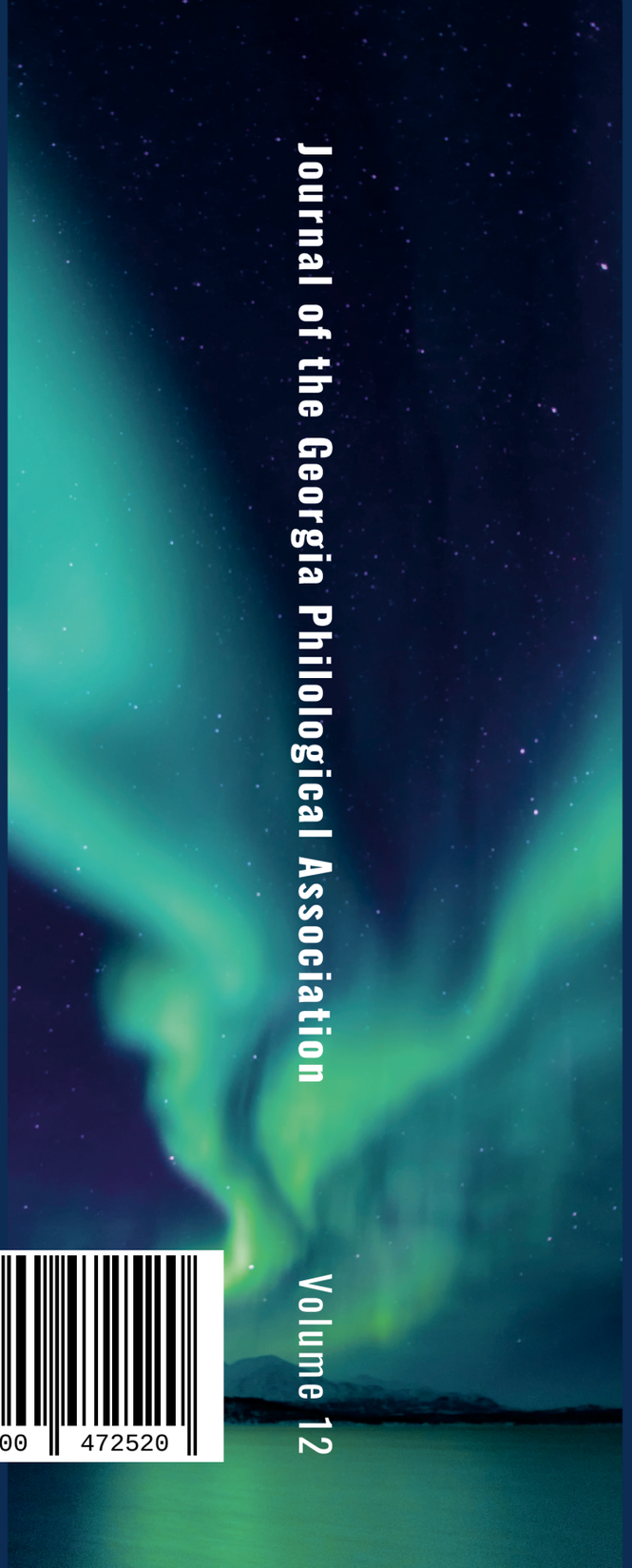

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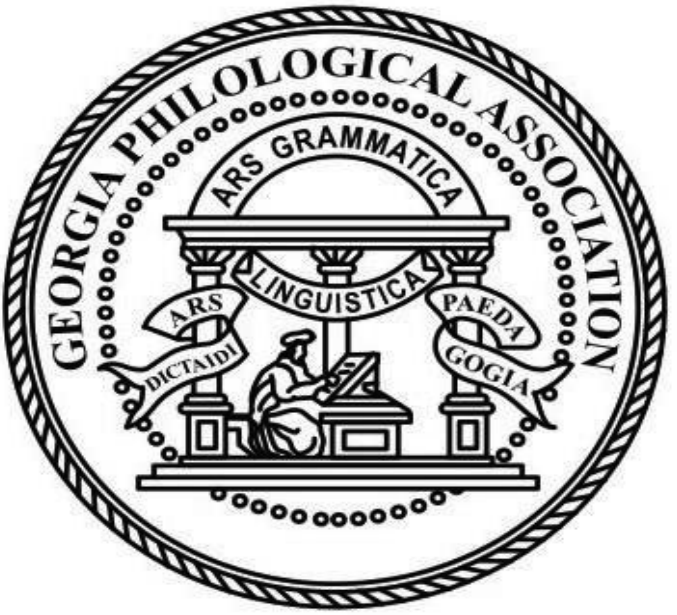

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Foreword

From the President:

The nineteenth annual conference of the Georgia Philological Association (GPA) was held online on May 17-18, 2024. Our keynote speakers were Andre Nicholson, Professor of New Media and Communication at Middle Georgia State University, and LaRonda Sanders-Senu, Associate Professor of English at Middle Georgia State University. In "Awkward, But Secure: Writing and Editing the Works of Issa Rae for an Interdisciplinary Collection," Nicholson and Sanders-Senu discussed how their scholarly interests led them to create their work *insecure, Awkward & #Winning: Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Works of Issa Rae* as well as the process of editing and publishing an interdisciplinary work that centers on intersectionality. Nicholson and Sanders-Senu see in Issa Rae an award-winning content creator who both laments the absence of people like herself in the media and who understands that the only way to change the present portrayals is to do it herself. We also awarded the Vicki Hill Memorial Graduate Recognition Award to Tyler Sehnal, a graduate student at New Mexico State University for his paper "The Bigger Picture: Contentions and Practicalities of Decolonizing Academic Writing Centers."

For the last several years in the foreword to this journal, I have expressed how lucky I feel to have served as president of the GPA and indicated that I would be handing over the reins of the association to a new president in the following year. Somehow that handover has never materialized, and I continue to humbly and gratefully serve as president for the foreseeable future.

We live in times that feel stressful and dangerous to many of us; war, climate change, and other fractures in our global society are front of mind for many. I hope that the GPA—with its focus on collegiality, intellectual curiosity, and best teaching practices—will remain a beacon of hope, no matter how small, in the academy.

Dr. Lorraine Dubuisson, President
Georgia Philological Association

Introduction

From the Editor:

Dear readers,

In my second year as Editor-in-Chief of this journal, I have learned a great deal but realize that I still have much to learn about scholarly editing and publishing. I thank all our contributors and reviewers for their patience as I continue to adapt to this role. I also want to take this opportunity to welcome some new members to our editorial board: Matthew Brittingham of Emory University, Rhonda Crombie of Middle Georgia State University, Jesahe Herrera Ruano of the Autonomous University of Ayarit (Mexico), and Troy Spier of Florida A&M University. I think it is also appropriate to use this space to express appreciation to our other, long-time members of the board—their continuing support and dedication to the GPA and its journal are invaluable.

This year's volume got off to a rather slow start as some of our submissions trickled in later than usual. However, I believe we have selected excellent scholarship in the areas of pop culture, pedagogy, film, literature, and rhetoric to share with you. We begin with the keynote address from our annual meeting this past May, delivered by Andre Nicholson and LaRonda Sanders-Senu about their experience publishing an edited collection focused on the work of content creator Issa Rae. Their contribution is followed by Caroline Black's study of the influence of French poet Charles Baudelaire on the goth rock band, The Cure. Next, we have Anca Garcia's reflections on using a "teaching-for-transfer" approach to help students at a small, rural community college adapt their writing skills to a variety

of situations, both in higher education and in their communities.

Jack Love's article, as the title indicates, is a comparative study of violence in literature and film: "The Violent Humor in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and the Coen Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*" According to Love, "O'Connor's use of comic violence has contributed to an entire vein of American humor that a variety of artists, like Joel and Ethan Coen, continue to use for their own purposes." After Love's piece, we come to that of our first international contributor: Nodoka Hirakawa of Kobe University in Japan. Professor Hirakawa asks us to consider how authors respond to contemporary social events and movements—in this case, how Margaret Atwood addresses the #MeToo movement and the COVID-19 pandemic through her story "Impatient Griselda."

Our selection of peer-reviewed articles ends with Tyler Sehnal's "Participation, Citizenship, and Violence: Redefining Rhetoric for Social Justice." Sehnal, one of our graduate student presenters at our most recent conference, provides us with a sobering reminder that rhetoric can be as harmful as it is helpful when citizens voice their opinions in public settings. This year's volume closes with Lorraine Dubuisson's review of *A Pedagogy of Kindness* by Kate Denial.

Our editorial board is excited to announce that next year's volume will be a special edition on the nineteenth century. Papers focused on literature, language, composition, history, philosophy, translation, the general humanities, interdisciplinary studies, and pedagogy as they relate to this topic will be considered. If you have a specialization in this area, we invite you to submit your work, or if you have colleagues who do scholarship in the nineteenth century, please pass the word along to them.

Nate Gilbert, Editor-in-Chief
Journal of the Georgia Philological Association

"Awkward, But Secure: Writing and Editing the Works of Issa Rae for an Interdisciplinary Collection": Keynote Address, 19th Annual Meeting of the Georgia Philological Association

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Andre Nicholson, PhD
LaRonda Sanders-Senu, PhD
Middle Georgia State University

In spring of 2023, we were pleased to see the publication of our anthology titled *insecure, Awkward, and #Winning: The Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Works of Issa Rae*. Coming up with the title was probably the easiest part of doing a co-edited publication because we were all on the same page about what we wanted the book to represent. However, our journey to our final project was, in contrast, both challenging and rewarding. In what follows, we share our combined process of creating this interdisciplinary publication and our individual experiences in doing so.

At the center of this publication is a young woman, Jo-Issa Rae Diop, better known as Issa Rae. A Stanford University graduate who is a self-proclaimed awkward Black girl, Rae is a multitalented content creator and entrepreneur who proudly reflects people like her. Historically, the images and narratives presented in the mainstream media about Black people and other marginalized groups often do not reflect their dynamic and complex experiences. Content creators like Issa Rae understand that the only way to change that portrayal is to do it themselves. Through platforms such as her award-winning web series *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl*, her *New York Times* best seller with the same title,

and her Peabody Award winning HBO series *insecure*, she introduces her awkwardness to the world.

