power and feel no need to hide it. Within the narrative, boasts are treated with nuance and comeuppance, but when oversimplified to fit alt-right truths, *Beowulf* could be read as a story

about a man who essentially boasts, fights, and reigns, and a story that allows the worthy to boast with relative impunity, for they are worthy of boasts. Through his inexorable power and legacy, Beowulf holds potential to become the unreal model that alt-right medievalists attempt to make real: the inexorable man of the inexorable West.

Conclusion

To return to the central rhetorical question: "How might the alt-right medievalist gaze interpret *Beowulf* to support its white supremacist rhetoric?" To answer, the epic conventions of *Beowulf* could be weaponized by the alt-right to frame the protagonist as a symbol for the Ascendant West, moralize his aggression through constructed victimhood, and enforce the divined futurity of his power.

This scholarship isn't a call to pull Beowulf from classroom shelves, but a reminder that historically accurate pedagogy and direct engagement with/against alt-right tropes is a necessity within literary Medieval Studies. The archetypical model of contemporary alt-right manhood appears just as how Beowulf might have once appeared: hulking men with pelts, boasting over a kingdom they claim to own by birthright. Unlike our epic Beowulf, the boasts of contemporary alt-right men hold real-world weight, and thus, must be held to a real understanding of the historical world.

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Greta Gerwig's *Little Women*: Family and Character Growth Through Non-linear Storytelling

by Quincy Calico

Writing a story, whether fiction or reality, can make something more meaningful and impactful on society. "Writing does not confer importance, it reflects it … I don't think so. Writing them will make them more important," (*Little Women* 1:55:45- 1:55:55). The art of filmmaking acts in the same way as writing. How a filmmaker decides to shoot, edit, or design a film can change the hearts and minds of others in vastly diverse ways. The film *Little Women*, directed by Greta Gerwig (2019), reimagines the way adaptations of Lousia May Allcott's classic 19th-century novel are made, which gives this timeless tale a new life during a modern age. She compares childhood and emerging adulthood through non-linear storytelling and contrasting colors, enhancing the emotional relation between scenes and creating an immediacy of missing childhood to which the audience can connect. Artful cinematography and editing infuse this period piece with a modern sensibility, highlighting contemporary character growth and family struggles to usher the message of *Little Women* into a new age. In the film, Gerwig utilizes temporal editing, flashbacks, and unique color in cinematography to emphasize transitions between the past and present and home in on core themes of the loss of childhood and emerging into adulthood.

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Gerwig utilizes temporal editing techniques to create a non-linear narrative, switching back and forth between childhood and adulthood rather than sticking with the traditional, chronological telling of Little Women. Greta Gerwig's version is one out of six other adaptations that seem to stand out among them all. Instead of trying to replace the past adaptations, Gerwig finds her own way to tell the March sisters' story while remaining true to the heart of Alcott's original novel. Even though the chronological story of Little Women displays the sisters' loss of childhood, Gerwig chooses to instead show how their childhood and adulthood is emotionally interlinked. She weaves them together through flashbacks and non-linear editing until the seams between past and present are almost invisible. In this way, Gerwig makes the March sisters more multi-dimensional characters. The film begins during the March sisters' adulthood, with the central character, Jo March, living in New York, selling stories and teaching to provide for her family back home. Beginning the film this way sets up the cuts to childhood as flashbacks that break up the temporal editing and begin to help the audience form expectations.

For example, a scene that displays this style of editing occurs later in the film when the March family goes out for a beach day with Laurie and his friends. During the scene, set in the March sisters' childhood, they all play on the beach, run through the water, and fly kites. Quick cuts between the various groups catch their bits of conversation, laughter, and energetic movements, making the scene feel vibrant and lively. It is the perfect day, and nothing could go wrong. However, the sunny beach suddenly cuts to the same location but during the sisters' adulthood. The vivid warm colors and bright light of the beach are now overcast, blue, and dark. This color change symbolizes this moment of silence and sadness as the sisters spend as much time together as possible with Beth's illness progressing. The vibrant life the beach once had seems to have been sucked from it entirely. The use of long takes also emphasize the lack

of energy compared to the joyful, fast-paced moments of childhood. This editing creates a stark contrast between one of the happiest moments in Jo's childhood and one of the most challenging times in her life. It is emphasized by the same location changing drastically just based on the point Jo is in her life. Jo feels that as she is growing up, she is losing everything that has ever made her happy: her writing, her livelihood, and even her sister. She has always dreamed of running away, making it on her own, and becoming a glamorous writer. However, once she is an adult and goes off to achieve that dream, she cannot help but wish she could relive the past. The non-linear storytelling emphasizes Jo's inner conflict of growing up while also wanting nothing to change by placing these two scenes back-to-back.

(For full color images, see *The Ashen Egg* online: https://www.wku.edu/english/ashen-egg/index.php)

Additionally, this non-linear editing is enhanced by the intricate use of color in cinematography. While the transition from the present day to past childhood memories could be considered confusing for viewers, Gerwig uses a striking contrast of color to differentiate between adulthood and childhood. She utilizes the universal association of warm reds and yellows with childhood to her advantage and directly contrasts it in the adulthood scenes with cool blue tones. An example of this is during the scene when Beth, the youngest March sister, passes away. It begins once again during childhood when Jo wakes up in a warmly lit bedroom with a golden light dappling across her face through the windows after watching

over Beth all night. She immediately gets up in fear once she sees the empty bed and sprints downstairs. When she bursts into the kitchen, Marmee and Beth both turn around and smile. The family's utter happiness is reflected in the home as it is lit in golden light, making the deep green walls and warm reds shine brightly. It provides a sense of home, safety, and calmness. It shows the viewer that Beth is safe, and hope has been restored. However, this quickly changes when the scene cuts back to adulthood. The room that was once lit in gold is now a dull, bone-chilling blue. The same extreme close-up of Jo's eyes starts the scene, but this time, the room around her is tinted an icy blue. Jo gets up slowly, and when she makes it down to the kitchen, she sees that Beth is not waiting there like last time. The cool blues and contrasting scenes make the viewer feel as though all hope is lost and enhance the complete devastation Jo and Marmee are experiencing at Beth's passing.

This use of color not only signifies this quick change from past to present but also provides an emotional context for the scene. Distinguished by the chilling blues of adulthood and the vibrant reds and yellows of childhood, Gerwig shows that the March family has feared Beth's death since she fell ill as a child. The cool blue tones used in the scenes of adulthood are a reminder that life and its challenges are inevitable and heartbreaking. She emphasizes that nothing can ever be the same as childhood once was. It causes childhood scenes, where the warm reds, greens, and yellows signify happiness and life, to be more influential within the context of looking back as an adult. It forces the viewers to realize that time cannot be recovered and makes them question how they can make the most of their life.

By the end of Little Women, Jo watches through the window of the printing shop as her novel is printed right before her eyes. It is the culmination of her life, childhood, and best and worst moments recorded in a bright red leatherbound book. Jo will always have the memories of her past and the incredible warmth they create in her heart. But the future has so much potential, and she feels ready to do everything she can to make it brighter. This film teaches the audience that no matter the hardship we face or how much we miss the past, there is always hope for the future if we forge a path for it. Gerwig artfully displays this meaning through flashbacks to childhood, creating an immediacy of emotional connection between childhood and adulthood. She allows the audience to better relate to the sisters' lives and their emotions and even reflect on their own lives. The contrast between the happiness of childhood memories and the stark reality of adulthood is made more impactful for the audience through color change and non-linear editing style.

Work Cited

Little Women. Directed by Greta Gerwig, performances by Saoirse Ronan, Florence Pugh, Timothée Chalamet, Laura Dern, Emma Watson, Meryl Streep, and Eliza Scanlen, Sony Pictures Entertainment Motion Picture Group, 2019.

COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY AND ASEXUAL VIOLATION IN SHAKESPEARE'S *VENUS AND ADONIS*

by Tuesday Grenead

When questioned about the types of characters one might encounter in Shakespeare's early modern epyllion *Venus and Adonis*, perhaps the best answer could be provided in the style of Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). That is to say, "Goddesses and virgins and boars, oh my!" Much like Dorothy's list of wild animals, this revised list of seemingly unrelated classifications represents three feared groups, except, in the context of *Venus and Adonis,* these fears revolve around sexual anxieties. Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* is a narrative poem first published in 1593 that follows Venus, the goddess of love; her attempts to court Adonis, a young boy disinterested in her sexual advances; and the boar that interferes with Venus's desires by ending Adonis's life (Maus 479). The poem begins with Venus pursuing Adonis, continues with a detailed account of her efforts to seduce him into submission, and finally concludes with Adonis's fateful death. In his steadfast disinterest and resistance to Venus's advances, Adonis represents an asexual perspective who takes pride in independence despite external pressures to abandon his queer identity.

Asexuality applies to any individual who experiences "a disinterest or aversion to sex, sexual practices, and the role of sex in relationships" (Przybylo 182). This is juxtaposed with Venus's representation of compulsory heterosexuality which considers sexual

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attraction to be applicable to everyone and any disinterest in sex as "inherently wrong and in need of fixing" (Przybylo 182). "Compulsory heterosexuality," coined by scholar Adrienne Rich in their 1980 article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," labels male-female relationships as normal and disproportionately casts queer relationships as unnatural and in need of justification (637). Though Rich primarily focuses on compulsory heterosexuality's impact on lesbian relationships, this term can be expanded to include all manner of queer individuals and situations where heterosexual ideological values are enforced as biologically inevitable. Shakespeare challenges compulsory heterosexuality through specific semantic choices in *Venus and Adonis* that draw parallels between the goddess Venus and her beloved's killer, the boar. These parallels serve not only to further undermine Venus's credibility, but also to question the ethicality of compulsory heterosexual desire. Venus's sexual advances are not dissimilar to the boar's physical violence and the epyllion's correlation between Venus and the boar questions the ethicality of projecting compulsory heterosexuality onto queer, asexual individuals.

