The Ashen Egg

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

Deadline: Submissions must be received in CH 135 no later than June 30 and must be accompanied by the cover sheet and endorsement form to be considered.

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Note on Contributors

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Megan Serio graduated in December 2014 with a degree in Literature and Popular Culture Studies and a fierce will to finally read all of the books she's been collecting over the past four years. Along with an impossible reading list, she has taken up an academic and personal interest in film, as well as smaller affinities for British Romanticism and the natural sciences. What this holds for the future, virtually no one knows, but she would be happy doing some sort of library or museum work, and she hopes to keep up some fashion of writing in the spaces in-between.

Megan Skaggs is a junior in the Honors College at WKU majoring in English Literature and International Affairs. After graduation, she intends to pursue a short-term English teaching position at an orphanage in Central America. Then, upon completion of the position, she will attend graduate school to obtain a dual degree in International Law and International Development. Ultimately she will use these degrees to work in International Developmental Education. For now, however, she enjoys reading, traveling, running, and spending time with her family. Her favorite book is *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, and she is always ready for a new adventure.

Taking it One Day at a Time: The Twenty-Four Hour Novel as Coping Mechanism

Chloe Brown

Long after the dust settled and the last war dead were removed from the battlefield, Britain felt the lasting reverberations of World War I. The war impacted not only business and politics, but also art, literature, and culture. After World War I, many writers found that they could not reconcile the beliefs and traditions that they had adhered to since birth with the horrors of war. Their writing began to indicate a new way of thinking about life and art. Modernist writers attempted to break away from tradition and explore new literary territory. One way in which these writers strove to create something new was to manipulate time. Many Modernist writers were very concerned with time, and wanted to demonstrate time's effect on society. Some Modernist works such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* take place over the course of one day. *Mrs. Dalloway*'s compressed time is a response to World War I. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the reader follows main characters as they go through the motions. Time provides a consistent structure to life, which requires characters to momentarily forget about the horrors of war by completing menial daily tasks. Time also frequently intrudes on the thoughts of characters when they stray into the horrific past. In this sense, time management in *Mrs. Dalloway* becomes a coping mechanism through which characters can relieve their debilitating stress, physical ailments, and haunting memories and manage the lasting consequences of World War I.

World War I decimated much of the young male British population. Approximately 8.9 million British soldiers were mobilized, and over 900,000 were killed. The British Army sustained a 35% casualty rate during WWI ("WWI Casualty and Death Tables"). This means that one in three soldiers were either killed or injured, and thousands of families had to deal with the death or physical/psychological debilitation of family members. At the end of the war, the country was still in shock and mourning. The war and its horrors brought life to a standstill. When the war ended and people began to transition back into daily life, it was difficult for them to readjust. The actions chronicled in *Mrs. Dalloway* refer to one way that people dealt with this shock and grief: to waste or fill time. As a result, Big Ben is a central character (or sonic image – as Big Ben is always heard rather than seen) in *Mrs. Dalloway*. According to A.J. Lewis, the working title of *Mrs. Dalloway* was *The Hours,* and Woolf initially planned to begin *Mrs. Dalloway* with an elaborate description of striking clocks (16). Time was immensely important to Woolf, and time and the striking of Big Ben are referenced frequently throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*. Near the beginning of the novel, Woolf includes her first description of Big Ben chiming the hours: "One feels . . . an indescribable pause; a suspense . . . before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (Woolf 4). The characters are always reminded of the time, and are kept shuffling throughout the day because they require structure and consistency.

The elaborate incorporation of Big Ben echoes the idea of taking life "one day at a time" when a situation is difficult or when dealing with grief. Shannon Forbes states, "Big Ben . . . indicates the ordered, dominating world that urban life provides to those like Clarissa who seek such order and stability. The sound of Big Ben . . . is a dominating presence in each character's life, a demand to adhere to one's schedule, a

reminder that life is progressing in an orderly, measurable fashion" (41). Time, externalized in Big Ben, provides necessary structure to the lives of many individuals in England after World War I. While many characters in the novel must feel as though their lives are falling apart, the consistency and progress of time reminds them that, although the lives of so many were lost, life itself is continually moving forward.

Throughout the text, characters connect the date with the idea that the war is over and things have returned to normal. Clarissa Dalloway, for example, struggles to overcome the oppressive forces of daily life; she is overwhelmed by memories of the past, troubling thoughts about the war, repressive social and gender norms, and distressing existential crises. Clarissa thinks, "In people's eyes . . . was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. For it was the middle of June. The War was over . . . it was over; thank Heaven – over. It was June. The King and Queen were at the Palace" (Woolf 4-5). This quote demonstrates Clarissa's tendency throughout the novel to firmly establish her life and existence in time. By reminding herself of the month and the fact that things in British government were still functioning as normal, Clarissa gains a sense of stability. In order to maintain control of her life and psychological health, Clarissa remains firmly rooted in time; she carefully structures each day, and is always cognizant of the passing of days and the stability of British society and culture.

Time management is also important in the life of Septimus Smith. Unlike Clarissa, Septimus is oblivious to the passing of time and is instead consumed by memories of the war. Septimus' wife Lucrezia, however, attempts to structure his days in order to help him transition back into daily life. She takes Septimus to Regent's Park in hopes that he will notice that daily life is continuing as usual for other British citizens. Lucrezia encourages him to settle back in to his place in their home. Septimus reads a newspaper (yet another symbol of time), and the two work together to fix a hat. Septimus also has

scheduled visits with his doctor that help fill time and structure the seemingly interminable hours of his existence.

Many of the characters in the novel structure their time to fill a space that would otherwise be spent contemplating harmful or difficult topics. Clarissa fills her day with trivial tasks in order to ignore her increasing unhappiness and discontent. Her discontent stems from her unhappy marriage, her perceived anonymity in the rapid urbanization of London, and her lack of an individual sense of self in an age which values democracy, individuality, and individual freedoms. In his 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" Georg Simmel writes, "The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society" (11). Although Clarissa experiences anxiety about her loss of an individual self in a growing and bustling London, Robert Smith argues that Clarissa can reassert her identity through her chosen use of time: "Time is given in democracy, and the function of the free, democratic subject is to manage the time that has been given (again one thinks of *Mrs. Dalloway*), to become conscious of oneself as experiencing phenomenal time, everyday time, and to make that time meaningful and necessary" (25). By doing something as seemingly meaningless as throwing a party, Clarissa is reestablishing her personal freedom and individuality through her chosen use of time, which is one way of coping with the societal changes wrought by World War I.

Another example of creating distraction through completing repetitive or trivial tasks is that Septimus' doctors suggest that he distract himself in order to recover from his undiagnosed PTSD (previously known as "shell shock"). According to Lucrezia, Dr. Holmes suggested that Lucrezia "make her husband . . . take an interest in things outside himself" (Woolf 21) and "make him notice real things, go to a music hall, play cricket" (25). Instead of talking and thinking through their

psychological issues, individuals choose (or are told) to spend their days completing basic tasks as a means of distracting them from real issues.

In addition to providing structure for the characters in the novel, the use of time and Big Ben provides structure for the novel itself. While most novels are divided into chapters, *Mrs. Dalloway* is divided into fractions of time. In "*Mrs. Dalloway*: A Study in Composition," Nathalia Wright explains that Woolf divided *Mrs. Dalloway* into nine divisions of time (355). Woolf confirms the idea of the division and authority of time when she writes, "Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counseled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion" (Woolf 102). Woolf structures the novel so that it is reflective of the experience of her characters. Their lives are divided into fractions of time, and so too is *Mrs. Dalloway.* Wright also states that the chiming of Big Ben usually signals a shift in character (355), which further underlines the idea that time keeps the world (and the plot) moving. The fact that Woolf included this strict adherence to time into her writing of the novel highlights just how deeply the idea of time is embedded in *Mrs. Dalloway.*

An interesting aspect of the division of time is that it does not necessarily correlate to divisions of time in a character's thoughts in the novel. Characters frequently have flashbacks, and the stream-of-consciousness technique employed by Woolf allows characters to mentally jump through time and geographical location. Clarissa and Peter recall their years at Bourton, and Septimus is plagued by memories of the war. The novel suggests the idea that the past is omnipresent, and that a twenty-four hour period actually contains the memories and experiences of thousands of hours. The novel includes ideas of qualitative and quantitative time – the novel chronicles the *quantity* of hours in a day, but also the *quality* of the thoughts and actions within those hours. The large quantity of Clarissa's

day filled with mostly banal tasks contrasts sharply with the relatively short yet immensely deep thoughts and memories of Septimus. While Clarissa's experience could be described as "passed time," Septimus' experience could be described as "lived time."

Wright notes that the consciousness of the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* is also semi-structured and ruled by time: "The consciousness of the characters is not allowed to wander on freely in time and space but is recalled periodically by the confinement of a particular moment" (355). An example of this is the scene in which Septimus and Lucrezia are in Regent's Park. Septimus is recalling terrible memories of World War I and his friend Evans, and he is interrupted by Lucrezia asking him about the time: "'I will tell you the time,' said Septimus, very slowly, very drowsily, smiling mysteriously. As he sat smiling at the dead man in the grey suit the quarter struck – the quarter to twelve" (Woolf 70). Septimus' thoughts are interrupted by time, and the novel immediately transitions to the perspective of Peter, which distracts the reader from the distressing thoughts of Septimus. The presence of time keeps the characters from dwelling too long on troublesome memories of war. They must always be preoccupied to forget the deaths of thousands of their countrymen.

Just as Septimus' thoughts of war are interrupted by time, Clarissa's thoughts are interrupted when she dwells too long on her own unhappiness. Forbes states, "Big Ben's dominance and insistence on order interrupts numerous moments when Clarissa either finds herself sadly contemplating her lack of a unified self or finds herself forced to confront the unhappiness of the life she has chosen" (41). The aftermath of World War I (increased urbanization, women's suffrage, infusion of women into the workplace) had helped Clarissa realize that she could be more than just a housewife. Clarissa contemplates her life and marriage throughout the novel, and she struggles with the idea that her husband's identity has eclipsed her own. When

Peter visits Clarissa and asks her if she is happy with her life as Mrs. Dalloway, Big Ben interrupts her before she has to answer his question: "'Tell me,' he said, seizing her by the shoulders. 'Are you happy, Clarissa? Does Richard-' . . . The sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour stuck out between them with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that" (Woolf 47-48). While the reader is aware that Clarissa is not in a happy marriage, Clarissa is never forced to respond to Peter's question. The intrusion of time allows Clarissa to avoid confessing the dissatisfying nature of her life to Peter, and to herself.

World War I drastically changed the nature of life in England. Many individuals, like Septimus, experienced physical and psychological trauma from the war, and all British citizens had to adapt to the changing social and political ideas of the time. This rapidly changing culture left many individuals with feelings of depression, discontent, confusion, or despair. *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrates that people dealt with these issues by distracting themselves with trivial tasks, such as throwing parties or taking walks in the park. Characters in the novel, particularly Clarissa and Septimus (through the encouragement of his wife) carefully structure their time, leaving them little opportunity to contemplate their problems. While the management of time is applied internally by the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf also externally structures time by incorporating the ringing of Big Ben. The presence of Big Ben also frequently interferes with characters discussing their issues with others. The structure of the novel indicates that, during a period in which life seemed chaotic and British society seemed broken, the thoughtful management of time provided a necessary coping mechanism for individuals. If the characters in the novel – and British society in general – could control the progress of the hours of each day, they could begin to rebuild. The cyclical nature of time – and clocks – indicates that life will continue on

indefinitely, and daily life will repeat in nearly the same way. Time provided the structure needed for a society torn to pieces by The Great War.

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Caught Between the Living and the Dead: Will's Liminal Existence in *Ash Grove*

C. Shawn Conger

In *Ash Grove*, protagonist Will Brinson's mother, Anne, is killed under tragic and mysterious circumstances. The novel chronicles Will's interaction with the world around him from childhood through young adulthood as the question of who killed his mother lingers in his mind. Will blames his father, Cleave, for Anne's murder throughout the book, and the result is an unhealthy relationship with Cleave that is based on rivalry and hatred. Only toward the end of *Ash Grove* do we find out Cleave is responsible for Anne's death, though her demise was unintentional. The manner in which Anne was killed produces a ripple effect in Will's life and leaves his interactions with others severely skewed and dysfunctional. Viewing Will Brinson through a psychoanalytic lens reveals that his interactions with others are the result of an unsettled Oedipus complex related to the death of his parents.