Initially, we were both drawn to this project because we are fans of the HBO series *insecure.* A colleague reached out to each of us, knowing our fondness for Rae's series, and invited us to participate in a roundtable discussion on Rae and her work at the 2019 Popular Culture Association Conference. On this four-person roundtable, we were joined by Adria Y. Goldman and Joanna Jenkins to discuss Rae through an interdisciplinary lens. During this event, the interaction between us and the audience was electric, leading us to the unanimous conclusion that Rae's growing oeuvre deserves more scholarly inquiry and we wanted to be the ones to do it.

We began work on our project immediately after the conference. Rather quickly, we decided to create an edited collection consisting of works by both scholars and media-industry practitioners. Valuing the interdisciplinarity of our roundtable, we wanted our collection to be interdisciplinary in scope as well. Each of us four editors also decided to contribute articles to the collection. After submitting a proposal with sample articles by the end of summer 2019, we were offered a contract by Peter Lang Publishing in late fall, and we distributed our call for abstracts at the start of 2020. The rapid pace of the early activities was daunting, but we benefited from having four co-editors; we were each willing to take on tasks as necessary. While we received many submissions from interested scholars, we also wanted to reach out to actors and producers from the show, in hopes that they would be interested in contributing. After creating a fact sheet about our project and scouring IMDB Pro for contact information, we optimistically reached out to figures in Tinseltown, including Rae herself; we were met with rejections and silence. Luckily for us, we decided to also reach out to established scholars, with whom we had more success.

The most challenging task that we faced was the editorial process. It became imperative that we have clear organization. We were fortunate that one of our co-editors established a well-organized and accessible Google account, which allowed us to communicate with contributors with a dedicated email address and organize the different aspects of the project in a Google drive, adding a degree of efficiency that was invaluable: each submission went through a rigorous editing process which consisted of each co-editor reviewing each piece during all three rounds of editing. This was time- consuming, but we wanted to be thorough. We also underwent an additional editing process, as our work was part of the Peter Lang Cultural Media Studies Series. Despite a number of delays, including shifting acquisition editors and facing a global pandemic, our book was published in spring 2023. The final product consists of twelve articles, divided into five sections ranging from gender, race, and sexuality to Black art in digital spaces. Our interdisciplinary work includes contributions from the fields of communication, history, and literature. The book is also framed by short critical perspectives of respected figures on Rae and her work.

We are both very proud of what we produced, and we believe that our disparate experiences with this process are instructive.

LaRonda's Experience:

As a novice to this process who had never considered creating an edited collection, I was both nervous and excited. The back-and-forth interaction between us and the publisher was useful, as it demystified the publishing process and imbued me with the power to ask questions and push back against requests when necessary. I learned to approach the process with confidence and the courage of my convictions.

I also grew as a writer through this process, learning to use visual media in my work, among other things. My research agenda relates to intraracial class dynamics and the

politics of respectability, and I was intrigued by the connections between *insecure* and the literature that I explore. I am glad that I chose to contribute an essay to the anthology: "The Pleasure Principle: Seeking the Erotic in the Works of Toni Morrison and Issa Rae." Discussing Black women, sex, and pleasure is challenging because Black female sexuality is so fraught with political cross-purposes that Black female bodies remain taboo even for many women who possess those bodies. Working with colleagues who provided useful feedback that helped me to sharpen my analysis was a great experience.

I also grew more confident and thoughtful as an editor during this process. I am very proud of the essays that we published. The progression from initial drafts of the submissions to the final drafts was very rewarding. While I spend a great deal of time in composition classrooms supporting students as they move through the revision process, time does not allow for prolonged attention to a single piece of writing. Seeing drafts that improved in clarity and effectiveness partly due to my personal suggestions was extremely fulfilling. Working on this book also afforded me the opportunity to read, learn from, and contribute to submissions from outside of my discipline. Collaborating on this collection was a gratifying experience that has given me skills that I now employ in the classroom and in current research projects.

Andre's Experience:

My research interests range from the representation and portrayal of traditionally marginalized groups in the media, to the use of social media and media literacy awareness. The graduate program director where I earned my Ph.D. used to always say that research ideas can come at any time, from anywhere; that is pretty much how this publication came to be for me. Although the initial idea came from a conference presentation, the thought of making it into a publication had not initially crossed my mind, but the response to our

presentation and the shared interest that others had for Rae's work made me think it was worth pursuing. My conference presentation was about the representation and portrayal of the men in *insecure*, so I wanted a chapter that focused on this aspect of Rae's show. However, I wanted it to be written through the lens of the female protagonists. It was the first time, after several conference presentations, that I had an interest in turning a presentation into a publication.

Once I put on the co-editing hat, I must be honest—it was challenging in positive and negative ways. It helped me hone my editing skills because I knew the work in the book would reflect on me as a co-editor. I tell my students often that group work is important because they will deal with different personalities and the diverse ways people tackle an assignment. This experience stayed true to this advice.

While our experiences during the process of creating our book differ in some ways, we agree on some of the lessons learned:

- Practice Patience—The publication process requires a significant amount of patience with all parties involved. With the contributors, we had to be patient at times, seeing the potential in a piece that still needed to be a bit more focused or fixing elements like citations. Patience was needed to deal with the publisher whose communication was often infrequent or delayed. We also learned to have patience with each other as co-editors: four thoughtful people do not always agree, and patient discussion is essential to resolving disagreements.

- Be Respectful of Everyone's Time—As we all know, everyone is very busy. This means that meetings and communications should be thoughtful and efficient. There is nothing worse than a meeting for something that could have been addressed through an email or a text. As the project progressed, we became increasingly aware of time efficiency.

- Be Organized—The Google drive with its clearly labeled folders full of drafts, lists, and other documents made the process manageable.

- Share Ideas and Understand Strengths—When working with others, it is important to remind ourselves that we have useful skills to contribute to the process. This becomes even more important when engaging with topics outside of our discipline. While this approach can be challenging, we learned that we could still give useful feedback when we ignored nagging feelings of doubt.

Overall, this was a learning experience for both of us and we feel enriched from its successful completion.

The Cure and the Art of Melancholy: A History of Depression, Dead Poets, and *Disintegration*

Caroline Black
Independent Scholar

"'I think it's dark and it looks like rain,' you said." The Cure's 1989 definitive album, *Disintegration*, begins with this foreboding line, which sums up the album as well as this study. Melancholy, depression, acedia—all tread a path strewn with disorder and indecision. The history of melancholy and the melancholic temperament is often linked to artistic expression, for example, in the life and times of nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire. The late twentieth-century band The Cure greatly inspired by Baudelaire, elevated melancholy into an art. In making these connections, it is useful to trek through Friedrich Nietzsche's views on aesthetics, as well as Foucault's genealogy of madness. Melancholy can and does become art, an art rarified and exalted by the music of The Cure, which group, like Baudelaire, speaks the language of madness in its art.

I. The History

The roots of melancholy run deep in Western psychology, with taxonomic beginnings in Hippocrates. The four humors of classical antiquity prevailed in the imagination, if not in the medical mores, of later times, with purgatives and bloodletting persisting into some of the psychiatric practices of the nineteenth century. Humoral theory ascribed four humors, or bodily fluids, to four temperaments. When any of the fluids was in excess, the patient would develop a corresponding psychological ailment. Yellow bile (choler) was ascribed to a choleric temperament, blood to a sanguine

temperament, phlegm to a phlegmatic temperament, and black bile (melancholy) to a melancholic temperament ("Humoral Theory"). The melancholic temperament gave way to a moralistic as well as psychological profiling in the Middle Ages.

In the *Summa Theologiæ*, Thomas Aquinas defines the deadly sin sloth as "an oppressive sorrow, which, to wit, so weighs upon man's mind, that he wants to do nothing" (2.35.4). Later, he says, "Sorrow is evil in itself when it is about that which is apparently evil but good in reality, even as, on the other hand, pleasure is evil if it is about that which seems to be good but is, in truth, evil" (2.35.4). Sloth or acedia (spiritual or mental apathy) is the sin from which the notion of melancholy stems. Sloth is not laziness; rather it is the "noonday demon," "anguished sadness and desperation," according to Giorgio Angamben in *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (5). Angamben insists that the medieval notion of acedia is not what we know today as sloth: "[M]odern psychology has to such a degree emptied the term *acedia* of its original meaning, making it a sin against the capitalist work ethic" (5).

The acedia of the Middle Ages is a moral as well as a psychological conundrum. Acedia is the sin of inactivity, the desire to act, but the fear of acting, that drives the bearer into indecision. The person with acedia may be desirous of reaching a spiritual good but cannot find the means to do so; the noonday demon which affects them makes action impossible. Thomas Aquinas's categorization of acedia as a mortal sin ascribes a character to it that implies it can be avoided. The melancholic temperament as such is regarded as a perversion of free will. If one can do something virtuous, one can also do something vicious. The inability to act at all is itself sinful because one does not act toward that which is virtuous. There is an implication of *choice* in the matter. The indolence of the slothful person is not so much a symptom of an illness as it is a religious and moral aberration of choice.

Robert Burton's seventeenth-century three-volume text *The Anatomy of Melancholy* details the symptoms, causes, and other factors of what is described as "the character of mortality" (144). "We are prone to melancholy because of our fallen state," states Burton in Volume I, reiterating the medieval notion that acedia or melancholy is, at least in part, of a moral and religious nature. Melancholy's connection to mortality is intimate. The melancholic keenly understands the intricate dance between life and death, and how one may ever so easily be removed (or remove oneself) from the one state and enter into the other. The knowledge and preoccupation with mortality is inherent in the melancholic disposition and in its excessive preoccupation with humanity's fallen state.

Melancholy affects body and soul, and Burton defines one of its key causes as the humor of the same name; according to Burton, melancholy is characterized as "cold and dry, thick, black, and sour," as it comes from the spleen (148). This idea that melancholy overtakes both body and spirit has pervaded much of Western psychology. "Fear and sorrow are the true characters and most inseparable companions of most melancholy," explains Burton (170). Like Thomas Aquinas, Burton ascribes to melancholy an indecisiveness that leads to inaction. The sorrow and fear of the sufferer create a state of despair, depleting one's energy to act.