From the first stanza, Venus is associated with force and violence, while Adonis is the unwilling recipient of that force. The stanza states:

> Even as the sun with purple-coloured face
> Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,
> Rose-cheeked Adonis hied him to the chase.
> Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn.
> Sick-thoughted Venus makes amain unto him,
> And like a bold-faced suitor 'gins to woo him. (lines 1-6)

Right at the start, Shakespeare complicates the characters' gender expectations and power relations. Adonis is described in traditionally feminine language as "rose-cheeked" (line 3), while Venus is "sick-thoughted" (line 5) and "bold-faced" (line 6). Though Adonis does

love to hunt, the hunting he enjoys is not the traditionally expected male hunt of a female partner, but a playful chasing of nothing he can truly capture, a hunt of the sun. In contrast, Venus's thoughts are focused entirely on love, so she pursues Adonis since he is not pursuing her. Yet, the language used to describe these hunts distinguishes them as existing in two different leagues. Adonis's hunt of the sun is a "chase" (3), while Venus "makes amain" (5) unto Adonis. While the use of "amain" could imply Venus's speed, another definition in use during the early modern period defines "amain" as: "with all one's might; forcefully; violently; vehemently" ("amain, adv."). If interpreted in this sense, Venus's pursuit of Adonis is not a lighthearted chase, but a *forceful* and *violent* hunt "unto" (line 5) her beloved with the intent to capture, a hunt worded much like an ambush or attack. If Adonis is an asexual character, Venus's advances are more than just an effort to seize and seduce a younger boy, but a forced attempt to normalize a queer character into accepting the compulsory heterosexual desire she projects onto him. By establishing these reversed power dynamics from the beginning, Shakespeare hints at Adonis's sexual disinterest, but also links Venus's actions with aggressive language.

As the poem continues and Venus further engages in her pursuit of Adonis, the narrator's descriptions reinforce the viciousness and savagery of both her approach and intent, often associating her actions with death. After she offers herself to Adonis and entreats him to come sit with her, she does not give him time to respond before deciding to "seizeth" (line 25) his hand. This action makes her feel so passionate that: "Being so enraged, desire doth lend her force / Courageously to pluck him from his horse" (lines 29-30). The language used to describe Venus's actions here underscores their forcefulness, that she is physically handling Adonis to satisfy her own wishes. It also connects the ideas of passion and desire with anger, since she is so "enraged" (line 29) by her sexual excitement that she "pluck[s]" (line 30) Adonis from his own horse without his consent. Venus is completely driven by this sexual anger,

and this harassment becomes more insistent as the poem unfolds. The narrator goes on to describe her desire as having a "leaden appetite" (line 34), as one who "murders with a kiss" (line 54) and is interested in "devouring...till either gorge be stuffed or prey be gone" (lines 57-58). All these descriptions take the forceful and violent imagery to an even higher degree, as Venus not only wants to kill Adonis with her love, but also *consume* him to satiate the sexual hunger driving her desire. The line equating Venus's sexual appetite with an animalistic craving makes her sexuality feel bestial, recasting a new light on compulsory heterosexual desire. If Venus is the embodied version of Love itself, what does the language used to describe her actions say about a forced heterosexuality? This connects to a point A.D. Cousins makes in *Shakespeare's Sonnets and Narrative Poems* which states, in response to Venus's "victorious" moments over Adonis, "the reader sees Venus as a ludicrous, bestial, predatory or, at the least, visually perfect yet wholly undesirable Conqueror" (lines 23-24). Despite the fact Venus is motivated by love in her pursuit, the narrator's semantic decisions work against a positive identification with this presentation of love, reshaping it to feel "ludicrous" and "wholly undesirable" (lines 23-24) instead. Though Venus is supposed to be the ultimate example of heterosexual desire, the way her actions are described work to cast a negative light on the realities of a compulsory sexuality. She is "enraged" by her desire and Adonis's disinterested response casts him as a queer subject for the execution of this heterosexual anger.

In response to Venus's overbearing desire, Adonis's consistent resistance to sexual relations and steady sense of self work to articulate his identity as an asexual character, helping reshape the view of Venus's advances as a critique of socially predetermined sexuality. To return to the opening stanza, Adonis is characterized in a way that is nontraditional to his gender identity, and it is this difference that draws Venus to him. This difference might be limited to his unusually fair appearance, but it might also apply to Adonis's

queer identity that Venus's compulsory heterosexuality feels the need to conquer and fix. From the beginning, he pursues the sun, not the goddess of love, for "love he laughed to scorn" (line 4). As he is a prepubescent boy, described by himself as "unripe" (line 524), his disinterest in love might be attributed to his youth, yet his resolve to remain steadfast in his desire *not* to submit to Venus's demands implies a self-awareness of his asexual identity. As Simone Chess argues,

> Asexual adolescent characters queer chastity and abstinence, coding them as viable and intentional choices rather than temporary defaults associated with childhood. The existence of asexual adolescent characters in early modern texts presents the possibility of sexual preference and practice that, by its very definition, undermines the assumption that sexual desire is natural and biologically inevitable. (32)

Adonis works against the notion that succumbing to Love itself, to Venus, is a given he must experience, and instead he rejects these notions by cementing his desire to avoid desire. He declares "'I know not love…nor will not know it'" (line 409) and "'My love to love is love but to disgrace it'" (line 412). He admits his ignorance in love but also admits he is aware of himself enough to know that he does not *want* to "know" (line 409) it at all. As Chess states, Adonis establishes his asexual identity as "viable" (32), not a false notion to be resolved at a later point. Yet, Venus treats Adonis as if his attraction to her should be inevitable, making Adonis's consistent refusal an asexual defiance of the notion of an expected way to love at all.

With the context of Adonis as an independent, asexual character and Venus as a character who refuses to acknowledge this queer identity, Venus's description of the fateful boar whom Adonis would rather pursue gives insight into her own heterosexual fears, insecurities, and anxieties. She states: "Being moved, [the boar]

strikes, whate'er in his way, / And whom he strikes his crooked tushes slay" (lines 623-624). Venus's argument for the recklessness of the boar is founded on the boar's lack of restraint, that he "strikes" (line 623) anything he desires. However, Venus does not cast the boar's desire to strike as a randomized occurrence, but something that happens when the boar is "moved" (line 623). The same desire incites him to kill, to "slay" (line 624) with his tusks, which Venus phrases as the worst possible death for Adonis. Yet, Venus's grotesque description seems not wholly motivated by her wish to protect her beloved, but also by her sexual jealousy of the boar as an opponent. In itself, the figure of the boar with its tusks has sexual connotations, defined in *Shakespeare's Sexual Language: A Glossary* as simply a "figure of lust" (Williams 46). Thus, Adonis's interest in hunting the boar while he refuses to hunt Venus allows Venus to interpret the boar as a rival to her own advances. She sees the boar as more than just a wild animal, but as an equivocal "figure of lust" (line 46) who will use his phallic "tushes" (line 624) to slay Adonis. From this perspective, Venus's fears of what the boar will do to Adonis are a projection of her own anxieties about what Adonis will *not* do to her. She is afraid not only to lose Adonis on his hunt, but also to lose Adonis through the threat of another sexual partner.

Yet, the language Venus uses in her efforts to incite a fear of the boar in Adonis reveals Shakespeare's irony, as much of her own language parallels the language the narrator uses to describe her. To return to an earlier point, Venus says the boar's desire to kill is provoked when it is "moved" (line 623). She phrases this as if it were evidence of the boar's savagery, that "being moved" (line 623) takes little, and anything or anyone can cause the boar to go into a frenzied state and strike. Venus seems to use "moved" here as equivalent to angered, but specifically characterizes it in a negative sense. However, was Venus not described at the beginning of the poem as "enraged" (line 29) by her own desire which motivated her to pursue

Adonis? Venus's jealous description of the boar codes anger as bestial in an effort to separate herself from the boar as a better choice, yet the narrator's language works to associate the two figures instead. Additionally, Venus uses "slay" (line 624) to produce a barbaric image where the boar chooses a victim and murders it mercilessly. Still, was not Venus described with similar imagery, as one who "murders with a kiss" (line 54)? At one point, she herself even offers to "smother thee [Adonis]" (line 18) with her love. When describing the boar, Venus uses the image of death to reinforce the animal's wildness, but with herself this figurative death is framed as something desirable. Again, the violent imagery in both instances seems to associate Venus and the boar rather than distinguish their desires as distinctly different in nature. This parallelism reshapes Venus's claims as contradictory and calls her credibility into question. To see her actions as comparable to this beast would mean that she, heterosexual love, is not progressive or elevated above the level of an animal but violent and unrestrained. Venus would also have to admit her role as an aggressor who is not consensually attacking her beloved, just like a boar slaying a victim. By doing so, Shakespeare poses a bigger question about compulsory heterosexuality and its desirability. Is this normative sexuality really "normal" in practice, or is it as wild, savage, and unpredictable as a boar?

When Venus's nightmare is fulfilled and Adonis is slain by the boar, her reaction is one of disbelief, but it reveals the value she placed on Adonis as a pleasurable object for others to enjoy. Adonis is not only murdered by the boar but murdered by the boar *via castration*. At first, Venus's reaction places focus on how Adonis's death impacts her: "Heavy heart's lead, melt at mine eye's red fire! / So shall I die by drops of hot desire" (lines 1073-1074). To see her beloved dead sparks an intensity within her, but it is an intensity centered around her own feelings. She is angry Adonis is dead, yet her language implies this anger is not for the sake of Adonis. Rather, Venus's anger stems from the fact that Adonis's death not only

means she will no longer be able to enjoy him, but also that another, her rival, was able to get to him first. She shall perish in her grief, but it is the grief of her "hot desire" (line 1074), the intense anger that her ability to eventually satisfy her lust for Adonis will never be able to come to fruition, not that the youthful Adonis will never be able to live a full life. Then, Venus transitions to express hypothetical situations where Adonis inspired a change in others, how he "moved" (line 623) them by virtue of his beauty. For example, she describes how the sun and wind would compete for his visual splendor, how predatory animals would go against their nature to admire him, and how birds would bring him gifts for the pleasure of his presence (lines 1081-104). In all these situations, Venus imagines Adonis as an agent with the power to arouse desire purely through his existence. From the sun and wind to predators and prey, Venus's depiction is one of Adonis as a compelling body, an entity of such beauty that no one can help but strive to take pleasure in him through some form. In doing so, Venus reveals her own view of Adonis; she values him for what he *does*, not who he *is*. To her, Adonis's death is a tragedy because he no longer exists to give pleasure to the world, and she sympathizes with those in her hypothetical situations because she feels all will be impacted by this loss. With this reaction, Venus continues to violate Adonis's asexual identity by imposing sexual value onto him even in his death. She refuses to acknowledge his independent, asexual self, and instead chooses to consider him in relation to others, as a sexual object for everyone's attraction.