Will's story is one of grieving and avoidant coping strategies brought on by those around him who do not encourage him to employ viable coping skills after his mother's death. The grieving process is a series of complex defense mechanisms that are experienced differently by every individual. It leaves one caught between two worlds—the one that person knew and the one to which he or she must now adjust. This liminal psychological state is taxing on the emotions and can result in irrational behavior until the situation grieved for is accepted and resolved. Will's interactions with those who come into his life can be tied to childhood experiences that are presented in the novel. Will is trapped between the actions of his deceased

mother and father and his need to accept their deaths and mistakes to become a productive member of society.

The main factor in Will's troubled life is the Oedipus complex. Part of this theory, originating with Sigmund Freud, is that every infant has a deep-seated, natural desire to eliminate the presence of the parent of the same sex as the child. In doing so, the baby can then have undivided attention and love from the parent of the opposite sex. This complex has to be resolved over time in order for the child to develop properly from a psychological perspective. Will spends his childhood unable to reconcile the Oedipal struggle of rivalry with his father and relinquishing what has happened to his mother. Once he reaches young adulthood, he utilizes avoidant coping strategies until he finally finds closure and, ultimately, knowledge that he has responsibilities to his own offspring. After examining many of the key events that occur in Will's life, it becomes clear that he is in a transitional psychological state until he learns to effectively cope with the losses that have occurred in his life, especially that of his mother.

Will's relationship with his mother is one that echoes Freud's Oedipus complex. In many of the scenes that pull Anne into the story, Will's recollections of his mother and her scent and warmth dominate his memory. In one scene he tells his mother that he remembers his birth. The episode is infused with talk of her warm skin and the scent of lilac. According to Margot Waddell, "the central Oedipal challenges, those of 'rivalry and relinquishment'" (62), must be resolved in order for one to appropriately adjust "the internal capacity for love and for intimacy" (61). This resolution is as imperative for a young person to experience as "is the repression of the Oedipus complex that separates normal infantile sexuality from adult sexuality" (Bergmann 536). Will never has a chance to reconcile the feelings he has for his mother in an appropriate way because of her untimely death.

The feelings of rivalry toward his father, seated in his subconscious, are never abandoned. Will also has a rivalry with his mother's lover after he catches them together. In addition to these rivalries, there is a spilling over of the love Will feels for Anne onto Betsy, his aunt. This complicates his situation further. He has two sets of love-objects, and two sets of rivals.

Interestingly, one rival, Anne's lover, and one love-object, Anne, are removed from Will's life within the same instant. The moment Anne's life is taken she and her lover are no longer in his Oedipal situation. Betsy and Cleave are left. However, Anne's demise presents Will with other issues that he has to overcome. The Oedipal issues affect Will's ability to navigate through the changes that would normally take place in regard to relinquishment.

Will is left vulnerable in his bereaved position. Not only is Anne removed from his life before he can naturally work through the issues of the subconscious, she is also taken suddenly and without warning. Research shows that bereaved children are "at increased risk for social impairment and/or psychopathology" (Ravies et al. 166). The suddenness of a parent's death is also a factor in how the child will respond. Children who lose a parent to natural causes and are able to prepare for the death show less externalized manifestations of stress. However, children who lose a parent as a result of homicide are "more likely to manifest externalizing distress" (Thompson et al. 363). The loss of Will's mother in a sudden and homicidal way is a stressful situation, and he externalizes that fear, pain, and anxiety.

We are given a glimpse of this externalization when Will meets the three boys in front of Felton's store. Instead of handling the situation appropriately, Will is provoked by the fireworks and taunts of the other children. He isn't able to face the events taking place in his life because no one has taught him how to cope, and the loss of his mother is still fresh. His response is one of impulse and fear as he looks for and utilizes a weapon against the boys who are taunting him.

The event of a parent's death is a situation that would cause a tremendous amount of grief and change in anyone's life. Nadine Thompson and her colleagues say that "it is important to recognize that death of a parent is not a single event, but a series of events that occur before and after the parent's death" (358). This series of events is stressful on a bereaved child and the stress isn't reserved specifically for the death of a parent. Secondary stressors like the boys shooting firecrackers, which would have triggered memories of the car exploding, also have to be resolved. As a result of not being taught how to properly

cope, Will begins avoidance coping and tries to fight his way out of the fearful memory-triggering situation he finds himself in at Felton's. These avoidant coping strategies and an unresolved Oedipal situation, coupled with Will holding his father responsible for Anne's death, are all stressors that can be seen in the dysfunctional relationship he has with his father.

If Will had been given the opportunity to see Cleave grieve Anne's death he might have had a better chance of coping more effectively, for "the degree to which [a] child adjusts to the loss of a parent may depend to a large extent on the surviving parent's own distress and adjustment to the death" (Ravies et al. 167). Will already has the Oedipal situation he is battling within his subconscious. The love-object, his mother, is taken away before he can work out the intricacies of that area of development and now he blames his father, Cleave, for Anne's sudden departure. In addition to blaming Cleave, he has no support from his father emotionally. This is evidenced by Will's response to his father's affection after the incident at Felton's. Cleave decides to take Will with him to the mining office and puts his hand on Will's shoulder after confronting him about the fight. Will is uncomfortable with this sign of affection, yet simultaneously wants it. He doesn't know how to respond to his father's affection.

Freud would say that the uncomfortable feeling comes from his secret desire to be rid of his father. The problem then becomes his inability to work through and relinquish his hate for Cleave because the love-object has been removed. Her removal through death puts Will in the vulnerable position of being a bereaved child who is not receiving support and comfort from his father. Ravies and colleagues say, "when family communication about a parent's death is avoided or when the communication is inadequate, the risk of complicated or pathological mourning or other less favorable outcomes is likely to be increased" (168). Such is the case with Cleave and Will. This leads to avoidant coping and externalized fits of anger such as the one at Felton's store.

To complicate the relationship further, Will suspects his father's involvement in his mother's death. Cleave is responsible for Anne's death and feels that responsibility weighing on him but can't talk to anyone about it without implicating

himself. Cleave's inability to face the situation directly affects Will's ability to cope. The inability of Cleave or Will to reconcile what has happened to Anne is a tremendous stressor. Thomas Ollendick says that "stress and, more generally, negative life events set the stage for the development and onset of a variety of fears and anxieties" (1029). Receiving no support from his father and having Betsy dodge his questions does not foster healthy coping mechanisms. The only solace he finds is in sexual promiscuity and in landscaping, which he discovers while living with his grandparents in Virginia.

Cleave's murder has an effect on Will but not in the same way Anne's did. The loss of his father in relation to the Oedipus theory can be compared to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Sigmund Freud said Hamlet was slow to avenge his father's death because he "came to grief over the task of punishing someone else for what coincided with the substance of his own Oedipus wish" (qtd. in Bergmann 536). This explains why Will is so eager to help Junior Messer after he is arrested for Cleave's murder. Instead of blaming Junior and pushing for the stiffest penalties allowed by law, Will steps in and offers financial assistance for attorneys, gets Junior out of jail, and even gives him a place to live. He knows he should be angry and shouldn't feel like helping Junior, but the subconscious side of him, according to Freud's theory, is actually happy that the obstacle which stood between him and his mother has been removed.

Looking at this from another perspective, Will also feels a sense of relief that his father is gone because Cleave has been the source of his anxiety for most of his life. After Anne's death he is given no comfort from his father and is eventually sent to live with his grandparents in Virginia. Cleave isn't able to work through the loss himself because he is responsible, and offers no encouragement for Will to do so either. He pushes Will off on someone else so he won't have to deal with him. Cleave is great at eliminating problems. Because Cleave died in a sudden and similar way to Anne, Will finds some sense of peace and feels that revenge has been enacted. In a sense, he is grateful to Junior because his mother's death has been vindicated through Junior's actions. Cleave's death gives Will the opportunity to resolve the Oedipal issue he has dealt with his entire life. The

resolution of the internal conflict affords him the opportunity to build, or rebuild, relationships with people such as Deana.

Deana and Will share a lot of intimate, and at times cold and unfriendly, moments throughout *Ash Grove*. When they were children, she is quite taken by him and he seems not to notice her. As they age into adolescents the feelings of attraction become mutual. But as a result of his inability to resolve his Oedipal conflict, Will does not know how to have a stable and intimate relationship. Margot Waddell states in the *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*:

> A person's capacity for such a relationship depends on their coming to terms with the discrepancies between their perception of the chosen, and usually briefly idealized, love-object (for such is "falling in love") and the actual characteristics of that same love-object which begin to become apparent. Whether or not the disappointment, disillusionment, rage and frustration are felt to be bearable will depend on the outcome of myriad attempts to work through previous loves and losses—the first among these perhaps being a baby's discovery that the external world (in the sense of extra-uterine) does not offer unlimited provision of the "stuff of life." (54)

The discrepancy Will has to overcome is two-fold. First, he must resolve the rivalry and relinquishment aspect of the Oedipal situation. Secondly, he must learn to cope more effectively with the loss of his mother. Initially consumed by Anne's death and all the surrounding unanswered questions, Will is incapable of resolving these issues and is in a liminal state of existence. He loves Deana, yet he has too many issues to become emotionally involved with her.

Another factor that plays into the way Will interacts with Deana is the fact that he witnesses his mother in a dominant sexual position with a man who was not his father. This has a huge impact on Will's view of sex and fidelity because of the very detailed account he gives of this event in the book. The focus of the account isn't necessarily on the action itself; it revolves more around Will's reaction and his mother's blank stare. She is so entwined with her lover that she doesn't even realize Will is talking to her at first. To add insult to injury, she

lies to Will. That lie causes the aggression Will displays toward Deana while they are in Anne's room. He knows his mother was a liar and, during the bedroom encounter, even tells Deana that she looks like his mother. He then engages Deana in an abusive account of how people are liars and how it's hard to see the truth. He calls it a game—exactly what his mother says about her sexual encounter with her lover.

Will is not able to be tender or to love because he has not found an inhabitable place in the adult world. His vision of the adult world is skewed by his mother's death, his suspicion that his father was involved, and his father's inappropriate handling of Will after Anne was killed. Never having a secure and honest relationship, he is incapable of developing one now. Instead, he has developed "a reliance on multiple sexual experiences as a defense against the felt impossibility of integrating 'the sensual and the tender'—that is to say, again a failure of Oedipal working-through" (Waddell 55). This explains Will's inability to stay with Deana and why he is constantly in and out of her life. It also explains his affairs with married women. He caught his mother having an affair, and he hasn't worked through his Oedipal issues so it has become a part of who he is. It has become a "way of seeking a relationship with that mother/partner, not so much through mindless erotic adventures, but through the capacity to risk loving and losing in the name of fully engaging with life" (Waddell 55). It isn't until Will learns he has a daughter that he can begin to resolve all of these deficiencies resulting from his unresolved Oedipal issues. Will's relationship with Deana becomes the catalyst to this reconciliation, and the product of their relationship, Sophie, is the thing that holds Will and Deana together—not necessarily *together* in the sense that they will be married or even date, but in the sense that they will forever be connected through Sophie.

Will and Sophie are inversions of one another. Will was seven when he lost his mother and Sophie is seven when she is introduced to her father. For his first seven years Will got to know Anne, whereas Sophie has missed out on the first seven years and will get to know her father for the rest of her life. Will develops into someone with the potential to become a good father as the novel progresses, but initially he is too weighed

down by his own issues to devote any time to anyone other than himself. However, toward the end of the book Will learns what the root of his troubles has been and in doing so has overcome those issues. It can be anticipated that he and Sophie will get to know one another and cultivate a lasting and loving relationship, contrary to the one he had with Cleave. It is his opportunity to break the cycle of bad fatherhood. The only way he can do this is to conquer his own psychological shortcomings. By helping his father's killer, Will has relinquished the rivalry he had with Cleave. Subconsciously Will has a part in the outcome of Cleave's death, which affords him the opportunity to move beyond his cycle of unhealthy relationships. It provides him the confidence needed to develop a healthy relationship with his daughter, Sophie.

Approaching *Ash Grove* from a psychoanalytical perspective and applying some of Freud's thoughts on behavior gives more meaning to Will's actions. Analyzing the intricate nuances that comprise who he is allows the reader to view things from his perspective. Throughout the novel he is in a liminal state, constantly coming and going, wanting love yet refusing it, and seeking closure but not finding it—not until the end of the novel. The sight of his daughter paired with the closure he receives about his mother's death has helped Will move on and mature as a person. Will has reached a place of comfort and maturity and has moved from the disturbed liminal state he first appears in, to one of contentment by the end of the story.