In the early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud writes of melancholy in "Mourning and Melancholia," comparing the psychological distress of the melancholic to that of a person in mourning:

> The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and

> culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (244)

Freud sees melancholia as a loss, just as mourning is a loss of someone or something, causing the person who has lost the object to withdraw and become sorrowful. However, as Angamben rightly argues, "Although mourning follows a loss that has really occurred, in melancholia not only is it unclear what object has been lost, it is uncertain that one can speak of a loss at all" (20). Though Freud may tentatively attribute melancholia to a preoccupation of the ego with a perceived loss, the sorrow of melancholy cannot be traced to an external object, but rather comes from within.

Melancholy, then, is the precursor to what we know today as depression. In his landmark work *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression*, Andrew Solomon writes about the definition, origins, and clinical map of depression. Solomon summarizes the ailment eloquently, connecting depression to love:

> Depression is the flaw in love. To be creatures who love, we must be creatures who can despair at what we lose, and depression is the mechanism of that despair. When it comes, it degrades one's self and ultimately eclipses the capacity to give or receive affection. It is the aloneness within us made manifest, and it destroys not only connection to others but also the ability to be peacefully alone with oneself. (15)

Like Freud before him, Solomon bases his definition of depression on love, or the desired object. Making this connection explicit, Solomon continues: "The only feeling left in this loveless state is insignificance" (15). Paradoxically, inability to love and mourning the once-beloved seem to be hallmarks of the ailment; the preoccupation with loss itself triggers this incapacity to love and accept love from self or others.

The definitive diagnostic tool for psychiatrists in the United States from the latter part of the twentieth century up

to now, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) defines two clusters of affective disorders: bipolar disorders and depressive disorders. In modern psychiatry, melancholy finds itself neatly categorized under the nomenclature of depression. Major depressive disorder, along with other related or nearly related disorders, such as dysthymia and bipolar I and II disorders, is the pathological heir of melancholy. According to the *DSM*, "The essential feature of a major depressive episode is a period of at least 2 weeks during which there is either depressed mood or the loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities" (American Psychiatric Association 163). As with acedia, the noonday demon, the defining feature of depression as a disorder is the inability to *act*, or more explicitly, the lack of *desire* to act for what is good. In this context, the patient might lose interest in hobbies, career, relationships, and the daily tasks of bathing and eating.

Whether seen as religious deficit or mental disorder, melancholy's troubling legacy persists. Regardless of where it appears--in Hippocrates's theory of the four humors, in Freud's psychoanalysis, or in the *DSM's* diagnostic section--melancholy is always a *deficit*, a lack. Symptomatically, it is a lack of joy, a lack of desire, a lack of action. Continuing his discourse on depression, Solomon writes: "In depression, the meaninglessness of every enterprise and every emotion, the meaninglessness of life itself, becomes self-evident" (15). Thus, the problem of melancholy or depression is not *simply* a psychiatric one; it is also existential.

II. The Art

Like melancholy, art has a lengthy history in definition. From the Latin *ars*, the term did not initially mean what we associate it with today, writes R.G. Collingwood in *The Principles of Art*. According to Collingwood, art was seen in the classical Greco-Roman times as a sort of craft, and those who excelled at it were masters of their craft (5). During the Middle Ages, *ars* became associated with book learning. It

was not until the eighteenth century that the idea of "fine arts" as we know it, viz., *les beaux arts*, came into use (7). To make an art of something, it must be crafted and curated, and it must be given an aesthetic appeal, according to these earlier notions. However, Collingwood goes on to refute this definition, speaking of art as "the expression of emotion" in which the artist and the audience are not divorced, as they would be in considering art as craft or as amusement (118). By this definition, the artist is not elevated above those who experience the art.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche discourses on aesthetics, stating that "[A]rt derives its continuous development from the duality of the Apolline and Dionysiac" (14). The Apolline nature of art is best observed in visual art: it is rational and logical, like the Greek god Apollo. Dionysiac tendencies, named after the boisterous god Dionysius, best play out in music. The Dionysiac is emotional, chaotic; coupling the two, Nietzsche explains, gives birth to tragedy.

Writing of the tragedy of *Hamlet*, Nietzsche argues that "Aware of truth from a single glimpse of it, all man can now see is the horror and absurdity of existence . . . it repels him" (40). Furthermore, Nietzsche contends that art "alone can turn these thoughts of repulsion at the horror and absurdity of existence into ideas compatible with life; these are the *sublime*—the taming of horror into art" (40). According to this perspective, only art can rid us of the revolting thoughts of our mortality and the bitter sting of the world in which we live. This idea, echoed by twentieth-century playwright and theater critic Antonin Artaud, repeats the existential crisis of lived experience. Writing on the Theater of Cruelty in *The Theater and Its Double*, Artaud exclaims:

> If Shakespeare and his imitators have gradually insinuated the idea of art for art's sake, with art on one side, and life on the other, we can rest on this feeble and lazy idea only as long as the life outside

> endures. But there are too many signs that everything that used to sustain our lives no longer does so, that we are all mad, desperate, and sick. And I call for *us* to react. (77)

Nietzsche seconds this sentiment—albeit with a twist—in *Birth of Tragedy*: "True understanding, insight into the terrible truth, outweighs every motive for action, for Hamlet and Dionysiac man alike" (39). Infamously, *Hamlet* is, in large part, a play about inaction and indecision. Hamlet's melancholy spurs his inability to act:

> O, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
> Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
> How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> (Shakespeare 1.2.129-34)

Hamlet vacillates about whether he wants to commit suicide, as Ophelia apparently does later in the play, or continue living miserably without hope or purpose. The suicidal ideation expressed in this and the "To Be or Not to Be" soliloquy, like most of Hamlet's other moments of indecision in the play, only serves to heighten the melancholic mood of the tragedy. As Nietzsche and Artaud both intimate, in the realization that the world around us is chaotic and unpleasant (to say the least), art is joined with misery. For Hamlet, this leads to inaction. For Artaud, this demands *reaction*.

III. The Cursed Poet

The bitterness of life and its proximity to death is something with which thinking people have long had to contend. The nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire confronted these ideas in an eloquent and melancholic way: in *Les Fleurs du mal*, or *Flowers of Evil*, the poet makes the bitter sublime.

Born April 9, 1821, to a former priest and his much younger wife, Charles Baudelaire was a son of the

bourgeoisie. His father, Joseph-François, died before Charles was six years of age. It was not long after that his mother Caroline married the military man Jacques Aupick, for whom the poet would soon develop a lifelong loathing. Baudelaire squandered his allowance on the indulgences of Parisian life: illicit drugs, fine clothes and furnishings, and whores. Relations with the latter would give the young poet the syphilis that would ultimately be his demise, as well as his longtime connection to Jeanne Duval, a Haitian-born sex worker and erstwhile actress who inspired much of Baudelaire's poetry.

The deteriorating relations with Baudelaire's family continued when Aupick, concerned with the youth's reckless Parisian spending, attempted to ship his stepson off to India in 1841. Baudelaire, however, famously jumped ship at Mauritius, and was soon on his way back to France (Carter 32). When Baudelaire came of age and received his biological father's inheritance, his reckless spending habits intensified, causing more concern for his mother and her husband. A trustee was appointed to dole out Baudelaire's inheritance at intervals for the rest of his life so that he would not squander it all at once on nonessential extravagances (Carter 52). The appointment of the trustee by his mother and stepfather was the final straw for Baudelaire, and the rift between him and his mother would not heal until years later, and after the death of his stepfather. The "Cursed Poet" made a suicide attempt in 1845, despairing of his finances and being treated like a child by the trustee.

Throughout his life and because of his indolence, Baudelaire was kept from seeking, acquiring, and maintaining stable and normal employment. The poet worked as an art critic and translated the stories of Edgar Allan Poe into French. In the meantime, he cultivated a reputation as "a bohemian and a dandy" ("Charles Baudelaire"). In 1857, the first edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* was published, to the outrage of many. Delving into themes of depravity and despair, the book of verse took Paris by storm, drawing ire from the

government itself, which demanded censure for the poet and his publisher. The book, a masterwork in sensuality, elevated Baudelaire to the arguable status of France's greatest poet of the nineteenth century.

In 1866, on a trip to Belgium, Baudelaire suffered a stroke from which he would not recover. In March of that year, he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, likely the result of his syphilis. Rapidly deteriorating, he was removed to Paris, where he died on August 31, 1867 ("Charles Baudelaire"). The Cursed Poet left behind him the reputation of an eccentric, a sensualist, and a failure; although he rose to the height of fame and/or infamy, the ever-destitute Baudelaire satiated his lust for corporeal pleasures as a rejection of the rigid morality of the French bourgeoisie.

Twentieth-century French philosopher Georges Bataille states of Baudelaire that "Only the poet's interminable agony can really reveal the authenticity of poetry" (18). Creativity, Bataille continues, is the "morose pleasure" of unsatisfaction. Furthermore, "This morose pleasure, prolonged by failure, this terror of being satisfied, changes liberty into its opposite" (19). Pleasure, writes Bataille (and this holds true for Baudelaire, too), exhausts. Baudelaire, a famous eschewer of work, instead chose pleasure, but at the masochistic price of satisfaction.

The exhaustion of pleasure and the acedia of the Decadent movement (of which Baudelaire was a pioneer) constitute a part of melancholy, in both the mental and artistic realms. Sources of strife in the life of Baudelaire--the manic spending, the exhaustive pleasures of the brothel and the aesthetic Parisian life, the constraint of the trustee--all lend themselves to bouts of melancholy that would influence *Les Fleurs du mal* and his other works. To quote "Au lecteur," the prologue of *Les Fleurs du mal*: "C'est Ennui!—l'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire, / Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka" (Baudelaire 184: "It is Ennui!--his eye filled with an involuntary tear, / He dreams of scaffolds while smoking his hookah," translation my own). Ennui preoccupies oneself

with death and inactivity. What is ennui, after all, but a loss of pleasure through a surfeit of pleasure?