However, despite the horror of the boar Venus expresses in her warning to Adonis and in the discovery of his mutilated body, at the end of the epyllion, she identifies with the boar's desire to get close to Adonis and begins to recognize her own brutality. Though she previously placed herself in opposition to the boar, Venus rationalizes the boar's motive for killing her beloved as something she would have done herself:

> But by a kiss thought to persuade [Adonis] there,
> And, nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine
> Sheathed unaware the tusk in his soft groin.
> Had I been toothed like him, I must confess
> With kissing him I should have killed him first. (lines 1114-1118)

In direct contrast with the language used in the warning to Adonis, Venus recasts the boar's attack on him in soft, affectionate terms. The "loving" (line 1115) boar did not strike Adonis, but "nuzzl[ed]" (line 1115) close to "kiss" (line 1114) him. This shift poses the question: Why, after going to such lengths to condemn the boar and set herself in opposition to such a beast, would Venus now flip to characterize the boar in positive terms? One reason might be Venus's identification with the boar's biological ability to do what she could not, as she admits that she would have killed Adonis "had I been toothed" (line 1117). The word tooth, which is "allusive of penis" (Williams 310), connects to Venus's perspective of the boar as accidental murderer in his attempt to penetrate Adonis. In other words, Venus admits she herself would have *already* penetrated Adonis if she had a phallus, and, like the boar, she also would not have been able to contain herself from "kill[ing]" (line 1118) his virginity. Her description is centered on herself; Adonis's consent in the action is uninvolved. Venus's change in perspective might also connect back to her view of the boar as a sexual rival. Now that Adonis has been killed and no longer has a phallus from which Venus can receive pleasure, there is not a need to try to compete for his favor. As a result, Venus acknowledges the boar as one motivated by the same force that drives her own desire; she recognizes the brutality of her own forced sexuality.

At the very end of the poem, Venus's final acts of violation cement her self-centered motivations and disregard for Adonis's asexual identity while also aligning her actions with those of the fateful boar. Following her verbal identification with the boar, Shakespeare emphasizes the connection between them by having

Venus mirror the boar's actions. The poem states, "With this she falleth in the place she stood, / And stains her face with [Adonis's] congealed blood" (lines 1121-1122). Though the text doesn't specify exactly where Venus gets the blood, Shakespeare implies that Venus puts her face to the wound in Adonis's groin. With this, Venus seems to recreate the action that led to Adonis's death, the violating sexual act the boar got to perform before Venus did. This action also reinforces the way Venus valued Adonis, as a sexual object, since she goes to the place that signifies her loss of pleasure on his body first. She "stains" (1121) herself with his blood, allowing herself to disturb the place where, when Adonis was alive, he would not let her trespass. She grants herself permission to violate this private area of his body without any regard for consent, and this act against his wishes illustrates her ongoing disregard for his asexuality.

In the last lines of the epyllion, a flower blooms on the earth where Adonis's blood was spilled (lines 1168-1170). Venus decides to pluck this emerging bloom and keep it to herself, stating:

> To grow unto himself was [Adonis's] desire,
>
> And so 'tis thine; but know it is as good
>
> To wither in my breast as in his blood. (lines 1180-1182)

With this concluding act, Venus satisfies herself by keeping the last life of Adonis and never allowing it to grow on its own. She even acknowledges her awareness of Adonis's asexuality, "To grow unto himself was his desire" (line 1180), yet she still decides to place herself first. Just as the boar took its token of Adonis, his phallus, Venus violates what is left of Adonis by taking her own token and quite literally deflowering him. In this way, Venus's action can be read as yet another sexual violation, one where she can finally take his virginity without resistance. Much like Adonis was never given the opportunity to develop into his own man, the flower that remains is held back from that same opportunity to flourish in its independence. Additionally, this act of plucking references back to Venus's "plucking" of Adonis off his horse near the beginning of

the poem. In both cases, she takes Adonis without his consent, being more focused on her own motives than his independent identity. These final acts not only convey that Venus did not learn from this experience, but they also provide a final convergence between the figure of Venus and the figure of the boar. While they may seem different initially, each figure treats Adonis in much the same way—taking from one who did not wish to give.

Shakespeare's configuration of Venus's temperament throughout the poem works to damage her credibility by drawing attention to her selfishness and inconstancy, in turn challenging compulsory heterosexual desire itself. In her sudden alliance with the boar's intentions as being motivated by love, Venus reinforces the parallel between her figure and the figure of the wild animal. Not only is she unrestrained and savage in her attempts to court her desired, but she is unpredictable in her resolves and her actions are always done to serve *herself*. Jeffrey Masten writes of Ovidian narrative poetry such as *Venus and Adonis*, "adult figures are always attempting to teach the boy, persuade the boy, to a desire of which they assume him fundamentally *to be capable*" (167). Venus is this "adult figure" (167) always pushing Adonis to feel a desire she believes he should but only to meet her own ends. She may claim Adonis as her love, but Venus is always primarily motivated by the idea of gratifying her own sexual urges. In this way, Shakespeare works to highlight the selfishness of ascribing a forced sexuality onto others, and Adonis's experiences illustrate the ways asexual and queer individuals can suffer as a result of these heterosexual expectations. Additionally, Shakespeare's parallelism between Venus and the boar articulates a negative view of compulsory heterosexuality as violent, intemperate, nonconsensual, and, ultimately, unethical. Different as they may initially seem, Shakespeare's use of description, language, and action to connect these figures illustrates the reality of compulsory heterosexual desire. It is not the image of a beautiful, desirable goddess, but something

equivalent to an uncontrollable animal that selfishly destroys and takes what it wishes.

To conclude, Shakespeare undermines the desirability of Venus's figure in *Venus and Adonis* by using violent language, highlighting her selfishness, and relating this figure of heterosexual love to that of an unrestrained beast. As a result, *Venus and Adonis* makes a statement about the notion of compulsory heterosexuality and questions the ethicality of a singular definition of socially accepted desire. By representing Venus as a problematic figure, this epyllion challenges not only the consent involved with compulsory desire, but also the implications an expected sexuality may have on queer, asexual individuals who refuse to submit to such singular definitions.

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How the Rhetoric of John Lewis Inspires Participation in Democracy

by Marybeth Hunt

In comparing John Lewis's original, uncensored draft of his speech at the 1963 March on Washington and his last essay written shortly before his death in 2020, one can see the depth of growth in experience and perspective that John Lewis gained as an activist and politician in the years spanning these works. The original draft of his 1963 speech was rejected in favor of the more toned-down speech which he ended up delivering at the urging of other activists. The uncensored draft, which I will refer to as the *March Draft*, was a fiery emotional appeal, urging the audience to take to the streets in protest of the government and racial injustice. His last essay, which I will refer to as *Last Words,* presents an overarching ideological appeal, urging his audience to participate in that same government in the pursuit of justice. In comparing the strategies used in each, we see how historical, social, and personal contexts affects the way each message is crafted. While his rhetorical methods differ between the two works, both are powerful in their calls to action, one urging protest of unequal protection Black citizens received from government and police and the other urging full participation in government itself—through voting and office holding as well as protests when necessary—as crucial to fully realize the purpose, potential, and equal protection of democracy.

To understand the methods used in Lewis's *March Draft,* it is necessary to describe the kairos or timing (Longaker and Walker, 2011) of the March on Washington in August 1963. The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) had been in progress for almost a decade with very few practical advancements. Recent events leading up to the march included the peaceful protests in Birmingham led by Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as an assassination attempt of King which led to rioting in that same city (Nimtz, 2016). Both series of events spurred John F. Kennedy's proposal of the Civil Rights Act to Congress, the focus of which was desegregation in public accommodations. While a major step forward, the Civil Rights Act did not provide adequate voting protections for Black Americans, which Lewis' speech addresses at this march for "jobs and freedom."

Understanding the kairos in the context of almost a decade of civil rights work with only minimal achievements and real-life improvements thus far, along with the history of oppression of Black people in America since its inception, inform our understanding of Lewis' emotional appeals in his *March Draft.* It speaks to the urgency of the moment, the impatience of those who want freedom, and the specificity of the goal of more protection of Black Americans through the Civil Rights Act. At the time, Lewis was a young Black activist, the leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC), an organization perceived as more radical than the other prominent leaders of the movement such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Tensions were high as government officials feared that violence would erupt at the march, so much so that in the event a speaker seemed to incite violence, a Justice Department official would cut off their microphone and play a record of Mahalia Jackson's "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" (Nimtz, 2016). When Lewis's *March Draft* was leaked to the press the night before the march, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and A. Phillip Randolph requested that he tone down the wording of his speech, which he did in reverence to them (Feeney, 2013). While the audience at the March on Washington included both Black and White people

involved in the CRM, the vivid examples of injustice against Black Americans seems to indicate that Lewis is speaking more directly to those of the audience who are directly impacted by those scenarios. His use of the pronoun "we" promotes solidarity and connection with his audience as a fellow member, one who is willing to lead by example to take on the fight against racism and injustice.

Lewis keenly uses vivid presentation, which George Campbell describes as the use of vivid language and description to increase engagement and emotional responses of the audience (as cited in Longaker and Walker, 2011). Lewis is not just trying to evoke an emotional response or pathos (Longaker and Walker, 2011) from his audience, but to elicit action because of that emotion. Lewis particularly focuses on vivid presentation to express the shortcomings in the bill's protection of Black Americans, as it relates to policy brutality, lack of protection by the government, and economic oppression. For instance, Lewis describes the perceived weakest in society being brutalized at the hands of police: "This bill will not protect young children and old women from police dogs and fire hoses, for engaging in peaceful demonstrations" (Lewis as cited in Feeney, 2013, para. 3). In criticizing the Federal government's lack of protection of peaceful protesters, Lewis gives specific examples such as "What did the federal government do when local police officials kicked and assaulted the pregnant wife of Slater King, and she lost her baby?" (Feeney, 2013, para. 8). To describe the economic conditions of Black Americans, Lewis asks "What is there in this bill to ensure the equality of a maid who earns $5 a week in the home of a family whose income is $100,000 a year?" (Feeney, 2013, para. 5). The specificity of the language Lewis uses leaves little to the imagination, painting a vivid picture of the daily conditions which Black people, particularly in the South, were facing on a daily basis. By using vivid descriptions and specific examples, rather than generic language, Lewis evokes visions of real-life people instead of abstract possibilities. These images appeal to fear and anger that

those things will be allowed to continue to happen, and the vividness further allows the audience to imagine themselves in those situations, making it even more real and relevant to them. According to Campbell, a "vivid representation can engage the audience, making them feel like they are actually experiencing whatever the rhetor describes…it is also more inclined to elicit the affective response that we would have in a real encounter" (Longaker and Walker, 2011, p. 216). This heightened emotion is therefore more likely to lead to the adoption of the beliefs and action the rhetor is trying to convey and incite.

After building the emotional appeal with vivid descriptions of injustice, Lewis then calls upon the audience to act now. Again, Lewis describes the proposed tactics in a vivid way, which were considered radical by the other leaders of CRM, with this section of his speech being the most heavily censored prior to the march. He uses the word "revolution" to refer to the continued efforts for racial justice, a symbolic word evoking images of overthrow of government, displacement of power, and possibly even violence. The topic of power is explicitly discussed as Lewis states that the power is in the hands of Black people to bring about justice.