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Genesis B: The Anglo-Saxon Fall from Grace

John Corum

Little mattered more than honor to most early medieval Anglo-Saxons. Their society was one in which respect for honor and valor served as the exclusive source of order in an otherwise lawless era. This honor bound a subject to his ruler in a mutually beneficial codependence known as *comitatus*, ensuring the ruler's provision of treasure and protection in exchange for his subject's unconditional loyalty (especially in times of war). Consequently, the necessity to defend one's honor led to the emergence of boasting as a means of maintaining reputation. And the quest to increase one's honor through war led to an overconfidence that prompted many Anglo-Saxon warriors to challenge undefeatable enemies. Indeed, these values of honor manifested in virtually all facets of Anglo-Saxon life and have a strong presence in Anglo-Saxon literature, in particular *Genesis B*. A poetic reinterpretation of the fall of man, *Genesis B*, embedded within the longer poem, *Genesis A*, functions to synthesize Anglo-Saxon cultural values with Christianity. Indeed, *Genesis B* is a blend of traditional biblical narrative and Anglo-Saxon cultural values associated with *comitatus*, boasting, and overconfidence.

Of course, one doesn't have to read for long to discover evidence of such a conclusion. The opening portion, section five, depicts a reciprocal bond embodying *comitatus* between God and his angels: "His handiwork stood together on the sand, knowing nothing of sorrow / to give them lament, if only they should perform the pleasure of God" (243-44). Having just finished creating his angels, God resolves to shield them from harm and sorrow – so long as they remain loyal to him. This

sort of bought loyalty is rampant in Anglo-Saxon literature (such as when *Beowulf's* Hrothgar bestows gifts upon his warriors in the mead-hall) and strongly resembles the real-world social structures of Anglo-Saxon society.

Comitatus is even more apparent, however, in the relationship between Satan and his followers. Satan, bound in hell, needs one of his fellow fallen angels to corrupt the newly created mankind. He uses the notion of *comitatus* as a method of persuasion: "If ever I parted out prince-treasures to any of my thanes…he could never repay my rewards / at a better time with gifts in return" (410-14). In this section, Satan is leveraging his doling out of treasure against his subjects, arguing they are honor-bound to offer service as recompense. This idea of paying for loyalty with treasure is almost explicitly referring to *comitatus*. Thus, the presence of mutual honor-bound responsibilities in *Genesis B* is not particularly subtle.

This emphasis on honor becomes especially problematic for Satan, who decides he is too powerful to continue as a thane of his creator and boasts that he will soon overthrow God and take up leadership of the heavenly realms himself: "I can be their master / to rule this realm" (288-89). This type of boasting was quite common in Anglo-Saxon culture and often preceded conflict. Interestingly, God banished Satan from heaven immediately after this boast was made, even though Satan had yet to actually incite the rebellion. This, too, was the result of Anglo-Saxon culture. In that era, little was given more weight than one's words. To boast of something was to make an oath (as seen in *the Battle of Maldon* when Bryhtnoth's prideful words commit him to battle). To boast and then fail to follow through would certainly diminish one's honor. In other words, God banished Satan after the boast because the boast, itself, committed Satan to rebel in the near future. Thus, the boast was the beginning of the rebellion.

Though Satan boasted that he was powerful enough to overthrow God, he clearly overestimated his abilities, as he was virtually powerless to stop his banishment and subsequent imprisonment in hell: "The fiends understood that they had exchanged / torments innumerable by their overweening thought and the might of God" (335-36). In other words, Satan and his followers were overconfident in their powers and

underestimated God and his might. This overconfidence is also relatively typical of Anglo-Saxon literature. Many military battles depicted (such as in *the Battle of Maldon*) are won or lost because one side grew overconfident and confronted enemies mightier than themselves. Satan, too, seems to have fallen victim to this arrogance. He hoped to increase his honor through success in war, and so, too, did his followers. Unfortunately, it was this overgrowth of Satan's own ambition, like that of many Anglo-Saxon heroes of legend (Bryhtnoth, the elderly Beowulf, etc.) that led to his eventual downfall. The quest to increase one's honor, it seems, is not without risk.

The importance of one's honor in Anglo-Saxon culture is depicted quite explicitly in *Genesis B*. Throughout the poem, honor (or the quest for more of it) drives nearly every character's choices, serving as the impetus for most of the rising action. By merging these qualities with a biblical narrative, *Genesis B* thoroughly synthesizes Anglo-Saxon culture with Christianity. Indeed, *Genesis B* is a composite of traditional biblical narrative and Anglo-Saxon cultural values associated with *comitatus*, boasting, and overconfidence. This blend helps to demonstrate the function of these cultural values in Anglo-Saxon society: a society in which honor was the driving force of life, war, and order.

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Dialectal Difference Ain't No Deficit: Combating Linguicism in Language Arts, ESL, and EFL Classrooms

Anthony Gross, Jr.

The concept of a Standard English cemented by the prioritzing of written over spoken language, high rates of literacy, and the declarations of what constitutes Standard English by those in positions of power has led to *linguicism*, prejudice based on a person's language. The presence of linguistic prejudice is unhindered within most facets of society, including education systems that now emphasize the acceptance of diversity, from sex to race and ethnicity. In both English as a Second Language (ESL) and regular language arts classrooms, the issue of linguicism is an important topic for teachers to consider regarding their own attitudes toward language diversity and their students' attitudes toward vari-ations in their peers' speech. Whether English is the students' first language or second language, it is adamant that teachers discuss with them the importance of language variation, emphasizing acceptance and facilitating a means for students to explore their own language and the language of their peers in an environment of learning.

In a regular language arts classroom, much of the linguicism may center on dialectal differences caused by socioeconomic status, regional differences, and familial origins. It is important for educators to recognize that these differences are not a result of poor grammar; they are not random but systematic variations comparable to any other grammatical pattern. Students in language arts classrooms who feel that they do not speak "correctly" based on their perception of language and how their peers speak may come to fear speaking out in class or con-

fronting situations where Standard English is usually expected, primarily in writing. If students avoid writing all together there is little chance that they will succeed, so it is important that teachers promote writing in general before they draw students' attention to how they are writing. Linda Christensen states that "when more attention is paid to the way something is written or said than what is said, students' words and thoughts become devalued. Students learn to be silent, to give as few words as possible for teacher criticism" (143). In order to combat the student silence Christensen refers to, it is important for educators to allow their students to use their own language in the classroom. The different dialects that students speak give flavor to their writing and can promote more creative uses of their language. Christensen discusses the use of writing assignments based on student experiences to help students come to accept and appreciate their language differences. She says, "One way to encourage the reluctant writers who have been silenced and the not-so-reluctant writers who have found a safe and sterile voice is to encourage them to recount their experiences" (Christensen 143). Having students recount their experiences allows them to rely on the dialectal speech habits of those around them. Additionally, through sharing experiences, students can find other ways to connect with each other, and the language similarities then become a backdrop for even further connections.

The incorporation of shared experience through writing and language is also relevant to the ESL and English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Students in the ESL classroom will often have very different backgrounds, and through sharing experiences, they can realize things they have in common with their peers. Because student backgrounds are often so varied in these settings, celebrating cultural difference is an important feature of the classroom, especially because Western culture is inherently promoted by teaching a Western language. Language is embedded in culture, so it is necessary for educators to acknowledge both in the language classroom. Hala Dalbani emphasizes, in regard to the Arab EFL classroom, the importance of incorporating cultural materials into the classroom in order to maintain respect for the culture of learners. He states that EFL teachers need to be aware that, because their materials are often created by British and

American experts, they need to "look for remedies, for in this global age…, Arab cultural identity may be assimilated by the Western culture and ideologies dominant in the target EFL materials" (Dalbani 1). Certainly, because English is of Western origin, it is important to take into account the cultural weight that comes with it, and it is necessary for educators to acknowledge the culture of students' first languages while teaching them about the culture of the second.

Additionally, the emphasis on language in the ESL and EFL classroom is much more evident because English is not the students' first language, so students may already be attuned to variations in their speech habits. It is necessary for students in ESL and EFL classrooms to grasp the basic grammar of the language in order to communicate competently, but they should also recognize that just because there is a concept of a Standard English, that doesn't mean it is not okay to play with the language. In addressing misconceptions about language, Leah Zuidema discusses two definitions of *grammar*, the prescriptive and the descriptive. She says, "When we define *grammar* as the organic patterns of a language, or descriptions of these patterns, it is correct to state that English must obey grammatical rules" (Zuidema 668). It is necessary for ESL and EFL students to learn that there are certain structural rules that cannot be broken if they hope to communicate successfully, such as the rule that an adjective must come before and not after a noun. However, the prescriptive concept of grammar, what Zuidema refers to as the "rules of taste," does not always need to be enforced in the ESL and EFL classroom. Zuidema says, "Most people will admit…that breaking these kinds of socially imposed rules does not actually impede anyone's understanding of the message a person is attempting to communicate" (668). Students can play with the language through writing, like poetry, or through speech, including song, to help them recognize patterns in the language but also recognize its pliability.

Students in regular language arts classrooms and ESL and EFL classrooms need to learn the standard structures of the English language because it is necessary to communicate successfully in certain contexts. However, the importance of a standard should be placed on the conveyance of meaning and not on trifling aspects of English, such as "Do not end a

sentence in a preposition." Teaching students to abide by these sticky rules will enforce the continuance of linguicism in society, as these students will become future employers, educators, and lawmakers, people who hold power in society and who, therefore, determine what is "right" and "wrong" language. Eliminating linguistic prejudice begins with promoting acceptance of linguistic differences in the classroom and recognizing that these differences merely reflect culture, not intelligence.

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We Are Not Who We Are: Metahorror's Examination of Genre and Audience

Collin Hammond

Wes Craven's 2011 film *Scream 4* opens with a flurry of false starts, most of which are revealed to be the opening scenes of the movie-within-a-movie *Stab* series. In one of these scenes Rachel, an average horror film vixen, gripes to her friend Chloe, "A bunch of articulate teenagers sit around and deconstruct horror movies until a ghost face kills them one by one. It's been done to death. The whole self-aware, post-modern meta-shit is over. Stick a fork in 1996 already." As Rachel and Chloe (played by Anna Paquin and Kristen Bell in the obligatory and self-referential opening-scene celebrity cameos established and required by the *Scream* series) talk about teenagers sitting and deconstructing horror films, they are themselves existing as teenagers sitting and deconstructing horror films. This is a film talking about itself. Even the reference to 1996 is metatextual, being the year the original *Scream* (Craven) was released.

It is this blurring of reality and fiction that make up the so-called meta universe. With these lines blurred, both the girls and the film they inhabit provide commentary. This commentary is the essence of metahorror, examining not only itself, but also the filmmakers, fans, and function of horror films. Kimberly Jackson distills the qualifications for metahorror thusly:

> […] while the films self-consciously refer to their own construction and the rules within which they operate, they do not therefore escape from that structure; their self-reflexivity is itself a part of their construction, and they do not in any real way break the fourth wall. In this sense, these films are properly deconstructive; they expose the limits of the narrative structure in which they operate and thereby open up an internal space of play; they are at once definers of the genre and moments or examples of it. (11)

While Jackson's definition provides an excellent introduction, her assertion that these films break the fourth wall in no real way is incomplete; it does not account for the impact that these films have on the horror genre and society at large. Metahorror ultimately pulls double duty as a mirror and sounding board for the horror genre by examining horror's function and definition in society, its influence and repercussions on society, and society's continuing demand for horror. It does this by simultaneously indicting and defending both itself and its audience.

Wes Craven's New Nightmare or: Why Witches Are Important

Wes Craven's New Nightmare (Craven, 1994) examines all three of these areas quite successfully. This film seeks to define exactly what a horror movie is by stretching that label into a metaphysical realm. *New Nightmare* can be read as part horror film, part documentary, and part fantasy film. The film follows a fictionalized version of Heather Langenkamp, the star of Craven's original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), as well as Freddy Krueger himself, Robert Englund. Craven even makes an appearance in a scene between Heather and himself, which is the key to unlocking *New Nightmare*'s meaning. Craven explains that the previous *Elm Street* films encapsulated some kind of ancient evil and held it safely during the serie's tenure. Now that the films have stopped, the evil is free and trying to cross

into reality—the reality of the film being another layer of our own—in order to pursue that which it lives for: the killing of innocents. He explains that storytellers can capture this evil, and the only way to keep it from bursting into reality is for another film to be made. This approach to the function of horror films defines them socially as a kind of necessary evil. Society demands horror films, regardless of whatever violent repercussions may occur, because without them the much worse horror of these ancient evils will break free and wreak havoc. One reading of this ancient evil Craven speaks of is man's own nature, which is somehow tamed by the horror film.