IV. The Cure

Out of Crawley, England, came the band The Easy Cure in 1976. Two years later, the group dropped "Easy" from its name and became The Cure. During the 1980s, The Cure took on a wide range of musicality. From the nihilistic *Pornography* (1982) to the deranged *The Top* (1984) to the playful *Head on the Door* (1985), The Cure explored the continuum of human emotions in a little over a decade. In *Goth: A History*, former Cure bandmate Laurence "Lol" Tolhurst states, "The Cure did not have a particular style; rather, we were the essence of a melancholy spirit" (5). A product of uncertain times, the band became, despite their arguments to the contrary, a forerunner in the goth music and subculture movement.

With singer-songwriter Robert Smith at the helm, The Cure still maintains a massive following of black-clad mourners. Smith, sometimes known as "the gothfather" (a title in dispute with Peter Murphy of Bauhaus), is the only consistent member of the group's 2019 inductees to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Known for his understated uniform of black button-up, massively disarrayed hair, black eye makeup, and smeared red lipstick, he is an icon of a generation and has maintained his influence decades after The Cure came to fruition with "Boys Don't Cry" in 1980. Smith, who studied French literature for a time, wrote lyrics filled with motifs of love, death, and existential despair. The death of Ian Curtis, frontman of Joy Division (a contemporary band to The Cure), prompted Smith to ponder his mortality as follows: "I hate the idea that you'd die for your audience, [but] I was rapidly becoming enmeshed in that around the time of *Pornography*, the idea that Ian Curtis had gone first and I was soon to follow. I wasn't prepared for this to happen" (qtd. in Thompson 305).

In 1989, the band would go on to create its goth masterpiece *Disintegration*, a concept album that begins with the sweeping "Plainsong" and ends with the tired "Untitled." In between these two songs lies a sonic expanse of aesthetic melancholy, and the album remains a classic nearly thirty-five years after its release. *Disintegration* famously delivered the classic "Lovesong," offered as a wedding present to Smith's wife, and the nostalgic "Pictures of You." But beyond these critically acclaimed masterworks are three songs about wistful reflection, mortality, charged eroticism, and creepy childhood nightmares: "Plainsong," "The Same Deep Water As You," and "Untitled."

The first of these, "Plainsong," is also the first song on the album. Sweeping and cinematic, it begins with the sound of bells, then envelopes the listener in synthesizers, creating a somber mood that only increases when the guitar comes into play. The lyrics are simple. They quote the words of an active beloved and a passive lover's response: "The wind is blowing like it's the end of the world," the beloved says, "And it's so cold / It's like the cold if you were dead." Finally, the lover replies, "Sometimes you make me feel / Like I'm living at the edge of the world." The song ends with the beloved's response, "It's just the way I smile."

Plainsong, or plainchant, is actually a medieval monophonic form, better known as Gregorian chant. The title and the way The Cure's song begins with bells, as though issuing from a haunted monastery, emphasize the near-religious nature of the song. The nostalgic yet dark words of the lover's remembrance of what the beloved said create a melancholic feel, which sets the reminiscent tone of the rest of the album. "The end of the world" and "the edge of the world" both imply an eschatological aspect of the song, reinforcing its quasi-religious nature. Smith captures a moment in time, a fragment of a memory, in an all-encompassing and monumental, yet at the same time restrained, manner. The songis thus both an overstatement and an understatement as an opener for an album.

Near the middle of the album, "The Same Deep Water as You" contrasts with the simple lyrics of "Plainsong." This sad song, nearly nine-and-a-half-minutes long, reads like a morose Victorian love poem in dialogue:

"The shallow drowned lose less than we"
You breathe
The strangest twist upon your lips
"And we shall be together…"

As in "Plainsong," "The Same Deep Water as You" presents another conversation between a beloved and a lover. "Swimming the same deep water as you is hard," laments the speaker. The mourning continues, describing what it would be like to drown, literally or metaphorically. Lyrically, the song makes use of internal rhyme to indicate the hypnotic yet frantic feel of drowning: "It's lower now and slower now," and then "But tightly hold up silently." As the song comes to its conclusion, Smith links love and death in an inextricable embrace:

I will kiss you I will kiss you
I will kiss you forever on nights like this
I will kiss you I will kiss you
And we shall be together…

The lethargic, measured tempo of the music juxtaposed with the urgency of the lyrics gives the listener the feeling of drowning in words, coming up for air, then submerging again, with the frantic attempts at saving oneself turning into the reluctant acceptance of one's demise.

Instrumentally, the song invokes background samples of thunder and rain, with a morose guitar in a minor key. The synthesizers serve to emphasize the drama of this loving lament. "We shall be together," echoes again and again as a refrain in this song, suggesting a relationship akin to the eternal togetherness of a Romeo and Juliet. The relentless, slogging rhythm of "The Same Deep Water As You" reiterates the melancholic (and gothic) call towards a romantic demise. As Tolhurst observes, gothic music is "usually about death *and* love in the same song" (28). If

"Plainsong" is a chant, then "The Same Deep Water as You" is a dirge.

If the price of pleasure is exhaustion, "Untitled" reveals this condition after the visceral, almost masochistic pleasures of the rest of the album. The song begins in a lengthy sigh as the guitar heaves an exhausted melody. The lyrics are brief, but the song's instrumentals trudge on for a lengthy six minutes. As it slogs along, Smith sings:

> Hopelessly drift
> In the eyes of the ghost again
> Down on my knees
> And my hands in the air again
> Pushing my face in the memory of you again

He continues, pointing to the tone of nostalgic remorse in the rest of the album:

> Never quite said what I wanted to say to you
> Never quite managed the words to explain to you
> Never quite knew how to make them believable
> And now the time has gone
> Another time undone.

The repetition of words completes the exhaustive nature of the song: "Again, again, again" at the beginning, and "never, never, never" nearer the end. Words become almost rote, but at the same time emphasize the meaning and lowered mood of the song.

Tired to the bone, Smith can only end with, "I'll never lose this pain / Never dream of you again." After the lyrics end, the instrumentation continues, slow and sluggish, finally ending with a collapse into weariness that would be anticlimactic if it weren't so apt.

V. The Cursed Poet and The Cure

A comparison of the melancholy of The Cure with that of Baudelaire's nineteenth-century poetry illustrates the firm connection between love and death. Charles Baudelaire is a definite source of inspiration for Robert Smith, Smith having translated into song Baudelaire's 1869 verse "Les Yeux des

pauvres," or "The Eyes of the Poor." Smith turned the lengthy prose-poem into the succinct and catchy "How Beautiful You Are."

"Flowers of Evil," "Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne" ("I worship you like I worship the nocturnal vault"), is a melancholic piece worthy of The Cure's catalogue. The poem, like many of the songs on the *Disintegration* album, shows the depths of a relationship in which love and death are two sides of one coin:

> Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne,
> O vase de tristesse, ô grande taciturne,
> Et t'aime d'autant plus, belle, que tu me fuis
> (Baudelaire 209; "I worship you as I worship the nocturnal vault / O urn of sadness, o great silent one / And I love you all the more, Beauty, when you flee from me," translation my own.)

The lover becomes more macabre with his metaphors, articulating the image of "un chœur de vermisseaux" ("a choir of maggots") that ascends a corpse, and also refers to the beloved as both Beauty and Beast. Looking back at "Plainsong" and "The Same Deep Water as You," one can see how Baudelaire's gothic aesthetic fits right in. "It's like the cold if you were dead," the active beloved says to the passive lover in "Plainsong." In "The Same Deep Water as You," the lover describes something akin to drowning:

> But I don't see
> And I don't feel
> But tightly hold up silently
> My hands before my fading eyes
> And in my eyes
> Your smile

Both The Cure and Baudelaire reiterate again and again how romantic love and death are one, Eros and Thanatos walking hand-in-hand. While Baudelaire's adoration of the erotic Beauty/Beast is captured in the imagery of a decaying corpse,

Smith's passive lover finds himself in the panicky process of drowning in love.

Both Baudelaire and Smith were products, respectively, of chaotic times. Baudelaire's origins lie in the Industrial Revolution and the constantly changing political order of nineteenth-century France, when violent revolution was frequent. The Cure began making music during the late twentieth-century rise of conservative governments in the U.S. and Western Europe and the dissolution of communist governments in Eastern Europe (the Berlin Wall "fell" the very year *Disintegration* was released), a time of worldwide uncertainty and unease.

To return to the aesthetic philosophy of Nietzsche, "[W]hen one once more becomes aware of this everyday reality, it becomes repellant; this leads to a mood of asceticism, of denial of the will" (39). Given the responsibility of imparting meaning to the abyss that is life, "[The Dionysian and Hamlet in particular] consider it ludicrous or shameful that they should be expected to restore order to a chaotic world" (Nietzsche 39). This assessment echoes Artaud's notions that give rise to the Theater of Cruelty. Add to this Bataille's idea that "only the poet's interminable agony can really reveal the authenticity of poetry" (18), and one concludes that the melancholic suffering of the artist due to the artist's specific circumstances leads to artistic expression itself. Depression, acedia, or melancholy, therefore, is not simply a sluggish reaction to one's hopeless situation; it also *becomes* the channel through which one can create. The suffering of the mundane is transmuted into art.

VI. The Art and Melancholy

Depressive love always involves tragedy, yet there is something of profound joy in the desperation of both Baudelaire and Smith. Baudelaire lived a complicated and rather brief life which included a suicide attempt. Robert Smith admitted to *Rolling Stone* in a 2019 interview on the

thirtieth anniversary of *Disintegration*, "Perhaps the reality is that I used to glamorize [death], and romanticize it slightly, and use it for artistic purposes" (qtd. in Grow). Though Smith broke the curse by insisting he would not be next on the list of suicides, he and his nineteenth-century predecessor seem to have cultivated a melancholic, if not altogether "mad," persona.