> The revolution is at hand, and we must free ourselves of the chains of political and economic slavery… we will take matters into our own hands and create a source of power, outside any national structure that could and would assure us a victory. (Feeney, 2013, para. 11)

The message is clear, that while Black people are not still enslaved literally, they are still slaves to systemic economic and political racism, but that they have the power to change that outside of government. Particularly striking is the use of vivid description to evoke imagery of action on a large scale: "Get in and stay in the streets of every city, every village and every hamlet of this nation until true freedom comes, until the revolution is complete. In the Delta of Mississippi, in southwest Georgia, in Alabama, Harlem,

Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia and all over this nation, the black masses are on the march!" (Feeney, 2013, para. 15). The word "masses" denotes something huge and beyond control, a mobilization of efforts, something that cannot be stopped. Lewis uses geographical location to indicate the widespread action which is necessary, and to inclusively call on all Black people to take action. Perhaps the most striking language Lewis uses is at the end of the original speech with his reference to marching through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did. "We will pursue our own scorched earth policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground—non-violently" (Feeney, 2013, para. 16). Sherman's march was a military operation in the Civil War in which he left a path of destruction in his wake to disable the Confederacy's infrastructure. The fact that Lewis added "non-violently" to the end of that sentence does not take away the sting of those words. And while Lewis may not have meant those words in a violent manner, the connotation of that metaphor is that of literal destruction. What better way to encourage the idea of power and action of the audience to break their metaphorical chains of economic and political slavery, then by recalling the destruction of the Confederacy and slavery?

The overall charged language Lewis uses to criticize the government and Civil Rights Act clearly illustrates the anger and frustration Lewis and other Black Americans feel and spurs the audience to urgent action. As compared to the censored version of the speech he ended up giving at the March, the *March Draft* is much angrier and aggressive in its language. Lewis sets this tone early on with "we have nothing to be proud of" noting Black Americans are receiving "starvation wages or no wages at all" (Feeney, 2013, para. 1). The negative assessment of the bill continues, calling the bill "too little, too late" and stating that "There's not one thing in the bill that will protect our people from police brutality" (Feeney, 2013, para. 2). This uncompromising language appears to call for rejection of the bill altogether. He doesn't hold back, stating "this nation is still

a place of cheap political leaders" (Feeney, 2013 para. 7) and calling the indictment by the Federal government a "conspiracy" (Feeney, para. 9). He asks "which side is the federal government on?" (Feeney, 2013, para. 10) further evoking an us-against-them mindset and identifying the government as the antithesis or common enemy (Head, 2016). Words with negative connotations like "cheap" and "conspiracy" serve to express the low opinion of government and its willingness or lack thereof to protect Black Americans, further appealing to the audience's anger and frustration. Lewis appeals to the audience's sense of impatience, stating that "patience is a dirty and nasty word" (Feeney, 2013, para. 12). While typically patience has a positive connotation, Lewis flips this concept on its head by saying the exact opposite, which serves to express how dire the situation was for Black people in America at that time and the urgency for them to act now: "We cannot be patient, we do not want to be free gradually. We want our freedom and we want it now" (Feeney, 2013, para. 12).

John Lewis's *Last Words* essay, titled "Together You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation," was written days before his death in July 2020 and was published in *The New York Times*. In the fifty-seven years since the March on Washington, John Lewis's ethos (reputation, credentials) (Longaker and Walker, 2011) has shifted from young radical activist to long-serving Congressman, serving the state of Georgia from 1987 to 2020 (John Lewis, 2022). The kairos surrounding Lewis' *Last Words* includes the recent murder of Georgy Floyd by police. While several prominent examples of police brutality against people of color had been in national news over the past several years, the George Floyd murder seemed to be a turning point in America, spurring not just Black Americans but their allies as well to participate in nationwide rallies and protests. The kairos is somewhat similar to that of the March on Washington, as it is a response to a culmination of injustices. However, as opposed to the urgency of appeals in the *March Draft,* Lewis' last words speak more of the long-term fight against racism and injustice, an

encouragement to keep the momentum going. The kairos helps us identify the audience. In the first and second paragraphs:

> You filled me with hope about the next Chapter of the great American story when you used your power to make a difference in society. Millions of people motivated simply by human compassion laid down the burdens of division. Around the country and the world, you set aside race, class, age, language, and nationality to demand respect for human dignity. That is why I had to visit the Black Lives Matter Plaza…I had to see and feel for myself that after many years of silent witness, the truth is still marching on.

He is speaking to all those who spoke out against racial injustice and policy brutality, and who are willing to continue stand up for what is right in order to make change. While Lewis consistently uses "we" to identify with his audience in the *March Draft*, in *Last Words*, there is a noticeable shift from "we" to "you" that indicates a passing of the torch so to speak, as Lewis is close to death at the time he wrote this speech. He praises the audience's efforts and makes a final appeal to keep the momentum going for the betterment of society.

In contrast to the fiery emotional appeal of his *March Draft*, in his *Last Words*, Lewis uses a logos appeal, or an appeal to reason related to ideology, or a system of beliefs or presuppositions (Longaker and Walker, 2011). Many Americans hold the presupposition of democracy being the ideal form of government in which people have the power to express themselves and effect positive change through participation in the political process. In vast contrast to the *March Draft*, in which Lewis encourages his audience to take matters into their own hands because the government had not yet protected their voting rights, in *Last Words*, Lewis appeals to the presuppositions surrounding democracy to encourage his audience to participate in the democratic process:

> Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to build what we call the Beloved

> Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself…Voting and participating in the democratic process are key. The vote is the most powerful nonviolent change agent you have in a democratic society. (para. 5-6)

The shift from power being in the hands of the people in opposition to the government, to power being in the hands of people as part of that political process is key to Lewis' appeal to this ideology.

To further express the importance of speaking up against injustice, Lewis applies religion as an ideological overlap with democracy. First, he equates speaking out against injustice and participating in democracy as a "moral obligation," recalling the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. who said "we are all complicit when we tolerate injustice…He said each of us has a moral obligation to stand up, speak up, and speak out" (Lewis, 2020, para. 5). This also speaks to the belief that allies have just has much obligation to speak up and take an active stance against injustice even if it doesn't impact them directly, which can be interpreted as a further religious ideological overlap to take care of others, love thy neighbor, and practice the Golden Rule. The moral imperative of democratic participation is further expressed with the metaphor of redeeming the soul of America. Lewis (2020) writes "ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble. Voting and participating in the democratic process are key" (para. 6). The aspect of a soul has a religious connotation, describing the inner being of a person, what makes a person, or in this case a nation, pure. Redemption of the soul speaks to the desire to cleanse, and save, to go from darkness to light, from wrong to right. Lewis (2020) implores his audience to answer to the "highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe " (para. 8). This ideologically charged metaphor and language speaks to the belief that democracy, morality, and even religion/spirituality are intertwined and exist together in a cause-and-

effect relationship, making the argument for the audience to take action in the data-claim-warrant-backing model:

Datum: Ordinary people have the power to make change,

Claim: So, they should speak up for what they believe in and participate in the democratic process

Warrant: Since it can bring about justice for the oppressed

Backing: Because it is a moral obligation

If John Lewis's *March Draft* brings to mind sprinters in the race toward equal rights, then his *Last Words* are those of a long-distance marathon runner with stamina to stay in the race for the long haul. The *March Draft* has an urgency related to the legal end of segregation and subsequent legal protections of Black Americans, as they did not exist prior to the Civil Rights Movement. Once those protections were finally in place, while it did not make things perfect in America, it did allow Black people to participate more fully in the democratic process. Black Americans continue to face systemic racism despite legal protections, but in Lewis's *Last Words*, he speaks of the ongoing fight against the systemic injustices that remain in America, and the long-term goals of bettering society as a whole through participation in the democratic process as well as questioning the effectiveness of that process when necessary. While John Lewis used two very different methods to urge very different actions, it becomes apparent that the two versions of John Lewis we see are not mutually exclusive, as he himself demonstrated the power of both protest against and participation in government to ensure voices are heard.

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Divine Hunger: The Herd Is Not Yours to Eat

by Liliane Keith

The rule of threes, in survival rhetoric: you can survive three minutes without air, three days without water, and three weeks without food. Three weeks: twenty-one days, or five-hundred-and-four hours, or thirty-thousand-two-hundred-and-forty minutes—starvation is a death particularly unkind in its protraction. As Eurylochus contends in the *Odyssey*, to die of hunger is to die "by inches" (12.378).

He, of course, is offering this notion as an incentive to the rest of Odysseus' crew, half-starved on the island of the sun god's cattle. It is a terror designed to spur them into action, for them to take to eating the herd that grazes tantalizingly close to their thinning bodies. The herd that is not theirs to eat.

His logic: should they eat the cattle, the sun god may indeed "[blot] out the day of their return" (1.10), but what does this matter to them, men whose hunger has already begun blotting out spots in their peripheral vision? The opening stanza of the *Odyssey* calls them "blind fools" (1.9), but perhaps it would be more accurate to call them "blinded." After all, it is a common idea that the starved man's hubris arises from desperation. I argue, however, that it is not so much that their hunger leads them to hubris but that hubris itself is symptomatic of a mortal hunger for divinity.

It is a month on the island before Eurylochus posits his "fatal plan" (12.365). Despite the implications of the opening in its

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condemnation of them as "fools," they do not dock their ship and immediately take to their boning knives. It is a month in which they are stranded, held in the palm of the same bitter tides that first drew them off course, looking out for pin-pricks of light on a horizon that is beyond their reach—Ithaca, the destination they will never see. Their desired conclusion is forbidden by the narrative itself, their survival refused the same as Helios' untouchable cattle. Still, it is only after they have used up their rations from Circe and are forced to hunt with "twisted hooks" (twisted, perhaps, as their journey; the turning of their ship by angered gods), that they begin to waver toward desperation. They search "for fish, for birds, anything they could lay their hands on" (12.356-57), anything to quell the growing hunger, which Odysseus calls them "racked with." It is only after this that Eurylochus stands in front of the rest of the crew—"his friends," as the text posits—to urge them, "Listen to me, my comrades, brothers in hardship. All ways of dying are hateful to us poor mortals, true, but to die of hunger, starve to death—that's the worst of all" (12.366-69).

The mortal body Is a storage container. Within living organisms, there are collections of glycogen and triglycerides, stowed energy deposits — and in its waged war with hunger, the body will begin to consume whatever remains of this repository.

With nothing else to eat, the body begins to eat itself.

Rather, then, to "die by sea, with one gulp of death" (12.376), than to be slowly devoured by your own body until there is nothing left for it to siphon from; until you are a shriveled and thin thing on an island far from home, surrounded by uneatable cattle.