It is possible that the ancient evil Craven refers to in *New Nightmare* is fear itself. Glenn D. Walters states, "Horror pictures afford people the opportunity to articulate, identify, and manage their fears by taking an abstract concept like fear and concretizing it into stimuli that are projected onto a television screen or a movie screen." Walters' suggestion that films can concretize an abstract concept like fear and deal with it in a manageable fashion suggests that horror movies provide a kind of public service to the world by giving everyone something or someone they can be afraid of together. Within the safety of a dark theater, audiences can confront fears in ways that might not have been possible before.

In *New Nightmare*, Craven uses Heather's reaction to her son Dylan's bedtime story of Hansel and Gretel as a talking point about parents and their attitudes toward violent films. Heather stops reading to Dylan when the witch is pushed into the fire, saying the story is very violent. Yet if not for that story, Dylan would not have known to leave a trail of breadcrumbs for Heather to follow when Freddy kidnaps him, nor how to confront and defeat Freddy in later in the film. In this way, the horror film becomes a teaching tool in how to deal with real-life trauma or fears. Even if viewers are not afraid of Freddy Krueger in particular, they are almost certainly afraid of the prospect of death or the loss of a loved one. Through inter-

actions with these horror films, viewers are able to face their own fears in a safe environment, helping them to identify and eliminate real causes of anxiety in their life. As Isabel Cristina Pinedo says, "For the fan viewer, the horror film provides an exquisite exercise in coping with the terrors of everyday life" (135). The viewing of horror films, then, acts as a preparatory experience that has the potential to equip audiences with skills for surviving more than a razor-fingered maniac; they can survive their own worst nightmares.

In order to fully understand the implications made by entries in the metahorror subgenre, one must first understand an audience's desire to watch a style of film so largely despised. Stuart Hanscomb presents a possible reason: "In terms of our emotional engagement, horror is closer to the truth of our existence than are science fiction or fantasy. We often look for truth in art, even if it makes us uncomfortable" (15). Making audiences uncomfortable is precisely the response many horror films attempt to generate. Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972) is meant to make the audience mourn the state of the world and the senseless violence that takes place within it every single day. John Carpenter has three films he refers to as his Apocalypse Trilogy: *The Thing* (1982), *Prince of Darkness* (1987), and *In the Mouth of Madness* (1995), so called "because in the end, in all three, the world may be doomed" (Black). While they show bleak outlooks on humanity's present and future, films like Craven's *The Last House on the Left* and Carpenter's Apocalypse Trilogy can help prepare audiences for the worst eventualities, which is just one of the positive aspects of horror films.

Scream or: What Came First, the Psycho, or *Psycho*?

In contrast to his earlier work, which focused on the true horror that is present in everyday life, Craven's next successful film series would focus on the perceived negative effects of the horror film on society while defending the art form through

very direct means. Written by Kevin Williamson, *Scream* would be one of the horror films to revive a failing, oversaturated horror genre during the late 1990s. *Scream* follows a group of suburban high school students suffering devastating losses at the hands of an unidentified killer. However, unlike their earlier genre-defining counterparts, these kids are educated in horror tropes and expectations. The aforementioned killer is someone in the town of Woodsboro with extensive knowledge of horror movies who is putting that knowledge to deadly use. By establishing a world in which not only do horror and slasher movies exist, but also in which someone is using the rules of said movies to kill, *Scream* plays into what Kendall R. Phillips refers to as "[America's] uniquely postmodern cultural attitude, one that was simultaneously highly derivative and deeply aware of its own derivative status" (168). Billy and Stu, the revealed dual killers, are well aware that their plan is derivative of a multitude of slasher movies, but for them, therein lies its brilliance.

Of course, this leads directly into a debate that has been taking place since the beginning of imitable behavior; does cinema violence cause real-life violence? Billy claims it does not, telling Sidney, "Don't you blame the movies! Movies don't create psychos, movies make psychos more creative!" This defense is again raised in the first two sequels of the series, although put in different words. Mickey, one of the killers from *Scream 2* (Craven, 1997), claims that his entire rampage is just "a prelude to the trial" in which he plans to blame the movies for his behavior. Sidney then points out, "You're a psychotic," to which Mickey replies, "Yeah, well… That'll be our little secret." When Roman, the killer from *Scream 3,* is trying to blame his murders on his circumstances, Sidney says, "Do you know why you kill people Roman? Do you? Because you choose to. There is no one else to blame. Why don't you take some fucking responsibility?" All this is to indict the audience, the critics, and

the militant parent groups insisting that these movies cause the acts of violence present in the world.

In this way, in every entry of the *Scream* franchise Sidney becomes the Final Girl that Carol Clover defines in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*: "The Final Girl has not just manned herself; she specifically unmans an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with" (49). This is true of every killer in the series: Sidney impales Billy with a long umbrella after he displays some homoerotic tendencies with Stu. Mickey is essentially an adopted/replacement Billy, complete with a complicated maternal relationship; Sidney uses her boyfriend's fraternity lavalier, a traditional symbol of male virility and possession, to lacerate Mickey's face. Roman has the biggest mommy issues of the bunch, launching this entire saga because he was unable to deal with maternal abandonment; Sidney pierces his heart with an icepick.

Sidney begins *Scream 4* with more masculine attributes, having unmanned her assailants in the previous installments and having published a self-help book in the interim, establishing her as a model of male authority. Jill, Sidney's cousin, is the mastermind who enacts the most recent killing spree in order to become the new Final Girl and receive all the fame that comes with it. It is interesting that in this installment, Jill seeks to become the Final Girl by attempting to unman Sidney, who is not male to begin with. Her attempt to become Sidney is similar to Buffalo Bill's attempt to become female in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), since ultimately neither of them is successful in their transformation. Sidney thwarts Jill simply by surviving as she has done all along. Once Jill is dead and Sidney is the survivor once again, she becomes an unkillable forever-Final Girl, which broaches a meta-lesson about horror: if the Final Girl cannot be killed, then the audience should stop demanding this ritualistic attempt.

The Cabin in the Woods; or, We Are Not Who We Are

Unfortunately, ritualized is exactly what tropes, rules, and characters become when they are too familiar, and as a result they can become meaningless. The audience may even forget it is participating in a ritual unless someone reminds them. This is exactly what Joss Whedon and Drew Goddard did when they wrote a metahorror film that expanded its sights from simply the slasher subgenre to horror proper. *The Cabin in the Woods* (Goddard, 2012) establishes a very familiar group of college kids in a very familiar setting of a literal cabin in the woods. The group is complete with five friends, the same number as in Sam Raimi's 1981 horror film *The Evil Dead*, and the same number and demographics as the five friends in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974). A harbinger approaches the group and warns them not to proceed, just as in *Texas Chain Saw* and *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980). The only thing missing is the typical behavior expected from a group of nubile young college kids. Not to worry, though… Literally below the surface of the cabin in the woods lies a gigantic control center full of corporate workers, flitting about trying to set up the perfect scenario for the five tributes: the Whore, the Fool, the Athlete, the Scholar, and the Virgin. All are to be ritualistically slaughtered for the entertainment and appeasement of the "ancient ones" that live below.

In an article entitled "Why We Crave Horror Movies," Stephen King discusses the idea of our own ancient ones:

> The mythic horror movie, like the sick joke, has a dirty job to do. It deliberately appeals to all that is worst in us. It is morbidity unchained, our most base instincts let free, our nastiest fantasies realized… and it all happens, fittingly enough, in the dark. […] For myself, I like to see the most aggressive of them—*Dawn of the Dead*, for instance—as lifting a trap door to the hungry alligators swimming around in that subterranean river beneath.

> Why bother? Because it keeps them from getting out, man. It keeps them down there and me up here. It was Lennon and McCartney who said that all you need is love, and I would agree with that.
>
> As long as you keep the gators fed.

King's approach to horror movies is exactly what Whedon and Goddard are tapping into with *The Cabin in the Woods*. They are jumping into the cellar with the five kids and playing in the dark. They are feeding those gators, but simultaneously issuing a warning about them and what they mean. The film removes any secondary layer between the audience and the ancient ones awaiting what Sitterson, one of the key operators in the film, refers to as "The Greatest Show on Earth."

Subsequently, if there is no separation between the film's audience and the ancient ones demanding the blood of these young people, the audience then becomes the enemy, or at the very least, the antagonist. As a result, the film compels the audience to turn on itself when the multiple layers of the film begin to unfold. The scene in which Jules, the designated whore, dies is fraught with gaze. Laura Mulvey,speaks of how "the determining male gaze projects its [fantasy] on to the female form which is styled accordingly" (11). No scene has ever embodied this idea more than when Sitterson and Hadley sit at their control booths, watching a giant screen on which Jules is projected as they turn their knobs and pull their levers in order to create the perfect opportunity for her to choose of her own free will (which has very little meaning at this point in the film, and even less later on) to transgress by providing nudity to her audience. Gerry Canavan impresses the depth of that audience:

> The multiple audiences for Jules's nudity signal the multiple levels of narration in the film:
>
> 1. "upstairs": her boyfriend, Curt, the "Athlete," to whom she freely chooses to display her nudity;
> 2. "downstairs": the predominantly male whitecoats,

who manipulate Jules to direct that nudity towards one of any number of unseen cameras;

3. the watchers: the Cthulhu-esque Old Ones who are being narcotized by this display, standing in for and parodying;
4. the film's actual audience in the cinema.

This is where Whedon and Goddard have been leading all along. In the narrative of this story, just as in *New Nightmare*, the horror show must go on in order to protect the world from something much worse than a few horror movies or the deaths of innocents. Whereas in *New Nightmare* Heather decides to essentially sacrifice herself by embodying Nancy once again in order to subdue this evil presence, the heroes of *Cabin* do not. Marty the Fool and Dana the Virgin decide that if this is what must be done in order to keep the world, then the world should not be kept. Whether or not the audience agrees with their decision is, at this point irrelevant, because Whedon and Goddard have placed the audience squarely in the destroyer's seat. It is the audience's demand for entertainment that Sitterson, Hadley, and the rest are serving. The audience is that to whom these character archetypes are sacrificed. The audience is responsible for everything because it demands to see bad things happen to beautiful people. But as long as the blood keeps flowing and the audience is satisfied, the boogey-men will be contained within their cinematic confines.

Conclusion; or, Stick a Fork in 1996 Already

Although *Cabin in the Woods* indicts the audience as voyeuristic evil gods, it ultimately sides with the technicians, absolving the viewers of their guilt by showing what happens when the slumber of the ancient ones ends: nothing short of the end of the world. *Scream 4*, as with the rest of the franchise, asks what effects media immersion has on society and saddles the viewer with personal accountability for their actions. *New*

Nightmare defends the horror genre itself by touting the horror film as evil's container, rather than its progenitor. But what happens when metahorror fails to recognize its own obsolescence? The current mediascape is one of instant, unfiltered access. As Jill says during the climax of *Scream 4*, "See, with you, the world just heard about what happened, but with us, they're going to see it. It's going to be a worldwide sensation. I mean, people have got to see this shit. It's not like anyone reads anymore." According to BoxOfficeMojo.com, *Scream 4*'s lifetime gross was $38.2 million—a little over a third of the original *Scream*'s $103 million. *The Cabin in the Woods* scored similarly low at the box office, with a lifetime gross of just over $42 million. Marketing mistakes and sequel sickness aside, these films drastically underperformed compared to their earlier counterparts, which warrants exploration.

Is it possible that metahorror has become too artificial to affect audiences the way it once did? Has it simply become too familiar? What function does metahorror serve in a society that doesn't watch metahorror? Why are videos of death scenes extricated from their horror movies available on YouTube? Is there a difference between viewing contextualized and uncontextualized violence, and if so, does the contemporary horror audience care? What, if anything, are viewers gleaning by stripping away the context, meaning, and larger ideas of these films to focus on the carnage? Why sit through the commentary when you can go straight to the cool kill scene? Perhaps, as Jill suggests, people have just got to see this shit. But that's no surprise. It's not like anyone reads anymore.

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No "Happily Ever After": Examining the Failed Marriage Plots in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*

Jaclyn Melcher

Although separated by almost forty years of history and ideological change, the fictional time spaces presented in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *On Chesil Beach*—June 1923 and July 1962, respectively—have many commonalities. Both of these British novels focus on the happenings of a single day grounded by an event (for Florence and Edward, a wedding night; for Mrs. Dalloway, a party) with some departures to memories of the past and future. Readers of each novel gain access to the raw, subjective thoughts and struggles of the primary characters, but this access is not entirely unlimited. Just as the reader is not fully aware of every aspect of a character, the varying characters must attempt to understand each other through an internal analysis of words and actions, and almost as importantly, unspoken words and inactions. Although the characters in each novel have shared external stimuli and experiences with friends, family, and strangers, each characters' own internal response is vastly different from the next, shaped by the subconscious, rarely articulated part of themselves that may never be uncovered or understood—even by their closest confidants or lovers.