Since the time of Aristotle, mental suffering has been linked to creativity or genius. The question of such a link remains a contentious one for academic psychologists; there are some who attempt to psychoanalyze the lives of well-known poets, artists, and other creative figures, measuring them by current diagnostic standards. Kay Redfield Jamison suggests there is a connection between artistic temperament and a person afflicted with "manic-depressive" or bipolar illness. In *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (1993), Jamison surveys the research done in the field: more than just crafting assumptions about historical figures, she finds several studies focused on factual life events, such as time spent in asylums or suicide, as evidence of these artists' depressive conditions. Jamison herself looked through historical documents and records of English poets within the span of a hundred years (1705-1805). However, this biographical examination of figures long-dead is itself dated, as the book is some thirty years old now.

More recently, James C. Kaufman wrote in 2014, in *Creativity and Mental Illness*, that such studies as Jamison's "historiometric research" of trusting the admissions of the apparently afflicted "may involve self-serving descriptions [from those examined] and projections of images that were made in the context of cultural assumptions often quite different from those of contemporary society" (19). This tendency is certainly evident in the life of Baudelaire himself: though he attempted suicide and spent money excessively, he also was careful to cultivate the Cursed Poet image, claiming to have a garment made of his father's flesh, and

randomly asking people if they would like to bathe with him ("Charles Baudelaire"). So, is the connection between creativity and mood disorders still relevant?

The conclusion of this study is that historiometric research like Jamison's cannot accurately indicate pathology and/or its connection to creativity, particularly when concerned with diagnosing the long-deceased with twenty-first-century mental disorders. Diagnosing Charles Baudelaire, for instance, with bipolar disorder because his excessive spending and suicide attempt meet several criteria for the disorder in the *DSM* is an armchair diagnostic process, whether done by a psychiatrist or a layperson and literary critic. The *DSM-5* does tentatively suggest that there may be a link between bipolar disorder and a sense of "heightened creativity," but it is also worth mentioning that in the fifth revision of the *DSM*, Bipolar Disorders are newly separated from Depressive Disorders, and that heightened creativity is ascribed to the manic or hypomanic phase rather than to the depressive phase (American Psychiatric Association 136).

While research in the humanities can suggest intriguing possibilities, the field of literary studies is ultimately not equipped to provide a definitive solution for this psychological conundrum. More research of living individuals is needed, particularly those with bipolar disorder, though it would be worthwhile to conduct studies on those with other diagnosed mental illnesses as well, to make those bio-critical connections clearer. Although the diagnosis of the long deceased with modern mental illnesses can be heartening for those who currently struggle with such diseases, it is hardly a fruitful or relevant endeavor for long-term or lasting treatment of those contemporary patients.

Taking into account the nosology of mental illness of the eighteenth century, and the idea of psychiatry in a post-Cartesian world, Michel Foucault strove to make sense of madness, hoping to create a cultural history of the affliction, in his book *Madness and Civilization.* In this study, Foucault

writes: "Joining vision and blindness, image and judgment, hallucination and language, sleep and waking, day and night, madness is ultimately nothing, for it unites in them all that is negative" (107). Further on, Foucault suggests, "All that madness can say of itself is merely reason, though it is itself the negation of reason" (107). Madness cannot speak for itself, and so it needs reason to give it a voice it doesn't have.

Jacques Derrida, once a student of Foucault, also suggests in *Writing and Difference* that one cannot speak of madness with the language of reason. In the attempt to voice the language of the oppressed, Derrida contends, one ends up using the language of the oppressor (36). This study, however, concludes that though reason cannot, perhaps, be the language of madness, art can. Likewise, the art of both Baudelaire and The Cure eschews the stringent nature of reason with visceral, chaotic imagery and the poetic trappings of melancholy. Whether one views this attempt through the lens of acedia, melancholy, or depression, the lowered mood, the inability to act, and the struggle against life in an anarchic world is their art's language of expression: that is, art becomes the language of melancholy.

Therefore melancholy, whether as a literary device or an ailment, has become more than simply a form of artistic expression or a psychological affliction. Returning to Tolhurst, "In Goth [sic], lyrics form *out* of emotional vulnerability as opposed to bravado and certainty. The process is one of internal analysis and confession, revealing to the world frailty and humanity" (39). The Cure shares this vulnerability and frailty in its music, forming art out of anguish, in the same way a diamond is formed out of pressurized carbon. Mating the rational Apolline with the irrational Dionysiac, tragedy is birthed and melancholy becomes art. Robert Smith of The Cure, following in the steps of Charles Baudelaire, turned the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" into an artform all his own.

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The Secret Life of My Interviewee: Bringing the Communities into the Classroom and Facilitating Transfer Through Job Narratives

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Background

When I started teaching English at a small rural community college last academic year, I was a very new Ph.D., having taught English courses only at four-year research universities. I knew that the change to a two-year college would be challenging, and that I needed to adjust to a distinct teaching experience. My new college had a very diverse student population, almost half of which consisted of minority students, mainly African Americans, and more than sixty percent of these students were female. Unlike the students I encountered at my previous jobs, most of my students here were first- generation college students, many of them nontraditional students, working parents who wanted to improve their job prospects, or older professionals who wished to advance their careers. I therefore decided to adapt my teaching and to foster transfer (student ability to repurpose writing knowledge and practices in new contexts) in other ways, steering away from some of the heavy theoretical content I used to teach at an R1. An interview and profile narrative assignment I designed for my Composition 111 class in the Fall 2023 semester is an example that teaching for transfer using personal narratives can work well with any student population as it encourages students to express themselves and write about their communities.

Divided into four projects, my course was meant to engage my diverse student population in the class content through varied student and community-centered assignments. The projects included a personal narrative about job experience or job aspirations, an interview and profile narrative essay, an analytical essay which discussed work-related images, and a research exploration of the local job market. Each of these projects took three to five weeks to complete. Following Anne Beaufort's suggestions in both *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*, and "College Writing and Beyond: Five Years Later" on positive transfer of learning and her observations that courses based on one theme help students explore in-depth subjects from multiple discourse communities, my course centered on the idea of "work" both as an activity and as a topic of reflection. In my view, such a theme helps students understand their own job prospects better and provides opportunity for the transfer of knowledge from school to the workplace. Throughout the semester, we explored students' work aspirations and the jobs in the community even as we focused on knowledge of rhetoric, reflection on assignments and writing processes, and knowledge of discourse conventions. Since the course also emphasized that workplaces are always spaces of rhetorical encounters which compel people to make appropriate discursive choices, the major assignments prepared students to tackle a variety of communication situations that might come their way.

Theoretical Considerations

From a theoretical perspective, the course content centered on ideas such as student agency, context-based projects, and transfer. Although theme-reliant, all the assignments encouraged students to ponder topics from their own communities or topics that would help them choose a major or a career path. At first, some of these suggestions were met with skepticism, and many students explained to me that

"nothing ever happens" in their community, or that they had not yet decided what they wanted to study. However, as the semester progressed, they acknowledged that writing about the theme was an opportunity for deep personal and social exploration, and their original hesitation was abandoned. Many of them realized that their personal experiences and the experiences of others within their communities can inspire writing and discussion, so our classroom became a safe space for sharing, for instance, local jobs posts and conversations about the type of audience that these job posts addressed, or about the writing genres needed to apply for these jobs.

In the case of transfer, I followed Perkins and Salomon's observations in "Teaching for Transfer" regarding proximity, fidelity, and scaffolding (25). Based on their explanations of how these variables contribute to the preparation of future learning, I decided to use similar genres in multiple assignments, increasing the students' degree of rhetorical awareness as we progressed through the semester. In addition, I kept in mind while designing my course Yancey, Davis, Robertson, Taczak, and Workman's description of the Teaching for Transfer (TFT) curriculum with its three integrated components: a set of rhetorical terms, a focus on reflection, and an assignment on the theory of writing ("The Teaching for Transfer Curriculum" 42; "Writing Across College" 270). Implementing their suggestions, I repeatedly discussed throughout the semester the eight key rhetorical terms in the TFT curriculum (rhetorical situation, audience, genre, reflection, knowledge, context, purpose, and discourse community), yet I did it in a sequence that allowed me to encourage what Perkins and Salomon define as "low road" and "high road transfer" through discussions that included analogies or problem-solving strategies (29). I started with an emphasis on genre and rhetorical situation in the first several weeks; continued with purpose (with an additional emphasis on *logos*, *ethos*, *pathos*, and *kairos*), reflection, audience, and context; and

finished with knowledge and discourse community. I made sure that I did not overwhelm my students with theoretical considerations early in the semester, since they would become familiar with these terms always in connection to their projects, making them more logical and accessible.

Since the TFT curriculum encourages reflection, I also incorporated a short reflective assignment at the end of each major project to offer my students space to think about their writing practices and to support the repurposing of the key terms discussed above in different contexts. Some of these reflective assignments asked students to explain in a short paragraph three changes that they made from one draft to another in order to adapt to the rhetorical situation at hand. Others prompted students to image how they would write certain parts of the project differently were they to start it again. As they revisited the terms throughout the semester after each major project, I noticed my students' increased ability to use the course's key concepts in a more cogent manner. Our class discussions gradually became more conceptually sophisticated.

The Interview and Profile Project

As I noted previously, perhaps the most transformative assignment in terms of transfer proved to be the second major project, a narrative based on an interview (or the "Interview and Profile Project," as I named it). This assignment, which spanned over four weeks and included a preliminary draft and a final draft, was inspired by a series of articles in *The Guardian* entitled "The Secret Life: The Inside Story of How the World of Work Is Really Like." The series conveys the characteristics of multiple jobs, from more familiar kinds of employment such as social workers or librarians, to more uncommon ones such as clickbait creators or Father Christmas impersonators. Each job is presented separately in a long stream of fifty-three articles (published weekly in 2016). Over the course of four weeks, we read and analyzed many of these articles in class, especially the ones

which aligned with my students' topics; the students also chose additional ones that they read at home, responding to them in short reader-response assignments. Conceived as anonymized first-person narratives providing the unadulterated (and, many times, very humorous) perspectives of those who allegedly hold the jobs they describe, the articles in the series go deep into the details of each profiled occupation, offering their audience lessons along the way.