This is the crux of theological mortality; that the mortal body is a thing that hungers and starves, always sitting enticingly close to the products of divinity but never meant to consume them, to become them. Because, indeed, consumption is a form of becoming, as is evidenced in the *Odyssey* itself. Odysseus frequently gauges the cultures he encounters by their diet—his question upon

landing on the island of the Lotus-eaters: were they "men like us…who eat bread?" (9.101-2).

The Lotus-eaters, however, are not, in fact, "men like [him]," in the sense that they do not eat bread and are, therefore, not Greek (or at least not of the same creed as him). They are, instead, defined by their unusual diet, that of the fruits of the lotus tree, which act as narcotics, making them languid and listless. As Odysseus drags his men from the alluring promise of an unconcerned life, drunk on the lotus, he is dragging them away, in some part, from the existential prospect of being redefined by what they eat. And that is the adage, of course—that one is what one eats. This is what Margaret Atwood seems to hit on in her poem "Eating Snake," in which she writes that "all peoples are driven to the point of eating their Gods after a time"—it is an "old greed," a mortal avarice for divinity, a hunger. And what is hubris, excessive pride in defiance of the gods, but a sort of hunger, only reiterated, recontextualized? Within every mortal intransigence, there is laid deeper a desire for the sort of possession found only in consumption; immortality in its embodied entirety.

This is the motivation of Sisyphus, who, in his perpetual torment, forever rolls a boulder up a hill with the same hands that once locked away Thanatos, god of death, the hands that twice cheated the parameters of his mortality, only for him to be unceremoniously ripped from it, all the same, now tasked with his eternal agony. The moral: you cannot keep death in a box; you cannot live forever. You are not a god. The herd is not yours to eat.

What, then, of the gods in ancient Greece, who often share the faults of mortals—selfish and particular, prone to taking offense at perceived slights? The Trojan War, the event that precedes the *Odyssey*, is the fault of the gods. Eris sows discord with her coveted apple and, in contention for whom among them is the fairest, Aphrodite offers Paris the most beautiful mortal woman in exchange for the attributive. Helen and her beauty did not cause

the war, though she is often ascribed the blame; rather, it was the goddess that handed her off as an item, that considered her nothing but a means to an end.

The Roman poet Ovid, known for being distinctly anti-authoritarian in his writing, explores this concept in his *Metamorphoses*. His rewrite of many mythological narratives casts a more distinctly sympathetic light on mortal characters. He offers more narrative space for victims of the gods, such as Io, and recrafts the story of Medusa as a tragedy of divine machination. In addition, his take on myths such as Arachne or Niobe, characters defined by their hubris, are of particular note as they seem to lean into the idea of the gods as sensitive and derisory when doling out retribution for mortal crimes. 'Mortal' is, of course, the operative term, as it constructs a sort of continuum. Mortal actions, by their nature, exist within a set timeline, always with the looming prospect of their morbidity—a facet decidedly untrue of the gods.

When Odysseus returns to the smell of roasting Sun cattle, he cries to Zeus, "left on their own, look what monstrous thing my crew concocted!" (12.400-01). But who is there to cry for the monstrous things that Odysseus has concocted, his hubris which sends them repeatedly off course—his taunting of Polyphemus, his extended tenure on Circe's island, or his choice, just prior to their landing on the island of the Sun cattle, to pass by Scylla? Scylla, which ate his men; men who, in their last moments, cried for Odysseus to save them before they were themselves consumed by another monstrous thing. Perhaps this was the bitter, secret motivation of Eurylochus and the rest of Odysseus' surviving crew. That Scylla may eat their comrades without suffering the woes of mortal starvation, but they should wither just in sight of the nourishment they require? The herd that is not theirs to eat. What a monstrous thing to have concocted.

Eurylochus is among the few crew members of Odysseus to receive a name and the only one to be given a degree of narrative

weight. We see the rumbles of his growing discontent in small moments, though he is cast aside by the text as merely mutinous. His first introduction to the audience is on Circe's island, a place where they are also removed from their mortal capacities. Circe transforms them into livestock animals, slaughterable animals—although, perhaps, this is already what they are. In a narrative sense, Odysseus' men were created to be killed. We are introduced to the story without them, with Odysseus having been again stranded, only this time on Calypso's island. His men are already dead by the time the story begins.

"All ways of dying are hateful to us poor mortals" (12.367), Eurylochus says, a statement that marks similarities to Emily Wilson's alternative translation of the opening stanza, where rather than blind fools, they are, more sympathetically, "poor fools" (1.7). And what mortal is not a poor fool in the eyes of the gods?

All ways of dying are hateful to us poor mortals, and indeed Eurylochus and the rest of Odysseus' men die shortly after this, consumed by the sea. Consider Icarus, who too was swallowed whole by the mouth of the sea, his wax wings melted by the sun. But there is, perhaps, some virtue in having at least seen it, felt it—as though for a moment he was more than mortal. The same is true, perhaps, for Odysseus' men. They die because they ate the sun god's cattle, but in a different sense: they are going to die regardless. At least, it was with immortality in their stomachs.

The axiom is simple: nobody wants to die. When truly measured, hubris is made up of more terror than arrogance. In the face of the untenable fatality of mortal existence, pride can be a sort of reflex, a defense mechanism—a hunger for the divine, if only to pretend for a moment that you could be a part of it. "The kingdom of god is within you," writes Margaret Atwood in her poem "Quattrocento," "because you ate it."

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Salvation and Compassion: "Goblin Market" as Allegory and Appeal

by Cara Kirby

In the scholarship surrounding Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," many different interpretations have been proposed to help explain the meaning of the poem and its details. Themes of religion are sometimes referenced, as well as more peculiar interpretations—such as viewing the poem as representing anorexia or Victorian concerns about devalued currency (Thompson; Lobdell). Much of the recent discussion, however, repeatedly draws attention to the sexual undertones of the poem, and attempts to analyze this through a modern lens of gender and sexuality. This line of analysis, while understandable given current trends in academia, fails to fully interact with Rossetti herself, her beliefs, and her experiences. By reading "Goblin Market" through a lens of Christina Rossetti's Victorian Anglican faith and her experience working with former prostitutes, many of the confusing or seemingly sexual elements of the poem fall into place, and a cohesive message of the poem presents itself.

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of Christina Rossetti's life was her staunch Anglican faith. She was strongly influenced by the ongoing Tractarian movement, which emphasized the incarnation of Christ and the importance of sacraments—such as the Eucharist—to symbolize and reflect higher spiritual truths (Arseneau 80). Much of her writing, especially later in her career,

was religious in nature, and in "Incarnation and Interpretation," Mary Arseneau argues that Rossetti was largely concerned with spiritual issues in all her works, even those that weren't explicitly religious (91). Another element of Rossetti's life that is pertinent to this discussion of "Goblin Market" is her work with "fallen women" (D'amico) or former prostitutes. From 1859-1870, Rossetti worked with women in St. Mary Magdalene's (also called Highgate Penitentiary, or simply Highgate), and it was early during this period that "Goblin Market" was composed (Rogers 859). This correlation invites questions about how Rossetti's experiences with these women may have shaped the story and purpose of her poem.

The poem itself is the story of two sisters (Laura and Lizzie) and their interactions with a group of goblin men who offer delicious yet poisonous fruit. Laura eats the fruit and is poisoned, while Lizzie refuses it, and is therefore able to save her sister. As the only male presence in the poem, the goblins' tension with the sisters takes on a larger connotation of the tension between women and exploitative men in general. Moreover, the sisters' interactions with the fruit hold undeniable sexual overtones. To Laura, the sister who eats the fruit, the goblins were seducers, sounding "kind and full of loves" and coaxing her "in tones as smooth as honey" (Rossetti lines 79, 108). Later, Lizzie tells the story of a girl who fell prey to the goblins and "met them in the moonlight . . . . for the joys brides hope to have" (lines 148, 314), only to then waste away and die. The goblins therefore represent men who lure in unsuspecting innocent women with promises of love and sexual pleasure, only to abandon them after the women have given in. This leaves the women destitute and unable to move on in regular life, much as seduced and abandoned women would have been in Victorian society.

Interpreting the poem only as an allegory for sexual abandonment, however, ignores many of the more important symbols and parallels that come forward when the poem is viewed

through the lens of Christianity. When read this way, what springs immediately to mind is the literal parallel of the forbidden goblin fruit and the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The goblins tout their fruit as “sweet to tongue and sound to eye” (line 30), much as Eve saw that the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil was “good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes” (Genesis 3:6). Moreover, the goblin fruit brings literal death (after eating it, Laura is “at Death’s door” [line 321]) just as the fruit in the Garden brings spiritual death (“but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die” [Genesis 2:17]). The goblin fruit, and Laura’s desire for it, are a picture of the human desire to have what it thinks will give pleasure, even after being told that it is harmful.

The poem also holds a very clear picture of Christ’s sacrifice and ultimate triumph. When Lizzie sees that her sister is wasting away because of the fruit, she seeks out the goblins as the only way to save Laura. Like Christ was tempted by Satan and refused to give in, so Lizzie is offered the fruit by the goblins but doesn’t take it. They become angry, and the scene that follows is violent. The poem says that they “trod and hustled her / elbowed and jostled her / claw’d [her] with their nails / barking, mewing, hissing, mocking” (lines 399-402). The picture is vivid, and it echoes the humiliation of Christ before His crucifixion, when Jesus was flogged, beaten, and mocked (Mark 15:15-20). Church tradition also says that the soldiers pulled Jesus’ beard out, just as the goblins “twitch’d out [Lizzie’s] hair by the roots” (line 404). Ultimately, however, the goblins can’t get Lizzie to eat, and they go away. Lizzie comes out hurt and covered in goblin fruit, but triumphant, reflecting the pain Christ endured in death and His ultimate victory in resurrection.

But what about the more confusing elements of the poem? Why is Laura poisoned when she gets the fruit from the goblins, but is healed when she gets the fruit juices from Lizzie? In her

essay "Heroic Sisterhood in 'Goblin Market,'" Dorothy Mermin interprets this as Laura being healed because Lizzie "brings proof that the goblin fruit is bitter, and she offers as an alternative . . . a better way of life" (112). It is only once Laura accepts that the goblin fruit is harmful that she can move past her obsession with it. I believe the poem bears out this reading, but a deeper interpretation can be found in the Christian doctrine of the First and Second Adam. This doctrine teaches that Adam (the first man) and Christ (also called the Second Adam) are inverse pictures of each other. 1 Corinthians 15:22 says that "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." Just as it was Adam's choice to satisfy his selfishness that cursed humanity to separation from God, so it was Christ's choice to endure unjust suffering that opened the door for all humanity to be restored. In "Goblin Market," Laura and Lizzie typify the two Adams: death comes through Laura's fall to temptation, and life comes through Lizzie's selfless sacrifice. The goblin fruit itself (or in the Christian interpretation: the physical world) is not nearly as important as the choice of the person who interacts with it. On its own the fruit is neither good nor evil: it brings about a good or evil outcome depending on whether it is used for selfish or selfless ends.