This lack of understanding creates the relationship difficulties laid out in both novels, with each novel containing failed marriage plots that stand in sharp contrast to the idyllic notions of romance and holy matrimony that were popularized in Victorian literature. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *On Chesil Beach* deal with the issues that surface when people do not subscribe to, or

succeed in achieving, the marriage "fantasy… singular to the Western world" (Gray 279), each novel exhibiting along the way both similarities and differences in characters' thoughts and experiences which reflect on a universal scale the true variations that exist among humans who don't fit into the conventional, heterosexual marriage mold that Western societies have promoted as the one true goal.

Besides the difference in time period (although both novels are situated sometime after a World War and show the effects of that war), the major distinction between the two texts is that Mrs. Dalloway stays in her failed marriage with Richard, while Florence and Edward separate immediately and permanently. Neither option is a perfect solution for the characters, yet everyone must live with the aftermath of decisions dictated in part by a sexually repressive landscape. The first sentence in *On Chesil Beach* sums up this complicated landscape: "They lived in a time when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible" (McEwan 3). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the unexpected arrival of Peter Walsh sets many memories and "what-ifs" into motion. Clarissa Dalloway considers her life and the choices she has made, thinking of the two lovers whom she did not choose over Richard: Peter and Sally Seton. Peter represents the "fickle flame" of love coined by French Renaissance writer Michel de Montaigne (Gray 280). On one hand, Clarissa does seem to love Peter. At the party, Sally thinks, "Clarissa had cared for [Peter] more than she had ever cared for Richard. [She] was positive of that" (Woolf 2262). However, Peter was the very person who ruined perhaps, the best, most euphoric moment of Clarissa's life. When Peter interrupted her kiss and stolen moments with Sally, Clarissa remembered that the feeling "was like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible!" (Woolf 2175). Although Clarissa does love Peter and Richard, to some extent, it was another female who brought out her true passions and awakened her: "Sally it was who made her feel, for the first time, how sheltered the life at Bourton was. She knew nothing about sex — nothing about social problems" (Woolf 2174).

Florence does not experience the same homoerotic awakening that Clarissa experiences, but she does have a similar background in terms of lack of sexual knowledge.

Florence was not used to physical contact or to the kind of "liberated" sensual passion that Edward so desired. She was foreign to it, and even repulsed by it. Finally verbalizing the sexual inadequacies that she'd kept trapped in her mind their entire relationship, Florence explained to Edward, "I'm pretty hopeless, absolutely hopeless at sex. Not only am I no good at it, I don't seem to need it like other people, like you do" (McEwan 187). Florence's marriage pamphlet, filled with seemingly simple instructions, did not work for her; much like the Victorian romance, it was not 'one size fits all' as society was led to believe:

> Since Freud, science has tended to dichotomize human affection along lines of deviance and normalcy, genitality and platonic love, instead of leaving it as a graduated spectrum of emotion in which love, friendship, sensuality, sexuality, can freely flow into each other as they did in the past (Gray 283)

The contemporary ideas of what love should and shouldn't be, how it should appear, and how it should make one feel, were manufactured by Western culture. Florence lived at a time just before these notions of "acceptable" love began to evolve and expand. Thus, her feelings—socially considered more "devian[t]" than "normal"—put her into the position of an outsider to the successful marriage plot. Edward explained to her, "We could be so free with each other, we could be in paradise. Instead we're in this mess" (McEwan 183). Edward was intent on living the popularized sexual existence laid out in the successful marriage plot, not realizing that alternatives—such as basing a marriage on platonic love, as Florence suggested—could actually be freer.

Conditioned by the times and his being blindly "in love with love," Edward did not understand the loving and sacrificial nature of Florence's offer and considered her to be deceptive (Gray 281). He had no concept that their love could exist and thrive on a source other than sex, and he couldn't believe she loved him if she did not possess his same desires for intimacy. Earl G. Ingersoll argues that "like millions of other men, Edward had been encouraged to believe that sexual gratification is only meaningful in a loving, i.e. conjugal, relationship, and that desire and love ought to be equal in

intensity and frequency" (Ingersoll 135). In other words, he had been sold on the idea of

> A fantasy… only a century old at that: the notion that sexual union between men and women who believe that they are passionately in love, a union achieved by free choice and legalized by marriage, tends to offer a life of perpetual bliss and is the most desirable human bond on earth. (Gray 279)

Edward is enraptured with this notion, and, like Peter, projects the same feelings onto his reading of Florence before her true feelings are revealed. The internal monologue of each man exposes what he believes his wife or lover is thinking, but these interpretations, often heavily romanticized, are far from what the women are actually thinking and feeling.

Although Woolf's novel is similar to McEwan's in that it contains many of the characters' innermost feelings, the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* do not have the same type of verbalized truth revelation in the end that Florence and Edward do. Instead, like the first three-fourths of *On Chesil Beach*, the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* are forced to piece together a knowledge of each other that is often filled with misunderstandings. Having gone to the exotic land of India and failing in his quest to find an equal substitute for Clarissa, Peter returns to England, bringing back with him his constructed view of the woman: "Peter does not simply narrate the events of Clarissa's past, but interprets many pieces of evidence… in order to tunnel back into a highly interconnected if not shared past and create a theory about what she must have thought and felt" (Edmonson 18). Even the last line of the book, when Peter sees Clarissa and thinks, "For there she was" (Woolf 2264) exemplifies the idea that part of Clarissa is filtered through his own, internal analysis.

Woolf creates these noticeable contrasts and discrepancies through her use of free indirect discourse, with the most memorable example being the skywriting scene. Everyone who witnesses the aeroplane swooping through the sky, revealing a single letter at a time, interprets the message differently. The skywriting scene is a communal experience for those who observe it, and Woolf includes it very intentionally:

> The raison d'etre of Woolf's "tunnelling process" is to foreground the deeply intersubjective nature of her character's minds — the ways in which they are continually interpreting each others' behaviors and casually attributing thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires to each other. (Edmonson 22)

The skywriting scene is a visual representation of the various mis-readings that can occur when one would initially assume the message to be "blatant" and obvious. It is a metaphor for the marriage plot and consummation of the marriage, in a sense: a grand sweeping act, meant to elevate those who partake in it, but, breaking the assumed conventionality, open to interpretation and various readings. It thrills some and scares others, with the various people involved not able to account for why their experiences are not all the same. The message is fleeting, and the trails from the "monumental" event fade into the air, failing to be substantial and readable.

Florence's and Edward's attempt to consummate their marriage is similar to the observers' experience with the skywriting scene in that Florence and Edward both interpret the situation differently. She is scared of the foreboding act, wishing to delay it indefinitely, while he is ready to experience an elevated sense of pleasure, and one without guilt. He thinks she feels the same way, making her reactions fit this idea: "In their moment of history, Edward and Florence may seem the unwitting victims of the greater expectations of modern sexuality" (Ingersoll 134-135). The couple have both heard and read about the impending experience—the romanticized union of man and wife—but their attempt to fit into the mold of this marriage plot is met with an unexpected, far from glamorous result. Florence is revolted by the product, appearing calloused in Edward's eyes, but her reaction stems from a time when women were taught to reject and be innocent of sexuality until a marriage was in place.

Both Edward and Florence were products of their time, and both were entirely unprepared for the romantic notions thrust upon them by Western society and the marriage plot. In his anger and embarrassment, Edward calls Florence "frigid, that's what. Completely frigid" (McEwan 191). Peter has a similar reaction to Clarissa: "But women, he thought, shutting his

pocketknife, don't know what passion is. They don't know the meaning of it to men. Clarissa was as cold as an icicle" (Woolf 2200). Neither Peter and Clarissa, nor Edward and Florence, understand how to navigate the sexual landscape of their respective time periods. Time, in the case of Edward, would later yield to a sense of awareness to the broadening definitions of love and desire, but the time, within the context of each novel, is focused on the lives of the characters after the event of marriage as opposed to before: flipping the end-goal of the marriage plot on its head, and exposing the flaws of the notion of "happily ever after."

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* both examine the flaws in the Victorian marriage plot ignored, or not fully explored, by such canonical texts as *Jane Eyre*. Through the use of introspective thinking and free indirect discourse, Woolf and McEwan reveal the inner lives of the younger generations expected to live out the romantic, fulfilling "ever after." This idyllic lifestyle is not as simple as one might imagine, however, and with the rise of the metropolis and technology, the burden of such an inheritance is difficult for both men and women, although in different ways. The language and words for the feelings that Florence and Edward, and Clarissa and Peter, experience have not yet been invented, and these characters are left to figure out things the hard way, unable to ever fully communicate themselves:

> They were too polite, too constrained, too timorous, they went around each other on tiptoes, murmuring, whispering, deferring, agreeing. They barely knew each other and never could because of the blanket of companionable near-silence that smothered their differences and blinded them as much as it bound them. (McEwan 180)

The landscape of the characters' worlds had changed, but the language hadn't quite caught up to offering adequate expressions for what they were feeling and thinking. Ultimately, the couples fail at achieving their respective marriage plots. This failure seems to be an intentional criticism of Western society's "one true goal," and *Mrs. Dalloway* and *On Chesil Beach* can both be seen as examples of characters trying and failing to achieve the ultimately unrealistic and

unobtainable Victorian marriage plot. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa thinks that "she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (Woolf 2159), and this thought exemplifies the Modernist-thinking and post-war world of the novels' protagonists. The couples in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *On Chesil Beach* explore their thoughts and feelings for their significant others over the course of a single day, and each character is forever changed by what happens and doesn't happen during these twenty-four hours.

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History Repeating: Butler's *Kindred* as a Commentary on Time's Cyclic Nature and Slavery's Ramifications

Mara Muccigrosso

In Octavia Butler's 1979 speculative fiction novel *Kindred*, a modern black woman, Dana, is inexplicably and repeatedly sent to the past to save her white ancestor's life and thereby ensure the birth of his daughter who would eventually begin Dana's family line. While the story features time travel and is therefore considered a piece of speculative fiction, time travel in the novel is simply the mechanism through which Butler chooses to make statements about the ease with which slavery and racism are accepted in a society as well as the cyclic nature of time.

Though Butler is considered a science fiction writer, *Kindred* diverges from typical science fiction. Time travel is present in the novel and is in many ways the driving force behind the plot's central conflict, but it is not the point of the story, nor is it deemed important enough to elicit more than a very small amount of explanation within the novel. And this is what makes *Kindred* different from many other works of popular science fiction—a genre that is often not respected by literary critics or theorists because of its tendency towards escapism and its reputation as juvenile. Sarah Wood asserts, however, that "*Kindred* is anything other than escapist fantasy… [it] demonstrates how the legacy of slavery lives on in contemporary American society" (86). *Kindred* does not feature time travel simply for the sake of being a story about time travel (as many science fiction novels do), but instead works to highlight the parallels between antebellum society and our own society today. Marc Steinberg notes, "Butler's neo-slave

narrative, at least in part, takes place in the relative present. As such, it more clearly blurs history and the present" (467). Steinberg says this allows Butler to suggest to her readers "a non-Western conceptualization of history—one in which history is cyclical, not linear—in order to demonstrate ways in which certain forms of race and gender oppression continue late into the twentieth century and beyond" (467). Dana's ability to time-travel in the novel so obviously shows this cyclical conceptualization of time. Raffaella Baccolini describes science fiction as an extrapolation of present society wherein "it has the potential to envision different worlds that can work as a purely imaginative (at worst) or a critical (at best) exploration of our society" (519). The latter sort of science fiction is the genre to which *Kindred* belongs and in which *Kindred* thrives.

One of the central themes Butler uses time travel to demonstrate is the idea that slavery was something so easy to grow accustomed to because it was something so completely ingrained in society. Throughout the novel, Butler's characterization of black and white characters alike and the relationships between them suggest that during the time period *Kindred* depicts, America's shameful era of slavery, people of all races were victims of the society they lived in.

There is in the novel no better example of this idea than the character Rufus Weylin, Dana's white slave-owning ancestor. Rufus is in many ways the exemplary evil and unkind plantation owner one expects to find within slave narratives. And yet, Butler expertly makes him a character both her protagonist and audience care about, pity, and even in some ways understand. Perhaps this is because Dana, and Butler's audience through Dana, meets him when he is only a boy. In Dana's first conversation with the 8 or 9-year-old Rufus Weylin, she can see on his back a "crisscross of long red welts … old marks, ugly scars of at least one much worse beating" (Butler 25) that he says he received from his unforgiving and greedy father—the father from whom Rufus learned racism and cruelty. Though Rufus has been raised in an environment where blacks are seen as little more than chattel to buy and sell, the boy-Rufus still treats Dana "companionably" (Butler 29) and with respect despite her race. While Rufus does seem spiteful and petulant in many ways, Dana excuses this, saying, "the boy

was obviously concerned for me. His father sounded like a man who worked at inspiring fear" (Butler 30), and at the end of their conversation, Dana even decides she is fond of him: "His environment had left its unlikable marks on him, but in the antebellum South, I could have found myself at the mercy of someone much worse" (Butler 32). Even then, at the start of both the novel and Dana and Rufus' tumultuous relationship, Butler characterizes Rufus as a misguided but good-hearted boy, merely a product of the society and household in which he was raised.