However, I did not ask my students to create personal narratives describing their own jobs as the articles in the series suggest, but to profile someone else, someone who loves what they do for a living. The assignment was modified to reflect this change and to engage students in transfer using the first-person narrative:

> Your second assignment requires you to profile a person who loves his or her job. Your profile will be based on an interview, but it will resemble a "featured profile" and not a dialogue. Although we will have a session of brainstorming questions in class, you should think in advance about questions that would create a more interesting profile, generate engaging details, help the person explain their passions, make them speak of the difficulties of the job, etc. See the model articles from the series "The Secret Life…" for more details and talk to me if you need help deciding on your subject.
>
> You have the freedom to choose any person and any job you wish but remember that you have to put both – the person and the job – in a thought-provoking light.
>
> Your final draft should be written in the first-person narrative, as if you put yourself in the situation of your interviewee, and you see the job through their eyes. Your profile should be approximately 1200 words in length (about 4 pages).

The assignment prompt also offered a few preliminary tips regarding the interview, encouraging students to think of questions that referred to the way the job shapes the individuality of the interviewee, that would help the reader acquire a better appreciation of the job, or that would disclose possible drawbacks of the job while also providing ways to overcome them.

In addition, I clarified that even though the profile would be based on an interview, the project itself should not discuss this interview at all, so the identity of the interviewee should always be kept confidential. Students were asked to share this information with their sources in order to relieve them of the pressure of the extra audience and help them feel at ease during the interview. I did not want my students' interviewees to imagine that a professor they did not know was about to judge their performance or feelings about their jobs. Instead, the sources were supposed to disclose many interesting and thought-provoking details, giving my students relevant material for their profiles. Furthermore, since the interview was to be kept private, it was also up to students to save or toss any parts of the interview itself. Anything compromising or bland was to be avoided; students were also encouraged to add extra information if they felt that the interview did not go as planned. They were told to imagine what they would do if they were to perform their source's job and to try to walk in their shoes as this would give them a better understanding of the social dimension of writing. After I finished reading the assignment requirements, we discussed how this project should come from a place of empathy and open-mindedness, and as a final recommendation, I told my students to use the project as an instrument for networking with people working in the field of their major or to explore jobs in a related field of interest. This was supposed to be an experience that they would carry beyond the course and which would help them understand the world of work around them.

Bringing Communities into the Classroom

It was clear from the very beginning that my students liked the project, especially because it offered them the freedom to choose their source. I asked them to think of a possible interviewee for a few minutes, and at the end of the short brainstorming session, most of them told me that they already had someone in mind. One student, for instance, wanted to interview the child therapist who inspired her to choose social work as her major. Another who was studying business told me that he wanted to learn more about what it meant to be an electrician, and that he would contact a local business to help him conduct an interview. Other students decided to interview people who would help them advance their career or who would give them recommendations for college transfer. In any case, none of my students expressed any hesitation or anxiety regarding the way they were supposed to complete the project.

In addition, they were also enthusiastic about the fact that the project employed first-person narrative. Since they had already completed a personal narrative earlier in the semester, they felt that they knew the genre well (Frankly, there were moments when I wondered myself whether the personal narrative would be so easy that it would inhibit meaningful transfer). However, I warned them that the purpose of this new assignment was different, and this generated a lengthy discussion about the new context in which they had to revisit a genre they had used before. They realized that for this project they had to simulate a personal point of view instead of simply providing one, and that they had to adapt to a completely different rhetorical situation. They told me they found this exciting. The discussion at this point represented a good opportunity for transfer and for the reinforcement of, or the introduction of, several rhetorical concepts, such as rhetorical situation, purpose, context, and audience. Even though later I would discover that the students found the adjustment to the new writing situation difficult despite their initial enthusiasm, from my perspective

at this point, they were already engaged in the metacognitive processes mentioned by the transfer theorists above because they were becoming aware of how these concepts operate differently from one situation to another.

The model articles from "The Secret Life" series also helped significantly. We read and analyzed rhetorically, as a class, articles such as "The Secret Life of a GP" and "The Secret Life of a Librarian." Students also worked in smaller groups and analyzed other articles of their choice. We talked about the position of the series' author and about the similarities in terms of style between these articles, concluding that the whole series was probably written by the same person or by a small group of people, especially since at the bottom of some articles there were short requests for people with certain jobs to send information about their professions. Since I pointed out that an interview was a type of primary research, my students noted that the series itself was, after all, the result of the authors' research. This insight prompted many students to research their interviewees' jobs in advance to become more familiar with them and to be able to focus on the important details of these jobs. We also talked about the use of the second-person narrative in parts of the articles, and the fact that this proved they were meant as lessons for the general audience.

The students' level of interest continued to be remarkably high in the first two weeks of the project when we examined and brainstormed a deliberately-chosen sequence of materials that guided the students through the project. For instance, listening to an interview by Terry Gross with Kory Stamper, entitled "From 'F-Bomb' To 'Photobomb': How the Dictionary Keeps Up with English," led to a discussion about the type of questions needed to keep the interviewee engaged and about interviews conducted by phone or online. I encouraged my students to use these distance modalities as I realized that some of them did not have the means or the time to conduct the interviews in person. Another time, we used ChatGPT to design

interview questions but ended up having a long class conversation about how the tool, although useful to a certain extent, was limiting because it generated some questions that did not adapt to the rhetorical situation at hand. Despite our efforts to narrow down the scope of the questions to refer to particular professions, the text generator provided mostly generic and "dry" questions, many seemingly inappropriate for a personal interview, such as, "How do you ensure attention to details and prevent errors?" or "Describe your approach to professional development." We ended up abandoning most of these questions and generating others together in class because we realized that the former would inhibit the interviewees. The students were thus exposed to an array of multimodal class activities and learned how to engage with them critically.

Yet, as the deadline for the first draft approached, so did challenges, many related to the interview itself. For instance, some students had difficulties finishing the list of questions, so we had a few extra individual brainstorming sessions. Others faced refusals from their initial sources, and they had to find other people in a very brief time. In such situations, many resorted to friends or family members, and though such solutions did not help them network in their field as we discussed at the beginning of the project, they still allowed them to satisfy the project requirements. Another common challenge was the lack of details some students received from their sources, which compelled them to return to their source with additional questions. This challenge helped students because it encouraged them to create certain details for their narratives and imagine what their source would say in a particular situation. Since the interviews were not submitted as part of the project, students had more freedom in dealing with and resolving these issues on their own. Finally, some students felt they did not have enough time to conduct the interview, so they missed the deadline for the first draft. I decided to allow them to submit the assignment later because I felt that four weeks might not be

long enough to finish the project. In hindsight, I believe that the time frame kept students engaged in the project and made most of them stick with their initial sources, so I will allocate the same amount of time when I teach this assignment in the future.

The first and last drafts of the project were varied and developed for the most part. Many students followed their major and interviewed nurses, IT professionals, engineers, and teachers. They networked in their area of interest and offered a comprehensive picture of their source's job. With very few exceptions, everyone complied with the first-person narrative requirement and tried to present their profession in a thought-provoking light.

I was happy to discover among the submissions a few professions usually considered not worthy of highlighting, and I realized that in these cases my students decided to break the barriers of anonymity or prejudice which usually surround these occupations. For instance, in one draft, a student spoke about the life and challenges of an immigrant motel worker in charge of everything from cleaning rooms to marketing and of the difficulty of balancing work and school. Another student spoke of their mother, a homemaker, who faced multiple responsibilities every day and who deserved more social recognition for her work. Finally, other students spoke of business cleaning owners who never planned on venturing into their field, but who were happy to find honest ways to provide for their children, and of teenage tobacco workers who dreamed of their first car. With every submission, I felt my students perceived my course as a place of inclusion, a place where everyone could have a voice. They managed not only to create meaningful first-person profiles, but also to provide glimpses into the different social layers of their community.

Ultimately, all these examples were also proof that my students were successfully employing the narrative genre in a new situation and that transfer was happening. Drawing on knowledge about writing they developed previously in the

semester, they were not only repurposing this genre in an effective way, but they were also demonstrating a growing understanding of how writing works across contexts. They were not simply describing the information their sources conveyed, but they were creatively reassembling this information to fit a new purpose. This shift showed considerable rhetorical awareness.

The Metacognitive Process

As I explained earlier, inspired by the teaching for transfer curriculum, each of the course's major projects was followed by a reflective assignment that asked students to focus on specific aspects of the project's writing process. While these reflections were submitted individually online, we often read and talked about them in class. Such "meta" discussions, as Beaufort would call them, helped me frame aspects of the writing practices we utilized in ways that solidified my students' understanding of them and fostered additional opportunities for the transfer of learning from one project to another (*College Writing and Beyond* 178). Each reflection had different requirements, depending on the scope of the project.

The reflection that followed the "Interview and Profile Project" was meant to be simple, only asking students about their work with their interviewees (the number of times the students met with their sources, whether the collaboration was smooth or difficult, and whether they would work with them again) and about the difference in terms of rhetorical situation between this project and the previous one, given the fact that they were both first-person narratives. I thought the second part would be a formality due to the numerous conversations on this difference we conducted in class and due to the number of successful drafts I read. This part of the reflection was simply meant to give the students the possibility to put what they said in class into writing, to give our conversations a more organized form. Yet to my surprise, many of these reflections suggested

that my students found the project very difficult despite their initial enthusiasm. Even though they felt the amount of information they received from their sources helped them write the project faster, the first-person narrative was difficult to reuse. Some students explained that they expected the second assignment to be easier at first, especially since they had the experience of the previous personal narrative. However, as they started writing the project, they realized that the two narratives were not that similar and that the impersonating requirement added considerable challenges to the second project. Nevertheless, most of them expressed appreciation for being directed to get out of their comfort zone and to become more creative. The assignment taught them to think differently, and they were grateful for that experience. In class, other students talked about the difficulty posed by the different purpose of an audience in this assignment. If the personal narrative in the first project was perceived as a modality for self-discovery, the second assignment was seen as a lesson addressing a larger audience that they perceived as inhibiting. Used in a different context, a genre that seemed most accessible turned out to be extremely demanding and required a completely different approach. Because of this challenge, students learned the need to adapt their writing to each task at hand, regardless of how familiar a genre might seem to them at first.