Another odd element of "Goblin Market" is the seemingly erotic exchange between the sisters in the last part of the poem, when Laura "kissed and kissed [Lizzie] with a hungry mouth" to eat the goblin fruit that covered Lizzie's face. This encounter has caused some to conclude that the poem is ultimately about latent homosexual desires, but I find this interpretation to be at odds with the rest of the poem, and with its historical and biographical context. Firstly, Mermin points out that we in modern society are much quicker than Victorians to see expressions of physical affection between women as sexual (113). While works commenting on or promoting homosexual desire were definitely present in literature of the time, it is highly unlikely that Rossetti, a staunch Anglican even by Victorian standards, would have been

advancing those ideas, which were in direct contradiction to Anglican doctrine. Secondly, a lesbian interpretation of this passage ignores the religious allegorical elements that have been so clearly present up to this point in the poem. When Lizzie says "eat me, drink me, love me" (line 471), it is much more indicative of Christ's injunction to "eat my flesh and drink my blood" (John 6:56) than it is of any type of sexual connection between the sisters. This is especially true when viewed from Rossetti's Tractarian background, with its emphasis on the Eucharist as making "diving grace . . . available through a physical form" (Arseneau 82). Salvation requires one party to offer, and the other to accept: the bread and wine of communion are an outward representation of that spiritual exchange. So when Lizzie saves her sister, her selfless act comes with a physical, edible representation, just as Christ's does.

But if Rossetti had merely wanted to write an allegory for salvation through Christ, she could have done so more straightforwardly. To make sense of her framing the story around two sisters, and around the undeniable sexual presence of the goblins, we must factor in Rossetti's ongoing work with "fallen" women. Whether they were prostitutes or women who had been seduced and abandoned, sexually compromised women found themselves ostracized in Victorian society. In an effort to address this problem in the late-1850s, the diocese of London opened several houses where these women could be safe as they tried to leave their old lives behind (D'Amico 68). These houses, of which Highgate (where Rossetti worked) was one, were open to women of all classes, and were staffed mostly by volunteers—devout women from the parish who wanted to help those who had been compromised (72). Though they were not nuns, Rossetti and the other volunteers were called Sisters, and they developed close friendships with the women they were helping. So while Laura and Lizzie can typify Adam and Christ, from the perspective of

Rossetti's experience at Highgate, they can also represent this sisterhood between women.

In the poem, both sisters are "unfallen" (D'amico 70) in the beginning, but despite Lizzie's warnings, Laura is sexually seduced by the goblins, and she falls out of her daily rhythms of work and rest (Rossetti lines 293-298). However, instead of abandoning Laura when she falls, Lizzie has compassion on her, and goes out of her way to save her. It is also important to note that it is only because Lizzie did *not* give into temptation that she is able to help Laura. If she had eaten the fruit herself, both sisters would have withered away. Lizzie voices this fear, saying "if we lost our way what should we do?" (252). Lizzie's compassion and purity enable her to save Laura, a situation which reflected contemporary views about establishments like Highgate and the way the rehabilitation process worked. Despite the terrible reputation sexually compromised women had in Victorian society, some pastors held that "you will never fulfill a mission dearer to Christ" than restoring a "fallen woman" through kindness (D'Amico 71). There was also a recognition that the women who wanted to reform themselves would need to be in community with "unfallen sister[s who could] 'be ever at their side . . . encouraging them . . . moving about them like a moral atmosphere'" (70-71). It was believed that, left to themselves, the compromised women would return to the life they had come from, and so cease to exist in moral society. Rossetti echoes this sentiment in the poem, when it is made evident that Laura will die without Lizzie's intervention.

The urgency of Laura's situation in the poem eventually demands that Lizzie act. She "weigh'd no more / Better and worse," but had to do something right away (Rossetti lines 322-23). Aside from just saving her sister's life, Lizzie's action safeguards the future, as the end of the poem sees both sisters as happy mothers to a new generation, half of which wouldn't exist if Laura hadn't been saved. The mission Rossetti was involved in was

treated with equal weight by her society, with some who were passionate on the subject "presenting the redemption of fallen women as central to saving the whole social order" (D'Amico 71). Rossetti herself was passionate about the mission, serving consistently for eleven years and occasionally even after that time (D'Amico 68). This passion shows at the end of "Goblin Market," when Laura joins together her daughters' hands and "bid[s] them cling together / 'For there is no friend like a sister / in calm or stormy weather'" (lines 560-62). Rossetti is clearly speaking to her female readers here, calling on them to reach out and help each other as only they can.

At first glance, "Goblin Market" can seem like an cautionary fairy tale written for children, yet with some strangely sexual and vivid imagery. There are various elements that can be parsed or drawn out of it, but a reading which combines Christina Rossetti's faith and her work with other women offers as comprehensive of an interpretation as any I have seen put forward. Viewed through this lens, "Goblin Market" is a strong spiritual allegory which calls attention to Christ's suffering and sacrifice, as represented by the character of Lizzie. Going a step further, it uses Lizzie and her sisterly compassion as a connecting link between Christ and the upright women of Rossetti's time. These women had a chance to help restore their "fallen sisters" (D'Amico), and Rossetti wove together a story that called them to be imitators of Christ and extend compassion to those who had been tricked by temptation. It asked them to join together in sisterhood, just as Rossetti did in her work.

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Soli Deo gloria

“ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS SWITCH IT OFF”: ADAPTATION AS EXISTENTIAL TERROR

by Liliane Keith

Prior to its baptism, Crossland Community Church was a movie theater. Despite the permutation of its purpose, the building itself occupies the same space it always has—an odd, angled corner jutting out of Fairview Shopping Plaza, just down the strip from Dollar Tree and Rent-a-Center. Still, its metamorphosis, both contextually and structurally (current expansion efforts have left it spilling out awkwardly across the parking lot), suggests it as a sort of adaptation; ironic, perhaps, given its previous life embroiled in film reel.

Of course, the process of adaptation itself can feel distinctly religious. Certainly, announcements of adaptations or sequels are often met with accusations of sacrilege — “why would they ruin the original?”, “why did we need to remake this?” or, infamously, “this ruined my childhood.” This is certainly the crux of Courtney Song’s description of the great terror of the colon (“Two dots,” she writes, “that act like nails in the coffin of the American film industry…often [preceding] a sequel, a spin-off, an adaptation or some other form of packaged unoriginality.”). Or, perhaps, of Chris Thilk’s consideration of Hollywood as a parade of an “endless series of adaptation, sequels, and other derivative materials.” There is a tendency to view adaptation as a sort of desecration—a dragging around of a corpse, like Achilles and

Hector. This is, perhaps, partially a response to the implementation of capitalist structures—the same ones that built Crossland, in its continued proximity to commercial spaces—which reframe story as product and adaptation as profiteering. On a more fundamental level, however, I think adaptations imbue us with a certain existential terror. Adaptations suggest that, when given, art cannot be taken back; that the things we create, not subject to human constraints, will outgrow their creator—that art, ultimately, will create itself.

Mainstream superhero comics are, perhaps, our most apt modern case study in this—DC and Marvel in particular. Comic books are a medium of continual self-justification; readers are always aware that these characters will exist indefinitely, constantly reinterpreted by an ever-changing cast of artists and authors. Without stasis, the very structure of comics morphs around a thesis of change, every retcon and rebirth a symptom of the medium's immortality. Newcomers are often forewarned that comics require a greater suspension of disbelief than they are used to, but I think that, rather than a mere putting aside of rationality, comics ask their readers to reckon with their own preconceptions of what makes stories meaningful—a question which relates, necessarily, back to the state of comics as continual adaptations of themselves. And while comic authors choose to address this fundamental aspect of their medium in different ways, there are few as distinctly metatextual as Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* run.

Morrison's *Animal Man* occurs in the wake of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, a large-scale crossover event within the DC canon that ran from 1985 to 1986. The first of DC's myriad *Crisis* plotlines, it was an event of widespread implications, killing off many major characters (Barry Allen's Flash, Green Arrow, and Supergirl, to name a few) and shifting the history and characterization of those that remained. *Crisis on Infinite Earths* was the first real cleaving of the DC universe, operatively redefining critical timeline points as

either *Pre-* or *Post*-Crisis. *Animal Man*, post-Crisis, follows Buddy Baker, the titular hero, as he tries to regain his status as a superhero after a pseudo-retirement. More than this, however, *Animal Man* is about coming to terms with the "futile brutality" of a comic book existence—something particularly evident in its fifth issue, titled *The Coyote Gospel.*

The Coyote Gospel is a departure from the first four issues in that it refocuses the narrative on two new characters: a gangly, anthropomorphic coyote named Crafty and the trucker that takes to hunting him. Crafty, a Wile E. Coyote imitation, originally comes from a different world entirely, a Looney Tunes-esque place, where things function on cartoon violence. Exhausted from this—his perpetual slapstick torment—Crafty seeks an audience with his God, his creator, who, in turn, offers him a deal: he will resolve the conflict of *this* world, but Crafty must be banished to another one, the world of *Animal Man*.

Upon manifesting on this new Earth, Crafty is given a form of flesh and blood, one that newly hurts and suffers. He still experiences resurrections—he is slowly revived after being struck by a truck in the opening—but now they are more distinctly visceral, described by Morrison thus:

> The pain is gigantic. A newly activated nervous system is suddenly jammed with frantic signals, like an overworked switchboard. The creature shudders, weeping. Its pelvic girdle fuses along hairline sutures, to cradle rapidly healing organs. A splintered rib that saws back and forth in one lung, is withdrawn. The thoracic cage locks seamlessly. The lung reinflates. Trembling, the creature rises…Behold! The miracle of the resurrection!

Of course, "miracle" here is ironic in tone. Notably, when Crafty does finally succumb, shot with a silver bullet, he is surprised by the painlessness of it. There is a courtesy to it, a freedom; after his many horrible resurrections, Crafty is allowed, finally, to die.

One can consider adaptation as a sort of resurrection itself, especially in the context of comics, in which character resurrections can be both metaphorical, in the sense of new writers reimagining a character, or literal—all of the characters whom I mentioned previously as dying during *Crisis on Infinite Earths* return, in various ways, to the DC canon over time. Is resurrection—or adaptation—a merciful renewal of life or a prolongation of torment? This central moral question is troubled especially by the existence of Comic Book Limbo, which comes into prominence in the later issues of *Animal Man*. Limbo is the in-universe realm that houses forgotten DC characters—mainly the more absurd Golden and Silver Age ones, such as the Inferior Five or the Space Canine Patrol Agents. They exist together in the only true period of stasis in comics, the time in-between being written about, which, functionally, is a sort of death. The only way for a character to escape their fate in Limbo is to be written back into existence. Adaptation as resurrection.