Christine Levecq says that as the novel progresses and "Rufus gradually assimilates to the surrounding ideology," Dana notices "his increasingly domineering attitude and even latent aggressivity" (535). She further argues that Butler does not create a villain in Rufus, but instead a young and in many ways powerless man who has acclimated to his immoral and unkind surroundings. This is even more obvious in Dana's fourth trip to the past when she arrives shortly after Rufus has raped his black once-friend Alice (who would eventually become Dana's great-great-grandmother). While white slaveholders raping their female slaves was a common occurrence during this time period in history, Dana understands the depravity in this act and resents Rufus for it, and yet she forgives him because of what she recognizes in him as "love for the girl—a destructive love, but a love, nevertheless" (Butler 147). Rufus' actions are despicable, but Butler's audience find themselves, like Dana, making excuses for him. Rufus loves Alice, but in the society in which he lives, he cannot truly show or act on his love, as Dana expresses: "There was no shame in raping a black woman, but there could be shame in loving one" (Butler 124). Rufus understands and laments his misfortune, telling Dana, "If I lived in your time, I would have married her. Or tried to" (Butler 124). It seems Butler is suggesting that Rufus and perhaps even many real men who lived in the antebellum South were not as completely and inherently evil, or even as racist, as they are often believed to have been, but were instead tragic consequences of their surroundings and society.

Another character in the novel who exemplifies this seemingly easy assimilation to a culture allowing slavery is the Weylins' slave and cook Sarah. Though her husband and all but

one of her children have been sold away from her, Wood argues that "Sarah has come to accept her abject condition" (91) and makes no move to fight against the mistreatment she has personally experienced as a slave, let alone the convention of slavery as a whole. In a conversation with Dana about running away, Sarah says, "Things ain't bad here. I can get along" (Butler 145). Dana is disappointed in Sarah for what she originally sees as cowardice, thinking:

> She had done the safe thing—had accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid…she was…the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to lose, and who knew as little about the freedom of the North as she knew about the hereafter. I looked down on her myself for a while. Moral superiority. Here was someone even less courageous than I was. (Butler 145)

Though here Dana judges Sarah, eventually she realizes that Sarah does not attempt to escape or rebel against her white owners not because she is a coward, but because she knows how much worse it could be. She, and many of her fellow slaves (especially Nigel who stops attempting to escape the Weylin plantation once he gets married and has a child), are comfortable as slaves; they are used to it and, having never been free, know no other way of life. Rather than cowering in fear, however, Sarah and her fellow slaves are, according to Wood, "fighting to survive in an environment harsher than most contemporary readers would be able to imagine" (91). This fight requires an amount of strength that Dana does not at first understand or appreciate.

With time, however, she too (and Kevin with her) comes to assimilate into the culture surrounding her while in the antebellum South. During Kevin and Dana's stay at the Weylin plantation, a relatively short time after their arrival in the past, Dana reveals:

> Time passed. Kevin and I became more a part of the household, familiar, accepted, accepting. That disturbed me too when I thought about it. How easily we seemed to acclimatize. Not that I wanted us to have trouble, but it seemed as though we should have had a harder time adjusting to this particular segment of history—

> adjusting to our places in the household of a slaveowner. (Butler 97)

Dana is disturbed by the ease with which she and Kevin acclimate to the slavery and mistreatment occurring all around them. It becomes an everyday part of their life and, as with Sarah, it is far easier for them to accept it than it is for them to truly fight against the system they are now a part of—albeit grudgingly. Later, after seeing slave children play a game involving pretend slave trade, Dana truly realizes how easy this acclimation is, both for those born into this society and for those who, like Dana and Kevin, mysteriously arrive in it from the 20th century, saying to Kevin, "Us, the children … I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery" (Butler 101). As Wood explains, "The voices that *Kindred* articulates attest to the dangers of homogenizing (and thus muting or forgetting) personal and social experience and of subsuming the individual act of protest in favor of natural unity" (88). The slaves at the Weylin plantation, and Dana and Kevin as well, feel at home there. They have developed a community and family that they do not wish to lose, and so allowing slavery to exist around them is far preferable to the alternative of open rebellion and its subsequent punishment. Butler uses the voices of Rufus Weylin, Sarah, Nigel, Kevin, Dana, and many other characters within *Kindred* to show how saturated the antebellum culture was with slavery and how easy slavery is to accept when it is ubiquitous in one's society and culture.

But Butler is making statements about the effect slavery had not only on those living during the time period, but also on those who would come to live after its abolition. The fantastical time travel within *Kindred* shows that though slavery has been abolished, its repercussions and consequences (racism and prejudice) are still very much alive in the 1970s when Dana's character lived and in society today. Wood refers to this as well: "While Dana bears the visual scars of slavery, *Kindred* makes it clear that in the wider context of American cultural memory, history cannot be so easily cauterized" (95). The wounds Dana gets while in the past eventually heal, but the wounds slavery inflicted upon society have still not healed one hundred years after its abolition, when Dana is living.

Various examples within the novel and Octavia Butler's own life prove the validity of this statement. Possibly the first example of this is found in Dana's account of when she and Kevin first met. An alcoholic co-worker mocks them while they converse, yelling racist comments about "chocolate and vanilla porn" (Butler 56). A female co-worker also makes the comment that Kevin and Dana "were 'the weirdest looking couple' she had ever seen" (Butler 57). After Dana's trips to the past are over and she and Kevin travel to Maryland, Dana notices "older people who looked at Kevin and me, and then looked again" (262). Even after a hundred years of freedom and supposed equality for blacks, interracial couples are still looked down on with mockery and surprise by whites and blacks alike.

But it is not only co-workers and strangers who judge Kevin and Dana for who they love, but also their own families. After Kevin tells his sister about his intention to marry Dana, he recounts the experience to Dana: "She didn't want to meet you, wouldn't have you in her house—or me either if I married you" (Butler 110). Dana has a similar experience with her own aunt and uncle, telling Kevin her uncle has taken it personally: "It's as though I've rejected him. Or at least that's the way he feels. It bothered me, really. He was more hurt than mad. Honestly hurt…He wants me to marry someone like him—someone who looks like him. A black man." (Butler 111). Guy Mark Foster comments on the reason for Dana's uncle's condemnation: "Individuals [engaged in relationships with members of another race] are often charged by other blacks with being self-hating or treasonous as well as being deficient in their racial identity" (154). These feelings of hatred and animosity no doubt came to be because of the animosity with which African-Americans were treated in pro-slavery pre-Civil War America. This separation between whites and blacks that began with slavery is still present in desegregated and seemingly enlightened 1970's America, though (judging from Kevin's shock at his sister's disapproval) perhaps less obvious at first glance than it once was. Marc Steinberg comments on the instances within the novel when this racism and separation is obvious, saying, "Butler thus insinuates how the wrongs of the past can survive, have survived in the present" (468). Butler's concept of history is one in which time repeats itself and

nothing proves this fact better than Dana's time travel in *Kindred*.

To further prove how realistic Dana and Kevin's experiences with racism in modern society are and to understand what exactly Butler intends her audiences to learn from the novel, one must look at Octavia Butler's own life and the experiences that originally inspired her to write *Kindred*. Looking at Butler's biographical information is important because as Raffaella Baccolini says, "It is widely accepted today that, whenever we receive or produce culture, we do so from a certain position and that such a location influences how we theorize about and read the world" (518). Butler's location in America's racial history was chronologicall distant from the location in which Dana finds herself in *Kindred,* yet in reality, Butler found the experiences of her mother and other female relatives to be startlingly similar to that of slaves in the antebellum South.

Butler's mother worked as a maid for rich white people and Robert Crossley says in "The Reader's Guide," "even then [Butler] observed the long arm of slavery: the degree to which her mother operated in white society as an invisible woman and, alarmingly, the degree to which she accepted and internalized her status" (269-270). Like Sarah and many of the other slaves found in Butler's novel, Butler's own mother seemingly accepted her own position as being beneath the whites easily and without much obvious fight. Crossley argues, "Some of these childhood memories infiltrated the fiction she produced in her maturity; certainly they shaped her purpose in *Kindred* in imagining the privations of earlier generations of black Americans" (270). Though slavery was abolished a hundred years before Butler's childhood, her mother still faced many of the same challenges her ancestors had faced many years prior and this definitely influenced her writing.

Because of her mother's experiences as an invisible and forgotten housemaid, Butler came to understand the tendency time and history have to repeat themselves. And so, she wrote *Kindred* to fulfill one of speculative fiction and literature as a whole's purposes, to move the audience to "think critically about the reader's own world and possibly act on and change that world" (Baccolini 520). Upon reading Butler's modern slave narrative, her audience comes to not only realize the cyclic

nature of time, but also their own ability to finally end the cycle. Being aware of the ease with which society, and therefore individuals within this society, comes to accept racism and prejudice is the first step towards breaking the cycle of hate. In *Kindred*, Butler provides her audience with numerous examples of characters of varying races, ages, and backgrounds seeing slavery and racism, accepting slavery and racism, and allowing slavery and racism to continue around them, in the hopes that someone somewhere will finally make the change that desperately needs to be made to finally draw the cycle to an end.

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Gauzy Perceptions and Tangible Images: A Shift in Focus in *The Virgin Suicides* from Text to Screen

Megan Serio

One would think that a novel entitled *The Virgin Suicides* would be about the five sisters who assume the roles of protagonists, and yes, who ultimately commit suicide. But interestingly enough, there seems to be more of a focus on the numberless group of teenage boys who assume the roles of both historians and narrators, and the struggle they encounter while trying to comprehend the girls' lives and deaths. What readers primarily witness are the perceptions of the girls that these boys possess. However, when Sofia Coppola decided to adapt Jeffrey Eugenides' debut novel *The Virgin Suicides* into her own debut film of the same name, the focus of the story shifted into one that favors the girls instead, and one that is perhaps more fitting of its title. With tangible images of the story's subjects, the film's focus is not entirely clouded by the perceptions of the novel's narrators, and therefore, the film is more about the girls than is the novel.

Significantly, a number of scholars who have written about Coppola's adaptation of *The Virgin Suicides* share a view of the film as a vignette of lush youth and mysterious femininity—a view that the neighborhood boys initially inspire with their self-documented fascination of the Lisbon sisters in Eugenides' novel. Bert Cardullo, for one, seems to share the hazy-eyed view of the girls in the film. When describing the role of Charlotte in Coppola's later film *Lost in Translation*, Cardullo notes that she is "not another instance (like the teenagers in *The Virgin Suicides*) of the mythopoetic exaltation of youth and the fetishization of nubile female sexuality" (467). With this description, Cardullo uncritically reproduces the romanticized

vision through which the Lisbon girls are depicted. From a slightly different and agreeably morbid angle, Michele Aaron focuses on the reverence for "feminized death," and specifically female suicide, within the film (78-79). Paying particular attention to the deaths of the sisters, Aaron further enforces the idea of the girls being enveloped in a mystical shroud. But while such identification with the perspective of the boys might be understandable, I disagree that the film is primarily interested in recreating that perspective. Eugenides does a spectacular and lovely job at illustrating that sort of view for readers, but I intend to argue that Coppola successfully diverts this gaze by giving the girls an on-screen voice.

In the novel, as previously mentioned, the reader assumes that he or she is being presented with a story about the five Lisbon sisters and their deaths, but looking more closely, it is less about the girls than it is the narrators' struggle to understand the girls and their collective decision to abandon existence. In a sense, we are given only one perspective in the novel—that of the boys, perplexity and all—in which we are allowed to observe what the boys do, watch how they behave and react to certain instances and events, struggle with them to find answers to their endless questions, examine the girls through their eyes, and share their collective confusion. We are looking through a rose-colored filter of adolescent boys' fascination and bewilderment. The novel revolves around this perspective.