Such comments also revealed another issue associated with transfer. In "The Teaching for Transfer Curriculum…," the authors make the valid observation that transfer can depend on the students' mindset: "more successful students are able to adopt a novice mindset, and … adopting this mindset enables students to break up and reassemble prior knowledge, such as genre knowledge, for use in new writing situations" (Yancey et al. 271). In other words, transfer is adaptive, so students should be encouraged to abandon preconceptions (about genre, audience, rhetorical situation, etc.) and reflect on the difference between writing contexts when they face new writing tasks.

From this perspective, my students' difficulties most likely resulted from their inability to start the interview and profile narrative with this "new mindset" because they completed a personal narrative assignment at the beginning of the semester. Focusing only on the similarities between the two assignments and anticipating just another personal narrative of the same type despite our many class discussions on the difference in genre and purpose in the case of the narrative and profile essay, they found themselves struggling when they had to write about someone else. Since, as Lorimer Leonard Rounsaville and Rebecca S. Nowacek note, transfer has a relational character and "a teacher's actions can influence student attention in discernible ways that later have consequences for the transfer of learning," I decided to make some changes the next time I teach this assignment, focusing more closely on helping students rework the genre through practical class activities, since the discussions did not work as I had expected (141). I believe that even a few group work sessions in the classroom, in which I would ask my students to rewrite short anecdotes told by peers, could prove helpful in clarifying this point.

Yet most of my students noted that challenges were constructive, especially in terms of writing skills acquisition. As some of them put it, they learned how to conduct an interview and how to create engaging questions to keep it fluent. Others were equally pleased with the fact that they could make up or imagine details to write a more vivid essay if the interview proved incomplete or choppy. Finally, for some, the project was another opportunity to move away from the five-paragraph high school essay, which in their view still influenced their writing.

There were a few students who did not approve of the assignment's word count or who did not understand why they were not allowed to simply reproduce the interview. Some of them did not appreciate that they had to impersonate someone, or they had a difficult time not writing about themselves. As one student explained, the

impersonation made them feel dishonest in some ways. Another student replicated the sentiment even though admittedly, by the end of the project, they felt that they became better at anticipating and constructing their interviewee's possible reactions to certain situations. Such observations suggest that some students possibly focused too much on the emotions they felt when writing about someone else, and this hindered their ability to revisit a genre in a different context. In this regard, their attitude toward the assignment impacted the writing-related transfer. I did not know how to deal with this situation at first, but after rereading the assignment requirements, I realized that it was possibly the result of my initial fear of being too theoretical with my students. I decided to rewrite the requirements in a way that speaks more openly about the idea of transfer and less about impersonating someone. The main purpose of this new writing situation should always focus on revisiting the personal narrative genre.

Overall, I believe the project was successful. The drafts and the reflection responses indicated that my students were becoming more aware of the writing conventions, were using existing knowledge to acquire new writing skills, and were developing metacognitive abilities. These are all marks of successful transfer of learning. As for me, I also learned that even the most mundane assignments, like personal narratives, can facilitate transfer while helping create an inclusive classroom environment at the same time.

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The Violent Humor in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and the Coen Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

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Introduction

Flannery O'Connor and the Coen Brothers have long been tied together by fans and critics alike. For instance, The Georgia Historical Society has an entire webpage dedicated to "Flannery's Legacy." Listed on the page are a variety of "famous and creative people" influenced by the Georgia author, including Conan O'Brien, Alice Walker, the producers of the ABC series *Lost,* Bono, and the Coen Brothers ("Flannery's Legacy"). Coen films are almost always regional (the frigid Midwest of *Fargo;* the Jewish-American community of *A Serious Man;* the Hollywood studio world of *Hail, Caesar!*). They are deeply critical of the American dream (*Raising Arizona; Burn After Reading; No Country for Old Men*). And their films are also deeply comical. Even though critics have noted that the filmmakers share similarities with Flannery O'Connor, there is no extended analysis of their works in conversation together. Indeed, Joel and Ethan Coen have only ever briefly mentioned O'Connor during interviews (Pyne & Palmer). In this article, I will explore where her fiction and their film converge: the humorous violence that is represented in both of their works. Joseph McBride makes this point about the Coens only in passing: "The sudden, casual intrusion of violence is also one of the Coens' legacies from the more exotic worlds

of…Flannery O'Connor" (29). Yet, there is more to these moments of violence than simply humor and artistic similitude. In both O'Connor's fiction and the Coens' films, violence functions as a moment of revelation for the main characters. While both employ this device in many of their works, I will focus specifically on O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and the Coens' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Particularly, in both the novel and film, humorous acts of violence are enacted by law enforcement officials; these seemingly irrational acts speak to the underlying anxiety of arbitrary legal codes in an unpredictable environment. Hazel Motes (or Haze for short) and Ulysses Everett McGill's (Everett for short) encounters with police are central transformative moments in *Wise Blood* and *O Brother*, respectively. Directly following these moments, Haze and Everett face their own type of flood. Everett is washed away by the human-made flooding of the Arktabutta Valley, and Haze encounters Mrs. Flood, his landlady. Whereas Haze's revelation is permanent at the end of *Wise Blood*, Everett resorts to his former self in the final scene of *O Brother, Where Art Thou*. By comparing these finale sequences, we can better understand how Flannery O'Connor's own usage of grotesque humor persists in the work of other regionalist artists like the Coen Brothers. At the same time, by placing *O Brother* directly into conversation with *Wise Blood,* we can see how Joel and Ethan Coen diverge from the O'Connor grotesque to return to a classic comedic structure that ends with a (renewed) marriage.

Unexpected and Unwarranted Police Abuse

Comparing *O Brother, Where Art Thou* to Flannery O'Connor's fiction goes much deeper than the simple fact that both are set in the 20th century American South. Robert C. Sickels asserts that the Coen Brothers are masters of the pastiche, playing on older narrative forms from bygone eras (114). In *O Brother, Where Art Thou,* there are frequent nods to southern fiction and film, including almost-direct references to Flannery O'Connor's work. Big Dan the Bible

salesman directly correlates to Manley Pointer from "Good Country People;" Everett and his fellow runaway convicts encounter a religious revival on a riverbank like Harry Ashfield does in "The River;" and both Coens and O'Connor utilize the Eliotian mythic method, paralleling ancient myth with the modern or 20th century periods. Though the two share obvious similarities, the tone of *O Brother* is much more upbeat and joyous than anything O'Connor wrote during her career. That said, Coen films like *A Serious Man* and *Barton Fink* can also be compared to O'Connor stories based upon their similarity in serious tones. Nonetheless, *O Brother, Where Art Thou* most clearly connects to Flannery O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood,* because both employ violent episodes with law enforcement as central movements in the narrative. Though the scenes come across humorously, there is something gravely serious about both instances.

In *O Brother Where Art Thou,* Everett, Delmar O'Donnell, and Pete Hogwallop flee from the law throughout the film, with occasional close encounters that bring out some of the best moments of humor. It isn't until the culminating act of the film—when Everett is about to reunite with his wife Penny—that Sheriff Cooley finally captures the runaways and their friend Tommy, the talented guitarist who accompanies them. The humor lies in the immediate exchange between Everett and Sheriff Cooley. Like the classic *Odyssey* story, Everett's entire journey revolves around returning home to his wife and children. In the process, he also receives a pardon from Pappy O'Daniel, the current governor of Mississippi, after performing "Man of Constant Sorrow" to an ecstatic crowd. To officially reunite with his estranged wife (played by Holly Hunter), he must simply retrieve her engagement ring from their old cabin in the Arktabutta Valley.

Everything appears to be on the mend for Everett and his three friends as they make the quick trip to the old cabin until Sheriff Cooley ambushes them. Noticing the

three nooses strung upon a nearby tree, Everett quickly asserts, "You can't do this. We just got pardoned by the governor hisself" (1:35). Delmar adds, "It went out on the radio" (1:35). Without skipping a beat, the sheriff responds, "Is that right? Well, we ain't got a radio" (1:35). This quick exchange is humorous because it undermines everything the four men have been pursuing throughout the entire film. Also, it unveils the arbitrary nature of legal codes in America. Because it is his station, Governor O'Daniel can dole out pardons as he wishes, and he only does so with the four because it benefits his campaign for reelection. "Man of Constant Sorrow" is such a hit that O'Daniel's decision to partner with the four (known as the Soggy Bottom Boys to the public) all but ensures his reelection for governor. The sheriff's disregard for a pardon further emphasizes the arbitrary nature of American law. Cooley makes this point clear, stating matter-of-factly, "The law is a human institution" (1:35). Because he did not hear the pardon over the radio, he has no reason to believe Everett. Pardons only operate successfully in writing, or as legal documents.

Consequently, what appears to be a humorous exchange is also a sheriff abusing his power. Rather than exploring Everett's assertion about being radio-pardoned, Sheriff Cooley chooses to reject any claims made by the runaway convict and proceeds with his own form of punishment outside of the law. According to Stephen Rothman, Coen humor mainly functions through sequences of irony. Films like *O Brother* are "grounded in incongruities between what might be expected on the screen and what actually occurs" (59). These sequences can be absurdly comedic, like Big Dan clubbing Everett in the face with a tree branch as he munches on a cob of corn. They can also be absurdly dark, like a police car colliding with a cow in the road while in pursuit of George "Baby Face" Nelson. In all these ironic incongruities that range from funny to shockingly dark, violence is accentuated. Like O'Connor's fiction, the Sheriff Cooley sequence may be coded as comic,

but it really suggests something gravely serious. Rothman contends that this particular moment at the end of the film "adds that deeper dimension to even the lighter work of the Coen Brothers" (60). Officers like Sheriff Cooley display the breadth of their power over individuals like Everett and his three friends in these darkly humorous moments.