But to exist, to be written about, is a double-edged sword, as Buddy Baker himself is aware. Prior to his being brought to Limbo, Buddy's wife and children had been murdered, an altogether pointless tragedy that drives the typically mild-mannered hero to great lengths of cruelty in the name of hollow vengeance. Morrison himself, who appears as a character in the final issue, admits as much to Buddy, although he insists it cannot be undone. "It wouldn't be realistic," he says, "comics are realistic now."

Morrison's run on *Animal Man* ends deliberately without much of a conclusion. After his final issue, the title would be taken up two separate times by different writers, to varying degrees of success. It would eventually come to exist under DC's Vertigo label (then referred to as Black Label), which houses their more "mature" comics. The shift caused *Animal Man*—an already surreal comic, even post-Morrison—to falter ever closer to the fate of "grimdark," that is, cynical to the point of near meaninglessness. In

an act of recognition of this potential fate, Morrison does, in fact, bring back Buddy Baker's wife and children, despite his earlier protestations that it would not be "realistic." It isn't a kindness—not really. Rather, it is played as a final flexing of his authorial hand. Nobody in comics stays dead. They would almost certainly have been brought back under subsequent writers. Better, then, for him to be the one to resurrect them.

Within all art, there is this exercise of control, borne, perhaps, out of the fear (or awareness) of losing it. An earlier issue of *Animal Man* pits Buddy against an alien artist, or, as it is termed on his planet, an "art martyr." As the name suggests, the issue grapples with art as a sort of martyrdom, something inherently sacrificial. The art martyr offers up the following consideration of his art: "I begin to shake, unable to say whether I am creator or created. For I have given shape to all grief, all anguish, all love. It is a fractal bird…a great tortured shape, wracked by infinities." And then he arms an explosive to destroy it—the killing of one's own art, if only to prove a final sort of ownership of it. As Buddy falls over himself in anguish, unable to figure out how to stop its detonation, how to prevent the destruction, Hawkman appears and easily disarms it. Almost humorously, he tells Buddy: "All you had to do was switch it off."

As Morrison, in his final issue, grapples with the passing over of *Animal Man* to new writers, it is hard not to be reminded of the fate of the alien art martyr and the end question of all art: who is creator, who is created? Or, more pressingly, does either distinction truly matter? If art is, as the art martyr claims, "tortured," "wracked by infinities," then perhaps adaptation is a gathering of "fractal birds" on a telephone wire—and, like birds, like all natural creatures, adaptations must also evolve to meet the demands of their environment.

Art is itself an evolutionary process, conjoined, inherently, with a legacy of context. The history of storytelling is told through

communal exploration; art passed down generations, imprinted with the lines on all the palms that have held them. And there is a terror in this, as *Animal Man* explores; the dread of not knowing the endpoint, where the things you create, the things you are, end up. But there is also a grand purpose in it. As the inhabitants of Comic Book Limbo understand, resurrection is equal parts terror and epiphany.

"I've come to send a signal out into the dark," Morrison writes in the final pages of *Animal Man*. He is talking about his childhood imaginary friend Foxy, whom he used to call out to in the night with a flashlight. He returns as an adult, saying, "it seemed like the only thing worth doing." Perhaps this is the purpose of art and, in turn, the purpose of adaptation: A call in the dark, in which one waits perpetually for a response, the flicker of a light on the horizon.

Morrison leaves before Foxy can respond; only the reader is privy to that light on the horizon, the light that Morrison himself cannot—can never—see.

"Are you there?" questions Morrison, "Can you see me? Foxy, I came back. I didn't forget. I came back."

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EVEN HARDER TIMES: WHEN DICKENSIAN SATIRE BECOMES MAINSTREAM CONSERVATISM

by Joseph Shoulders

When I first read Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, I read the exaggerated characters of an emotionless Mr. Gradgrind hellbent against the circus and of a lying, "bootstrapping" Mr. Bounderby depriving his workers with amusement. The rhetoric was obvious satire calling attention to the injustices of ever-growing utilitarian Victorian England, which we modern humans could all agree was wrong. However, after the past few years of conservative politics scaling further Right and becoming more vocal, I began to see eerie parallels between our current political climate in the United States and the city of Coketown. Instead of being fictional satire critiquing industrial mistreatment, the same rhetoric found in *Hard Times* is now being used by politicians to control and get rid of queer people.

The uncanny feeling of these parallels began in the opening scene of the novel. A new student named Sissy Jupe arrives at Gradgrind's school, and he demands of her, "Give me your definition of a horse" (Dickens 6). It's an absurd and useless request, so Sissy cannot answer. Gradgrind replies, "Girl number twenty unable to define a horse! … Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals!" (Dickens 6-7). In an echo, I heard Senator Marsha Blackburn question Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, "Can you provide a

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definition for the word 'woman'?" (Weisman). The question has no relation to Justice Jackson's role as a legal judge, so she does not answer. Senator Blackburn replies, "The fact that you cannot give me a straight answer about something as fundamental as what a woman is underscores the dangers of the kind of progressive education that we are hearing about" (Weisman). In both cases, the questioned has a whole understanding of the topic; Sissy was raised by horse-riders, and Justice Jackson is a woman. Because of their deep understanding of the experience of the topic, they know a definition would be complex and always limiting. However, the questioner views the lack of answers as an intellectual failure that can be mocked. Yet, they also cannot provide adequate definitions. Senator Blackburn does not even define a woman. Bitzer's definition of a horse is:

> Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth. (Dickens 7)

This definition fails because, without prior mentioning of a horse, a listener might not even know he was describing one. The definition lacks all human experience of what a horse is and functions as. Even as a strict biological definition, it can be questioned. If a horse were to lose its legs, it would be ridiculous to say that it is no longer a horse by definition. If a horse were to be born without all forty teeth, we would still consider it a horse. This logic applies to the conservatives' definitions of women, which tie women to their reproductive capabilities and fail to consider societal experiences. This comparison reimagines the opening of *Hard Times* as calling attention to transgressions, and that theme manifests repeatedly.

The circus in the novel presents as the greatest transgressor of norms, which I read as an unabashed queer space. Dickens describes the circus performers as rowdy, messy, uncouth, and

prone to showing off their legs (42). The refined Victorian society at large would be ashamed to be seen in that state. The people of the circus, however, show off those qualities to raise people's spirits, a goal that further challenges society. In an industrialist society, saying that people "can't be alwayth a working, they an't made for it" (Dickens 335), makes one a threat. Gradgrind is hypervigilant of the threat of the circus, particularly when children are involved. He takes it upon himself to instruct children away from looking into the circus as he passes by, and he is outraged when he catches his own children there (Dickens 15). Gradgrind assumes, "Something ha[s] crept into Thomas's and Louisa's minds…which has never intended to be developed, and in which their reason has no part" (Dickens 23). This determination to shape children's minds and keep them away from the 'contamination' of the circus is reminiscent of the recent outrage against children attending drag shows. Texas House Member Bryan Slaton and like-minded people would like to ban drag performers from being in child spaces (Rocha). Their belief is that drag queens are "perverted adults" set on "sexualizing young children" (qtd. in Rocha). As the circus is to Gradgrind, the drag scene is a threat to conservative society. Drag performers embrace the same qualities of "rowdiness" and boldly challenge gender roles and presentations. This scene, thus, introduces the circus as a space of nonconformity, representing the state of being queer.

In his hypervigilance against kids being exposed to the circus, Gradgrind militantly suppresses mentions of the circus within the classroom, a goal challenged by the presence of Sissy. Gradgrind tries to instruct her repeatedly, "You mustn't tell us about the ring, here" (Dickens 6). However, Sissy's connection to the circus is tied to her identity. Her name itself is seen as evidence of her lifestyle as Gradgrind says, "Sissy is not a name…Call yourself Cecilia," and even tells her to instruct her father to do the same (Dickens 6). Gradgrind further tries to reshape Sissy's identity by circumventing

her father's real profession and labeling him "a veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and horsebreaker" (Dickens 6). Gradgrind defends his methods as "the principle on which [he] bring[s] up [his] own children" (Dickens 3). The situation mirrors the current issue in education where classrooms are facing pressure to censor mentions of queerness in order to "protect" children. Proponents of "Don't Say Gay" bills argue that "parents have a fundamental right to control the education of their children and that there is a constitutionally protected relationship between children and parents. Given the presence of these rights, supporters say the pervasive 'homosexual agenda' presence poses a real threat in public schools" (Barbeauld 141). However, the depiction of Sissy Jupe represents an issue that educators are facing under these bills: what do teachers do if a student is queer or has queer parents? Gradgrind's solution for Sissy is to remove her from the school (Dickens 45). This may seem too unethical to occur in today's society, but that is wishful thinking considering the adamancy of the Right to control education. In bills banning transgender children from sports and bathrooms, we already see queer children being barred from other child spaces for merely existing.

The rhetoric of such censorship is framed around protecting children, but conservative actions do not reflect genuine care for children. For example, in their desperate attempt to bring back heterosexual conventions, Tennessee legislators overlooked setting an age limit to their marriage alternative, which if passed, would have led to much abuse of minors (Brown). Gradgrind in *Hard Times* demonstrates how a principle of conformity can lead to overlooking and even excusing pedophilia. Gradgrind's older friend Bounderby had "watched [Louisa's] progress with particular interest and pleasure" in hopes of one day marrying her (Dickens 111), which is an obvious case of Bounderby grooming Gradgrind's young daughter. Gradgrind informs Louisa of the proposal in an awkward ramble and refers to statistics, and the historical statistics show that age gaps have been very common in

marriages (Dickens 113). Gradgrind does not contextualize the statistics nor assign a moral judgment to them; he merely concludes to follow the pattern of the past. If the conservative mindset is to conform to traditions—the patterns of the past—the moral failings of the past will be continued and excused.