The film, however, seems to be split into two perspectives. Through voice-over narration, we are offered the boys' perspective as in the novel, but we are also presented with a new perspective for this story: that of the viewer, in which we can see tangible images of the girls for ourselves, instead of constructing images from the words of the novel's narrators. This idea of forced specificity replacing ambiguous details is reminiscent of Robert Stam's "automatic differences" between film and novel, as he says that "[t]he words of a novel, as countless commentators have pointed out, have a virtual, symbolic meaning; we as readers, or as directors, have to fill in their paradigmatic indeterminances" (55). Where Eugenides' novel describes the appearances of the Lisbon girls with relatively abstract textual language, its film equivalent is weighted with

the task of choosing "specific performer[s]" to fill in those roles, giving us concrete images of these girls without having to arrange their gaits, countenances, or dispositions for ourselves (Stam 55). And not only that, but we can use these images to determine for ourselves answers to the innumerable questions that the boys pose.

Readers and viewers are fully aware of these questions because of the monolithic job that the narrators set forth to do: telling the story of these five mysterious sisters. But scholar Debra Shostak recognizes another function beneath this ambitious goal: "the men who narrate have set themselves the task of reconstructing a history of the girls who continue to haunt them, a project that causes them incidentally to construct a history of their own adolescent selves" (808). By attempting to structure a story about the Lisbon girls, the neighborhood boys tell the reader mostly about themselves. They may tell us about what the girls did, and likewise what they were like, but the emphasis is on how the boys perceived it all. It becomes a history of "their own adolescent selves" because they spent their adolescence observing the girls and trying to interact with them:

> They become readers of their own incomplete memories, of the contradictory eyewitness testimony they collect in interviews with a variety of participants in the original events, and of the many "exhibits" they assemble, including such material remains as battered high-tops, dried-up cosmetics, a microscope, and yearbook photos as well as such documents as a diary and a psychiatrist's report. (Shostak 808-809)

Following this notion of the boys as "readers," it is easy to understand how and why the story of the girls is told in the manner that it is. Through a complex process of locating clues and determining the meanings behind them, the boys attempt to piece together a chronology of the girls' lives, but the task proves to be more difficult than they expect. They encounter a great deal of confusion along the way, and their attempt to structure this narrative becomes a vehicle through which they admit their lack of comprehension: "The narrators at once explicitly interpret evidence for themselves and organize it for the consumption of the unknown narratee to whom, according to the premise of the novel, they wish to confide their per-

plexity" (Shostak 809). In a sense, the reader is bearing witness to the boys trying to make sense of the girls. How are we supposed to see clearly what the boys don't understand? This is my main point about the novel being focused more on the boys than the girls, because it is essentially centered on the boys compartmentalizing, sorting through, trying to comprehend what's going on with these mysterious girls, and all the reader is privy to is the half-finished jigsaw puzzle they are poring over with rogue pieces scattered about the floor in disarray.

Shostak discusses extensively the expectations and results of the first-person-plural narration—that it "promises to offer a more reliable point of view than one might expect from a single voice" (809). However, instead of solidifying a single answer to all of the boys' questions, as she goes on to suggest, the multiple interpretations only muddle things further: "the authority in numbers is undermined by the narrators' confession of their common puzzlement" (Shostak 809). Shostak looks at a particular line in the novel to illustrate her point, when the narrators begin the second chapter with the comment that "We didn't understand why Cecilia had killed herself the first time and we understood even less when she did it twice" (Eugenides 29). Imagine the narrators arriving at this conclusion, each of the adolescent boys straining their minds to comprehend why this thirteen year-old girl had chosen to die, coming up empty-handed, and later congregating to bounce ideas off of each other, and yet still never reaching a satisfying answer. This isn't to prove these boys unreliable narrators, but to emphasize the fact that the reader is supposed to be totally aware of this confusion—that this confusion is the whole point, in contrast to the film.

Suggesting that from the girls' point of view, the events of the novel are recognized as tragic, rather than romantic as in the boys' perceptions, Shostak writes, "from the perspective of the sisters themselves, the events partake of the accidents and psychological causalities of realism; but from the boys' innocent, uncomprehending perspective, the events partake of the mode of magical realism, dominated by the uncanny and unpredictable" (813). I continually refer back to the perspective through which we see the girls in the novel—the images filtered through the whimsy and bewilderment of teenage boys'

fascination. Viewers are subject to less of these images in the film, but there are still a few scenes that illustrate the boys' perceptions as accurate to the text as can be rendered.

When Peter Sissen is invited over for dinner and asks to use the restroom, Mrs. Lisbon directs him to the one in Cecilia's room upstairs. As he climbs the staircase, the viewer is offered a visual example of the perspective that the novel supplies us with. In the text, once he steps over the threshold into Cecilia's bedroom, the resulting account to the other narrators speaks of the magic and mystique of teenage girls: "He came back to us with stories of bedrooms filled with crumpled panties, of stuffed animals hugged to death by the passion of the girls, of a crucifix draped with a brassiere, of gauzy chambers of canopied beds, and of the effluvia of so many young girls becoming women together in the same cramped space" (Eugenides 7). In the girls' bathroom, he discovers the twelve boxes of tampons in the cupboard shortly after spotting a tampon in the trashcan, which he assured the narrators "wasn't gross but a beautiful thing" (Eugenides 8). But in the film, these details which are coated with a glossy sheen of allure don't evoke as much of a mystical quality as they do in the novel. We see Peter stepping across a jumble of objects strewn across the floor, crumpled panties included, walking into a cluttered bathroom with a sink covered in various bottles and tubes of toothpaste, and opening the cupboard to find a shelf full of tampon boxes. Through the eyes of the viewer, these appear to be ordinary things; there is nothing special about them. But when Peter finds a tube of lipstick, he opens it and inhales the fragrance of the waxy cosmetic, and we see the first dreamy vision that evokes the tone of the novel: Lux in a gauzy, lens-flare-laden close-up shot; enveloped in warm-colored tones with an aura of sunlight behind her, her hair whirling around in a soft breeze.

The diary sequence in the film is a much longer example of this type of filtered vision. It embodies the boys' perceptions of the girls as well as the richness of Eugenides' language. While the boys read Cecilia's diary entries aloud to each other, they envision her writing in a field of tall grass and warm tones, pages of curling letters fading in and out of the scene. There are images of a white unicorn, of Lux jumping up and down in a bikini top, of her plucking petals from a flower and gazing in

the direction of something off-screen. Mary waves around a sparkler, superimposed over a blue sky filled with fluffy, white clouds. Bonnie and Therese sit around in the tall grass; Lux hula dances. This is all in the same hazy, dream-like atmosphere as the lipstick vision Peter Sissen had in Cecilia's bathroom. Bert Cardullo acknowledges the quality in these scenes and recognizes the effect that it has on the girls, asserting that the girls "remain obscure objects of desire who are removed from reality, and whose existence is conferred on them only by the male gaze—a gaze rendered gauzy if not dewey-eyed by Edward Lachman's color cinematography" (639). This atmosphere successfully captures the essence of the novel, its language, and its narrators' undying fascination.

Yet while there are scenes such as these to illustrate the perspective in which the narrators view the girls, there are times in the film during which we see the girls alone in their rooms, and the boys are nowhere to be found. Because the viewer is not looking at the girls through the boys' perspective, these moments assure us that the girls are the main focus of the film. After Lux missed curfew following the homecoming dance, and consequently after the girls were taken out of school and the Lisbon house was put under maximum security isolation, there is a scene in which the four remaining girls are lounging around one of their rooms in their nightgowns. We see the girls again in their room after they nobly prevent the elm tree in their front yard from being cut down. The narrators even admit, "For the next few weeks, we hardly saw the girls at all," signifying the lack of understanding on their part of how the girls could have possibly felt during this long stretch of time being locked up in the Lisbon house.

In the novel, the narrators mirror this lapse of comprehension, also remarking on the girls being trapped in their own residence: "We'd like to tell you with authority what it was like inside the Lisbon house, or what the girls felt being imprisoned in it. Sometimes, drained by this investigation, we long for some shred of evidence, some Rosetta stone that would explain the girls at last" (Eugenides 164). This sensation of the unknown shrouds the girls' true selves in most of the novel, but is absent when we view the girls in the film. We can see and infer for ourselves what the problem is, whereas we can't

through the words of the novel's narrators.

The scene in which Mrs. Lisbon orders Lux to burn her rock records is also telling in what the boys cannot see for themselves. Lux tearfully and laboriously dragging her crate of vinyl down the carpeted staircase, staring into the fireplace and watching her freedom melt away in the flames. This is an intimate detail, a closer look into life inside the Lisbon house that the narrators would not be able to know. In the novel the boys acknowledge misunderstanding of the sisters when they tell us what they know about the car ride to the homecoming dance. As the girls talk, there seems to be a collective sense of surprise at their knowledge and knack for conversation: "Who had known they talked so much, held so many opinions, jabbed at the world's sights with so many fingers? Between our sporadic glimpses of the girls they had been continuously living, developing in ways we couldn't imagine, reading every book on the bowdlerized family bookshelf" (Eugenides 119-120). In the film, we as viewers watch the girls develop in these normal, everyday ways, as the boys cannot; we see what they can't see.

The day that the girls return to school after Cecilia's suicide, there is a scene in which they spend a moment in the girls' bathroom—Mary examines her face in the mirror, Bonnie sits on a sink and turns the water faucet on and off, Therese leans against the wall and stares absentmindedly, and Lux smokes. It's a soundless scene but the viewer can vaguely understand that the girls are communicating wordlessly. Despite their lack of verbal intercourse, they embody a mystical, sisterly connection, and it is this scene which empowers them in such a way and makes the film theirs. Without the influence of the novel narrators' perspective, it draws complete focus to them as the film's true subjects.

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Jeffrey Eugenides confided that his "'own feeling is that the point of view in the movie comes more from the girls than is the case in the book'" (Fuller 4). Doubtless, the mysterious quality of the girls would be lost from the film version of his novel. After all, the novel centers on that mysterious quality that the narrators notice and cling to. On the screen, however, with concrete images that strip the girls from misty perceptions, viewers have a better chance of

seeing the girls as they really are. Eugenides admits in another interview, with *The Missouri Review,* that the novel is "really not a book about suicide—it's a book about surviving suicide, or knowing someone who has committed suicide. The book never answers definitively why the girls do it, but it's about the feeling you're left with if someone you know and love does commit suicide" (Schiff 114). So while the novel gives readers a chance to see things from the boys' perspectives, and to understand the mystery of the girls and their suicides, the film gives the girls their own voices to tell the their side of the story as well.

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The Girls Who Cried Coyote: A Closer Look at the Ecofeminist Implications in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*

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In the realm of politics, there are two areas that are far too often overlooked. While scandals, campaigns and the economy remain in the forefront of American minds, the environment and equality for females are consistently placed on the backburner. With this in mind, it is heartening to come across a work that elaborates upon the issues others seemingly neglect. Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*, which takes place in Southern Appalachia, does just that. Through exploration of the lives of her three pivotal characters, Kingsolver presents readers with an interesting, but enlightening, look at the true interconnectedness of life. Narrated in part by two strong and rather unconventional females, Deana and Lusa, this novel effectively offers true insight into the female mind, specifically in reference to sustaining a healthy environment and ecosystem. Her single male narrator additionally offers a source of contrast for readers to understand the differences between the female affinities to nature to that of a stereotypical older gentleman. Kingsolver's ability to intertwine two such clearly significant topics in one frame of literature is evidence of her dedication to the subject. In utilizing her previous knowledge from her undergraduate biology degree, she further strengthens the argument for taking local environments and the treatment of females into more serious consideration. Moreover, in creatively referencing major problems such as extinction, out-of-balance ecosystems, unwillingness to change, and invasive non-native species through different perspectives, she more effectively conveys the truth

about the patriarchal domination of women and the environment that America so desperately needs to understand.

Kingsolver is not alone in her effort, however. According to Barbara Bennett, who also addresses the issues pertaining to females and the environment, "Ecofeminists believe that until we change our perspective of community and see it as a system of cooperation for the betterment of all rather than competition for the success of a few, our world will experience an intensification of these serious problems" (64). Through creating a work centered on the promotion of the collaboration of a community to perpetuate the betterment of the environment, in addition to the appreciation of camaraderie with neighbors, Kingsolver befits Bennett's description perfectly. Indeed, within the opening lines of her own novel, Kingsolver even states that "every quiet step is thunder to beetle life underfoot; every choice is a world made new for the chosen" (1), thereby affirming that sense of connectivity between all members of the ecological community.