In contrast, the character of Sissy conveys how those who do not conform are more whole, and her nonconformity is upheld as the voice of humanity throughout the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Gradgrind sees the circus lifestyle within Sissy and undertakes to rid her of all traces of it. He tells her, "I shall have the satisfaction of causing you to be strictly educated; and you will be a living proof to all who come into communication with you, of the advantages of the training you will receive. You will be reclaimed and formed" (Dickens 55). In a sense, Gradgrind undertakes Sissy to put her through conversion therapy and prove that all people like her can be made "right" with a censored upbringing and rewired thinking. However, as much as Sissy tries to obey, her nature cannot conform. Gradgrind takes note that there is "something in this girl which could hardly be set forth in a tabular form," and does not think he could categorize her (Dickens 106). Sissy's transgressions of societal conventions—her queerness—are beginning to be recognized as innate to her. Her differentness presents in the novel as a voice of morality. She raises the concerns of national prosperity compared to the wealth disparity, the lack of attention to starving people in a "prosperous nation," and the grief of the loved ones of the unlucky who die in accidents (Dickens 66-67). The displeased teacher represents the conservative habit to match statistics to social concerns in order to downplay them. However, Sissy highlights how those statistics truly mean nothing when discussing human experience. Such an understanding of human experience is more likely to be reached when someone, like Sissy, has lived in a freeing culture found in the circus and queer spaces.

The novel also represents the healing nature of a queer love. After Louisa finally breaks down at how broken her life has been, Sissy comes to her and asks,

> I would be something to you, if I might….Whatever you want most, if I could be that. At all events, I would like to try to be as near it as I can. And however far off that may be, I will never tire of trying. Will you let me? (Dickens 260)

She says that she loves Louisa and will not be repelled by how Louisa has been shaped by Gradgrind's raising of her. Louisa lays her head upon Sissy's heart and finally rests (Dickens 261). The love that Sissy has for Louisa is not impeded by Gradgrind's wishes to keep them apart nor by Louisa's own turning away from Sissy when she chose to follow her expected path. The determination and uniqueness of her love is another aspect of Sissy's queerness that she never represses for societal conventions, and that queerness is able to heal people broken by the pressures to conform. Fittingly, Dickens describes the circus people as generous, youthful, helpful, and generous (42), of which queer people can also characterize their community that has held together and supported all people's search for wholeness and freedom. Their voices are strong against the destruction caused by conservatism, and in Mr. Sleary's words, "You mu[s]t have u[s]" (Dickens 335). Dickens ultimately sends a message for society to heal from the damage caused by conservative domination of mind and society by embracing the nonconformers, the queer people and queer life.

The ending of *Hard Times* is a hopeful one; however, the book ended over 150 years ago, and the issues raised by Dickens seem more relevant than ever. Although Dickens portrayed the dangers of utilitarianism in the workforce and education, the U.S. has preserved that mindset and established it within the government. Rather than education becoming a place to foster critical thinking and effective empathy for others, schools have become a political

battleground as the first step to label all challenges to their social conventions as radical indoctrination, threatening the existence of queer people. A careful reading of *Hard Times* with today's climate as a background just may alert more people that we are in a Dickensian dystopia, but that is only if we can protect against censorship before conservatives ban Charles Dickens in schools for being too radical an ideology.

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DAISIES' CASTRATION OF THE SPECTATOR

by Daniel Ungs

The gap between traditionalism and experimentation in film isn't as vast as audiences may think. Directors of experimental cinema utilize the same techniques commonly associated with Hollywood: mise-en-scene, camera autonomy, narrative chronology, etc. However, they flip these elements to create something functionally contrarian, inherently evocative, and refreshingly new. The hardly-recognizable skewing of traditional Hollywood cinema editing and camera techniques allows Vera Chytilova to create a disorienting commentary on the representation of women in film with her eccentric, yet deeply impactful *Daisies* (1966). Despite debuting nine years prior to Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory, the director successfully subverts the sexist gender tropes of mainstream cinema through her manipulation of the spectator.

Born from the budding artistic expression of the Czechoslovak New Wave of the 1960s, *Daisies* focuses on two young women named Marie spoiling each other and emotionally torturing the men around them. Their escapades are presented in a surreal and episodic manner, with the film seeming to lack any narrative chronology. Communist Party censors almost immediately condemned the film to banishment over food waste and the not-so-subtle critique of Czechoslovak culture and government. Vera Chytilova ultimately struggled to get another film produced due to the obscene backlash that her debut picture received. However,

Daisies is most notorious for its progressive depiction of the female character that petrified audiences accustomed to conservative gender standards of the time period. In fact, the Czechoslovak New Wave was almost entirely dedicated to straying away from conventional narrative normalities in order to challenge audiences to change the way they view cinema's depiction of reality (Frank 46). Chytilova's confrontation of traditionality in key scenes has led to it being one of the premiere films of its time. Her characters are able to regrow limbs and leap between time and space without any respect for laws of convention.

In one of the film's most notorious sequences, the two Maries can be seen cutting each other's limbs off with a pair of scissors. While the barebone description of the scene sounds grotesque, the score remains composed with a jazzy delight—and so do the charming protagonists. Throughout the film, the sound design often informs the audience how they should feel about a situation. However, *Daisies* uniquely uses unnatural sound that occasionally subverts the watchers' expectations. For instance, the creaking of the girls' limbs at the beginning of the film as if they were dolls prepares the audience for the bending of traditionality. Prior to the cutting scene, the audience is shown the two young women cutting out photographs of women's body parts from a magazine. The brunette Marie instigates the tomfoolery by cutting off the blonde Marie's arm, who snips off her head in retaliation. They freeze momentarily, gauging a reaction from one another as bouncing heads, before transforming the room into a collaged mess of body parts draped in lingerie. The score continues to build as their laughing and cutting intensifies, and the composition of the scene is rearranged like a jigsaw puzzle of the aforementioned magazine clippings thrown askew. In traditional Hollywood cinema, the camera usually just works as a bridge between the audience and the film while maintaining the laws of the real world. However,

Chytilova bends reality and creates a fantastical refraction of realism with this cutting and pasting of the screen.

Even without their heads, the two Maries retain autonomy. The focus of the camera is on their torsos, specifically their feminine attributes. With the camera lens emphasizing their bodies clothed in revealing nightgowns, the audience has no choice but to remain a spectator. This pulling of the audience into the film forces them to look at the events with a lens of subjectivity, as there is no objective reality in *Daisies*. In Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," she introduces the idea that film reflects the human fascination with the human form: "[In film], curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visual presence of the person in the world" (Mulvey 836). Male filmmakers have often displayed and exploited the female body on the silver screen in order to form the notion that a woman's value is in her figure. Even in 1966, Chytilova was aware of this connotation and successfully mocked the trope by subverting the relationship between film and spectator. She whittles her female characters down to nothing but their body parts, satirizing the entire premise of the male gaze. The finished product is an uncomfortably direct display of the female body bolstered by the confrontation of the spectator, who is being forced to perform the gaze on the two girls by the autonomous camera. The sequence concludes suddenly, with a dramatic shift to another collage consisting of atmospheric colors. The Maries resort back to their fully formed stature, without an awareness of the carnage that just ensued.

Another provocative instance from *Daisies* that showcases Chytilova's innovative manipulation of the camera is the butterfly scene. In what seems like a disruptive interlude, the audience is flung into a collage of butterflies narrated by a distraught man. The audience soon discovers that he is talking to and about the blonde

Marie, whom he calls Julie. "You're heavenly and yet so human," he says. She grins seductively past the apparatus, decorated by her usual innocent flower crown, and into the eyes of the speaking man. As he grows progressively angrier at his failed sexual advances, a yellow filter—perhaps representing his anger—covers the lens and he begins to play a quirky piano ballad. As music fills the room, the spectator once again is introduced to jarring images of butterflies juxtapositioned by the alluring stripping of the blonde Marie. The importance of this imagery can't really be understood by audiences unfamiliar with the Czech's cultural association with butterflies and sex: "The sequence in the film that comes closest to being a 'seduction scene' also begins with a cliche: butterflies feature prominently, as in Czech culture they symbolize sex" (Frank 47). This collage of wings that commands the screen represents the sexual acts the two engage in. Even after the man has finished pounding on the piano, the blonde Marie covers her breasts and vagina with the butterflies he mounted on the wall. The camera reverses to the man, who has become flustered as Marie continues on this seductive escapade with the collage of butterflies interrupting intermittently. The lack of continuity editing that appears throughout *Daisies* is another confrontation of traditional Hollywood ideals. By completely rejecting technical tradition as a whole, the director is essentially rejecting societal standards set by the patriarchy. In a way, Chytilova is casting herself as the Maries as they are the personification of feminine autonomy disrupting normality.

Once again, Chytilova chooses to focus on the female body—more specifically the sexualization of specific parts. These close-ups of the blonde Marie's devious smile and self-censored breasts intentionally replicate the male gaze: "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness"*

(Mulvey 837). However, as the viewer watches the events unfold, Marie continues to evade the man's sexual advances. His manipulative barbs even seem to fuel her playful captivation. Although he has the ability to observe, he strives for more and is rejected by not only the character Marie, but by the filmmaker Chytilova as well. This rejection serves as a knock on his manhood, and ultimately as an emotional castration. *Daisies* is full of metaphorical castrations performed by the two Maries, but this one is the most intimate. The man professes his love to a young woman in his own home surrounded by sexual memorabilia, but is laughed at. The blonde Marie is not only laughing at the fragile masculinity of the male character in this scene, but at the fragile masculinity of the male spectator. She is aware of the male fascination with her feminine sex appeal and acknowledges the desire, but holds the lust just out of reach of the patriarchal glare. She is in control, as is the director.

The scene concludes with the blonde Marie knocking a case of butterflies off the wall after the man plucks away the butterfly covering her genitalia. When she does so, the man attempts to save the cascading collection but shows no compassion for the girl he has been trying to seduce. He proclaims, "life without you is miserable," as Marie snickers to herself behind his back. This mocking is an action he is unaware of, but the audience is intentionally shown. In the context of the male gaze that exists within Hollywood, the male character is supposed to represent the empathetic right, while the woman embodies the treacherous wrong (Mulvey, 839). For the majority of the scene, the spectator inhabits the point-of-view of the male character as they are shown his anger, his desire, and ultimately his gaze. The blonde Marie is the object of all three, so the camera primarily follows her. She's supposed to embody that deviant female character whose sole purpose in the diegesis is to antagonize the male, while he attempts to win/domesticate her by the conclusion of the narrative. However, at no point in *Daisies* does Chytilova allow the two young

women to become domesticated by the men they antagonize, thus disrupting the gender power dynamic of mainstream cinema.

Through her experimental utilization of camera work and editing, Vera Chytilova is able to manipulate an audience accustomed to traditional cinema techniques. *Daisies*' mocking of the male gaze addressed in Laura Mulvey's writing subverts the expectations the spectator may have about female characters in mainstream American and Czechoslovak film, as well as the relationship they share onscreen with men. Sequences such as the limb-cutting and the sensual butterfly exemplify the rarely addressed gender issues that are being presented in the artform, while simultaneously being a stunningly surreal and quirky display of expression and entertainment. *Daisies* is the epitome of the rejection of tradition, both in a narrative and a filmmaking sense.

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