The theme of ecological connection remains constant throughout the course of *Prodigal Summer,* but is particularly brought to light during the sections concerning the character Deana, who resides alone in a wildlife preserve as a ranger and wildlife ecologist. Disconnected from the rest of the world, this character can more clearly maintain passionate admiration for nature in both its positive and negative aspects. With this admiration also comes a higher degree of respect, as well as a greater understanding, of the natural world itself. Thus, in learning her perspective, readers too can grasp the concepts of extinction, preservation, and innate animal character that seem to encompass a great deal of her thoughts. In reference to extinct animals, for example, Deanna is especially affected, as one can infer from the following statement: "She deferred to the extinct as she would to the spirits of deceased relatives, paying her quiet respects in the places where they might once have been. Little red wolves stood as silent shadows at the edges of clearings, while the Carolina parakeets would have chattered loudly, moving along the riverbanks" (60). Through this detail, readers thus learn of animals that have become extinct to the area, as well as just how that came to pass, thereby enlightening

readers about the consequences of failing to realize the importance of maintaining the environment and ecosystem.

Nevertheless, extinct animals are not the only type of creatures on which Deana muses. In fact, many of the chapters that detail her life reference her obsession with coyotes, and their introduction to an ecosystem to which they are not accustomed. To her, coyotes are not mere pests to be killed off, but fascinating and misunderstood creatures that should be given more consideration in the animal kingdom. According to Suzanne Jones, "Deana Wolfe does not judge coyotes, which are migrating to southern Appalachia, as 'invasive' as most readers might expect, because her research shows that coyotes will help restore the imbalance in the ecosystem caused by the loss of larger predators (wolves and mountain lions) in this habitat" (85). Yet, in attempting to relate that fact to her temporary lover, Eddie Bondo, she realizes that she is unable to alter his stubborn opinion that coyotes are nothing more than a threat to his live-stock back at his ranch home in Wyoming. Bennett voices a similar point: "A societal structure in which women, men, and nature are equally valued cannot be accomplished overnight, and the objectives of ecofeminists remain long-term solutions rather than simple bandages" (64). Hence, it is evident that Kingsolver, in writing Deana's part, recognized that Eddie Bondo's immediate change of heart would be unlikely; rather, she addressed the situation realistically and permitted that Deana simply keep striving to change the outlook of coyotes in an ecosystem that is out-of-balance, despite the sloth-like progression towards her goal. When Eddie Bondo eventually departs, his farewell note simply states, "It is hard for a man to admit he has met his match" (Kingsolver 432). This mysterious statement, in effect, could indicate that Deana's efforts to change his opinion were not in vain after all. That concept, however, is left entirely up to readers' imaginations.

Shifting to another prominent female character within *Prodigal Summer,* one should note how Kingsolver continues to utilize the image of a strong, intelligent woman to communicate ecological issues pertinent to the region. Lusa, in contrast to Deana, has only begun to feel the effects of isolation and loneliness after the recent death of her husband. An outsider to the community, the multiple problems Lusa encounters

throughout the novel are derivatives of the fact that she does not belong. Well-educated, well traveled, and attractive, Lusa possesses all that her sister-in-laws cannot. As an entomologist, her fascination with insects further garners a sense of unease among her extended family, who already view her as odd due to her background and religious affiliations. According to Jones, however, "Because Lusa is a 'religious mongrel' with a knowledge of Judaism and Islam that the locals do not possess, she knows that the holy days will converge during her first year of farming, and create a demand for goats, necessary for religious celebrations" (Jones 86). Lusa, as an outsider, is more open to the idea of change than members of her husband's family are willing to be, to their own detriment. While Lusa attempts to profit from raising goats for meat, her brother-in-laws depend on the one crop that is marketable enough to provide decent income: tobacco. Even tobacco alone, however, cannot sustain a growing family, and many men within this small Appalachian town are forced to commute to do factory work. Their reasoning for not finding a more viable alternative for income could partly be explained through a statement by Cary Glass Morris, who explains, "Many women understand the reciprocity required for community in a unique way… [T]hey have always operated in a co-operative, flexible, do-it-yourself economy" (Morris 78). Lusa, unsurprisingly, seems to completely identify with this statement, while her extended family is locked in a situation many of their ancestors were forced to deal with as well.

Though many moral and health problems arise from the selling of tobacco to make cigarettes or tobacco dip, it is grown for the simple fact that nothing else can rival it in income and demand. Even Lusa realizes that "tobacco's value, largely, lay in the fact that it kept forever and traveled well" (Kingsolver 107). With few other options, and little desire to risk the cost associated with change, many farmers in the region simply stick to the same practices, yet, as Jones points out, "Following Wendell Berry's rule of thumb, Kingsolver has Lusa recognize that 'good' farming practices will always require flexibility, or the ability to adapt to local conditions and needs" (86). Therefore, in order for individuals to truly prosper in an agricultural career, Kingsolver appears to propagate the increasing necessity

for them to welcome change rather than flagrantly disregard it – much as Lusa's brothers-in-law did after her refusal to grow tobacco.

Women's opinions are a clearly significant contributor to progressions made in this novel. As Ynestra King eloquently explains:

> Another primary aspect of the ecofeminist theoretical project is that we make an argument for why women worldwide are (often) the source of the knowledge on which the future depends and are therefore subjects of this revolution because of the socially assigned work we do as caregivers, farmers, foresters, and basic cultivators of nature. (18)

Hence, due to the examples Kingsolver presents in *Prodigal Summer,* as well as other such ecofeminist works, it has become increasingly clear that remaining open to topics of change, even changes made by women, would prove much more beneficial for the overall betterment of society.

According to Stephanie Lahar, not only does this inability to change harm the chance of profitability in the farmers' lives, but the "methods including engineered seeds, chemical pesticides, deep plowing, and intensive irrigation… permanently destroys indigenous soils. These have replaced traditional methods that have long sustained soil fertility, including mixed and rotational methods for the local soils" (33). It is imperative, as one can infer from Lahar's statement, that the fertility of the soil be continually replenished so that farmers have the ability to reuse the same plot of land multiple times. Thus, Lusa, in her seemingly outlandish ways, ultimately discovers a characteristic of farming that even experienced farmers in the region fail to grasp. In choosing to become a goat farmer, she has discovered an environmentally friendly approach to maintaining her grounds while earning an income to sustain herself and her home without the moral issues that tobacco presents.

The last pivotal character within *Prodigal Summer,* like the majority of Lusa's extended family, is also a proponent for consistency in his actions. Garnett, an elderly retired agriculture teacher, is the only male voice presented in this tale. His presence in the story likely stems from Kingsolver's desire to

simply add contrast to the last resilient female in the work, Nannie Rawley. Nannie and Garnett, who have been neighbors for years, present an interesting combination in this composition. As Linda Vance states, "A basic tenet of ecofeminism holds that the patriarchal domination of women runs parallel to the patriarchal domination of society" (60). It appears even more likely that Garnett was inserted in the tale to provide a male perspective on matters influenced mostly by men. And, certainly, Garnett does provide a rather stereotypical figure in which to compare Nannie, Lusa, or even Deana.

Old-fashioned in his thoughts and proud in nature, Garnett poses a perfect opposition to the practical insight of forward thinking Nannie Rawley. When initially expressing his thoughts about Nannie, Garnett articulates, "In those days, a girl went away for a decent interval to visit a so-called relative and came back sadder but wiser. But not Miss Rawley. She never appeared the least bit sad, and the woman was unwise in principle" (Kingsolver 83). In this assertion, Garnett not only reflects his position on a degree of inferiority of women by insinuating that they should be more meek and submissive in their actions as they age, but he also reflects his dislike for Nannie, and, unsurprisingly, Nannie's knowledge of more newly-founded techniques in farming. Morris speaks to Garnett's ideology: "In Western thought, nature, women, and physicality have been equated and defined separate from and subordinate to culture, men and rationality" (74). Shaped by a culture that has preserved this very ideology, Garnett initially cannot comprehend Nannie and her somewhat eccentric ways, a fact conveyed in the sarcasm in many of his explanations concerning her. The idea that she could grow her apple orchard without pesticides so as to be labeled a certified organic grower is incomprehensible to him, as indicated in the following passage:

> Her certification! Nannie Rawley was proud to tell the world she'd been the first organic grower to be certified in Zebulon County, and she was still the loudest one. Fifteen years ago he'd assumed it was a nonsense that would pass, along with rock music and hydroponic tobacco. (Kingsolver 86)

His inability to understand the importance – or even appreciate the reasoning behind – growing organically is just one such example of the wide-ranging differences between the two characters and the progressiveness of their agricultural practices.

Another seemingly more contentious disagreement between these two characters pivots around the idea of lost species through extinction, either by natural or human influences. Garnett is particularly concerned with the loss of the American chestnut, which has been completely destroyed due to a blight caused by the introduction of the Japanese chestnut – a non-native species to the Americas. Nannie Rawley elaborates more on this topic in a letter she wrote to Garnett. She states: "Just think: if someone had shown you a little old seedling tree ... on a ship from Asia all those years ago… and remarked 'These piddly little strands of fungus will knock down a million majestic chestnut trees… would you have laughed?" (Kingsolver 216). Due to this inadvertent extinction, Garnett has dedicated much of his life to discovering a crossbreed of a tree that would rebuild the population of chestnuts from which his ancestors had made their fortunes, a fact exemplified in the following sentence: "He was haunted by the ghosts of these old chestnuts, by the great emptiness their extinction had left in the world…"(Kingsolver 128). To him, restoring those trees would also restore a degree of his ancestral pride as well.

Nannie, on the other hand, firmly believes in striving to protect all forms of life, regardless of their prominence or supposed function. As she so eloquently states, "Everything alive is connected to every other by fine, invisible threads. Things you don't see can help you plenty, and things you try to control will often rear back and bite you, and that's the moral of the story" (Kingsolver 216). In effect, Nannie believes in affirming inequality in all things – man, woman, and nature – while Garnett seems to be perpetually stuck in the mindset of a time where women were even more subservient to men and did not have the freedom of choice Nannie so often uses to her advantage. As Nannie is far from the typical woman during that time-period, it is no surprise that Garnett does not know how best to handle her. When she desires to make a difference, she simply acts. As revealed in the case of the salamanders that

Nannie buys at the local store each week to set free, as well as her firm belief that each of God's creations should be treated with love and equality, Nannie Rawley is the epitome of an ecofeminist. According to Morris, "As a premise, women need to recognize the political importance of their own grassroots action; the choices they make within a family and within a community are political and politically valuable" (78). Nannie, as one can easily gather, can completely relate to this principle in both her actions and thoughts. Garnett, on the other hand, might find the statement to be a bit radical. His inability to change or consider the possibility of an alternate opinion hinders him as greatly as the relatives of Lusa.

Each of the characters within this novel accomplishes a role in contributing to the overall effectiveness of the message Kingsolver strives to make. Despite the variation in the desires and goals of the individuals, the combined opinions, actions, and statements projected throughout the entirety of the novel strengthen its position as a eco-feminist book that causes the reader to question the very premise of their prior beliefs. Deana, Lusa, and even Nannie portray a situation that is very real in certain parts of the United States, and though we cannot hope to eradicate those issues overnight, even writing a fiction book such a *Prodigal Summer* can instill ideas into the minds of the public. Only then will they recognize the importance of acting in opposition to the problems presented. Jones points out that "Kingsolver clearly shows throughout the novel that not understanding the interconnections between the natural and the human world damages the ecosystem, as Nannie's argument with Garnett about broad-spectrum insecticides and Deanna's argument with western bounty hunter Eddie Bondo about coyotes demonstrate" (88). The characters' necessity to be connected to the world around them is consistently portrayed throughout the story; yet, the characters not only realize their place within their local ecosystem, but within the community as well. After she discovers she is pregnant with Eddie Bondo's child, Deana comes down from the mountain to live with Nannie Rawley, whom her father once loved. Lusa, in learning that Garnett is the biological grandfather of her niece and nephew, reaches out to Garnett to ask him to meet with the children he has yet to acknowledge. Garnett and Nannie, meanwhile, make amends in the end after he attempts to protect

her from what he believes is a intruder, and she sees that he cares for her after all. Each story, once so seemingly disconnected, suddenly seems to be in sync.

At last a sense of equality and unity has been attained, if only briefly, between the characters presented and the nature that surrounds them. To communicate this fact, as well as to indicate the connectedness of the tale as a whole, Kingsolver ends the tale as she begins it, stating, "Solitude is a human presumption. Every quiet step is thunder to beetle life underfoot, a tug of impalpable thread on the web pulling mate to mate and predator to prey, a beginning or an end. Every choice is a world made new for the chosen" (444). Hence, the characters, like the story itself, come full circle in their realizations and efforts to connect the natural world back to their own lives. After all, this is the fundamental goal of ecofeminism. By connecting human life to nature, while recognizing the importance of equality of all creatures, Kingsolver perfectly achieves this goal, capturing the interest of the reader while simultaneously promoting the ecofeminist vision of equal community and ecological protection.

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