In *Wise Blood,* Haze spends most of the narrative fleeing from the truth of Christianity inherent within his very being. Before accepting this reality, he pursues his double, Solace Layfield, the "new prophet," and murders him with his old Essex. As he drives on the outskirts of town, a patrolman with "a red pleasant face and eyes the color of clear fresh ice" pulls him over (O'Connor 208). Explaining the reason for the stop, the cop says, "'I just don't like your face'" (208). To this, Haze responds with the lazy comeback: "I don't like your face either" (208). When the officer commands him to drive his automobile to the top of a nearby hill, Haze shrugs and follows the order because "he didn't mind fighting the patrolman if that was what he wanted" (208). Already incongruous with what one might expect during a routine pull-over, things only become more absurd when the patrolman shoves Haze's Essex down the hill to its destruction. This sequence of absurd humor has led many critics like Marshall Bruce Gentry to conclude that the "patrol car appears, as if Hazel had called it up from deep in his psyche" (Gentry 132). Gentry goes on to suggest that Haze uses this figure as a representation of his own transformation that he has already undergone. Others even contend that the patrolman is some sort of angelic being in material form come down to trigger Haze's final conversion (Ragen 395). Regardless of these readings, this mysterious person still represents a law enforcement agent who abuses his power in this moment of violence to property. His only justification for destroying Haze's Essex is the statement, "'Them that don't have a car, don't need a license" (209).

The Incongruous and the Grotesque

What is humorous in both instances is the incongruity of the officers' expected actions. They enact violence when there is no need for it. In her 1980 article on O'Connor's use of humor, Rebecca R. Butler points out that there is a "sense of threat, of danger, of violence that, in some form, permeates all of her stories" (35). This style of humor, Butler argues, often does not land for those reading O'Connor's fiction. Nonetheless, it remains the basis of her comedy in most of her stories, especially in a novel like *Wise Blood*. The Coens use humor in much the same way. *O Brother, Where Art Thou* is more obviously funny than some of their darker films like *Fargo* or even parts of *The Big Lebowski*. Even still, the Coen filmmakers incorporate aspects of dark humor in their 2000 movie through law enforcement and shocking moments of unexpected violence. Echoing Butler's claim concerning O'Connor, Joseph McBride asserts that the filmmakers' violent humor is often the most prominent aspect of their work, but it sometimes fails to land correctly, causing controversy or negative critical reception of their works (15). The dark humor we see in *Wise Blood* and *O Brother* is not pointless nor masochistic. Rather, in the words of Butler, humorous violence often rests "upon some deeply serious or horrifyingly repugnant reality" (35). For O'Connor and the Coens, the violence we see concerns the unsettling reality that police can violate the social contract they hold with civilians, usually without any negative repercussions to the officers. At its base, this social contract simply avows that an officer cannot arbitrarily inflict violence on any civilian who is not a threat to others. Thus, when a cop or sheriff does act out violently in an O'Connor story or a Coen film, we laugh because it is unexpected and in violation of the social contract.

This type of humor, which falls under the theory of incongruity, goes all the way back to Aristotle, who suggests in his *On Rhetoric* that a speaker can get a laugh by creating an expectation for the audience before violating it (3.2).

Building on this idea, Søren Kierkegaard claims that both the tragic and the comic in fiction are based on contradiction (459-68). We expect events to go a certain way in any given scenario. When they do not, the consequence can either be tragic or exceedingly comical. The difference lies in the levels of pain characters suffer due to these contradictions. In a comedy, of course, characters experience very little or temporary pain, coming away from such contradictory moments in a better place than where they started. Tragedy, on the other hand, rests upon the fact that characters encounter some contradictory moment that radically alters their lives for the worse.

Incongruous moments and comically-violent scenes all point to the grotesque—a common literary mode in Southern literature. Indeed, O'Connor is known as one of the most prominent practitioners of the grotesque in the 20th century. But it is not limited to the American South. The Coen Brothers, who are not Southern filmmakers, implement aspects of the grotesque in many of their films, not just *O Brother, Where Art Thou.* Molly Boyd defines the grotesque in literature as "anything deviating from an explicit or implicit norm: bizarre, incongruous, ugly, unnatural, fantastic, abnormal" (321). Flannery O'Connor's own rationale for employing the grotesque lies in her interest in revealing her own religious conception of the world. Contrary to Enlightenment rationalism, O'Connor believes that human life and the surrounding world is "essentially mysterious" ("Some Aspects" 816). The grotesque, she contends, is the perfect tool for conveying this mystery because it ignores ordinary realism in favor of the unexpected. In her words, grotesque characters have "an inner coherence, if not always a coherence to their social framework" ("Some Aspects" 815). It is clear from the beginning that Haze possesses an "inner coherence" that does not align with the social framework of Taulkinham, the fictional Tennessee city in the novel. Throughout these sequences, Molly Boyd suggests that O'Connor does not

"explain away, rationalize, define, or otherwise […] alleviate the reader's distress" (321). Likewise, Haze's violent encounters with police are depicted with an "almost total absence of emotion" (Boyd 323). Both facets of O'Connor's narrative style relate back to the grotesque. They entail bizarre, unexpected, and often horrific moments that are narrated matter-of-factly and even with tinges of comedy. The grotesque unsettles the reader because of its inherent fusion of seemingly "incompatible elements" (Boyd 321). In the final moments of *Wise Blood,* the comical, unemotional tone through which the narrator tells of Haze's violent demise often forces readers to laugh.

O Brother, Where Art Thou also consistently utilizes the grotesque in various scenes. Perhaps the best example of this is the Ku Klux Klan scene towards the end of the film. Everett, Pete, and Delmar encounter a large party of Klan members rallying around a burning cross. Rather than depicting the scene as one might expect, the Coens choose to stylize it by having the KKK members march and chant in the exact same manner as the "monkey-men" who defend the wicked witch's castle in *The Wizard of Oz*. What makes the Coen Brothers' use of the "monkey-man" chant even more grotesque is that the Klan intends to execute Tommy Johnson amid their absurd meeting. Bound and held by two Klan members, Tommy begs for mercy as the racist band of hooded men conduct their fantastical ritual. Thanks to Everett, Tommy is rescued from the violent racism of the Klan in what serves as a bit of foreshadowing for the ending of the film. This moment proves that the Coen Brothers never remain wholly committed to the grotesque. Herein lies the primary difference in humor between O'Connor and the Coens. Whereas O'Connor unwaveringly applies grotesque comic moments in *Wise Blood* to the point of Haze's death, the Coen Brothers ultimately withdraw from the grotesque to return to a conventional comedic storyline.

For O'Connor, the grotesque leads to revelation and transformation. For the Coen Brothers, it is something that

Everett and his trio must ultimately overcome. Denise T. Askin claims that O'Connor's humor is unique in the way that characters in her fiction usually only approach the "threshold of freedom" (57). Building off Northop Frye's famous claim that all comedy moves towards a character's freedom from a restrictive society, Askin points out that O'Connor's characters approach the threshold of this moment, choosing either to reject or accept the offer of freedom at the end of the narrative. Askin writes, "[O'Connor] exposes societies for their deformities, but she does not 'free' [her characters] at the conclusion of the story. O'Connor subjects her characters to shocking confrontations with reality, but her plots often lead them only to the threshold of freedom," not beyond it (57). Haze, for instance, spends most of the novel vehemently rejecting Christianity even though he obviously represents a kind of prophet or, in the words of O'Connor, a "Protestant saint" ("To Carl Hartman" 919). He only begins to fathom his role towards the very end of the text after encountering the patrolman who pushes his Essex down a hill, essentially immobilizing his ability to flee the religious truth within him. It is only when he dies at the end of the novel that he finally reaches his moment of liberation. While O'Connor eschews a traditional comedic structure in favor of the grotesque, *O Brother, Where Art Thou* adheres to Northop Frye's claim that all comedy stems from characters attaining freedom in a society of restrictions (43). As such, violence is something that Everett and his friends must overcome. When they finally escape Sheriff Cooley, the comedic nature of the film is fully realized. By evading the strictures of an oppressive Mississippi society, Everett can finally reunite with his family and renew his marriage with his formerly-estranged wife. Interestingly, this is atypical for the Coen Brothers who, much like O'Connor, rarely allow their characters to experience any form of freedom.

The Role of Law Enforcement and Floods

One way to identify difference between the two narratives is through the role law enforcement plays in each. Though both function disruptively, Sheriff Cooley in *O Brother* and the highway patrolman in *Wise Blood* are fundamentally different in their relation to their respective protagonists. Both officers embody some sort of spiritual being or preternatural force that surpasses human ability. This point has been widely explored in *Wise Blood* criticism. Jordan Cofer, for example, is one of the many O'Connor scholars who claim Haze's encounter with the patrolman on the road is equivalent to the Apostle Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (49). This means the officer functions almost like an angelic being intervening during Haze's escape from Taulkinham. Though O'Connor's rendition of the biblical story is much more humorous, the similarities are clear. As such, the patrolman's role in the novel is a positive one. His destruction of the Essex benefits Haze because it forces him finally to accept the religion he had been attempting to flee.

In *O Brother,* Sheriff Cooley has been identified as Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea, by David M. Pollio (24). In the *Odyssey,* Poseidon is the main hindrance to Odysseus' homeward journey in the same manner as Cooley is to Everett. The god of the sea hurtles storm after storm at Odysseus and his returning soldiers, sending them to seek out shelter on dangerous islands across the Aegean Sea. Cooley likewise forces Everett and his comrades to take detours in their journey, forcing them to confront their own Southern version of cyclops, sirens, and other dangers on the road. In addition to this interpretation, Tommy Johnson suggests that Sheriff Cooley is a human embodiment of the devil as understood in a Judeo-Christian context (00:22). In more than one instance, we see Sheriff Cooley in a close-up shot with flames reflecting in his dark-tinted glasses. This imagery suggests the opposite of one who should symbolize the Greek god of the sea. Either interpretation of Cooley as Poseidon or devil firmly places him as antagonist to the trio

of escaped convicts. Thus, there is a major difference between the police in *Wise Blood* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou.* For O'Connor, the abusive actions of the patrolman bring on Haze's final transformation. The mysterious trooper becomes a tool for Haze's redemption. Opposite to this, Cooley's abusive actions directly conflict with Everett's attempt to return home to his family. As such, he must be overcome in some form before Everett can finally achieve his goal. By simply exploring how the officers have fundamentally different roles in each narrative, we can begin to see how O'Connor employs the grotesque as a means for Haze to attain his salvation. On the opposite end, by setting up Cooley as the embodiment of evil itself, the Coens reveal how they will ultimately return to a conventional comedy rather than remain within the grotesque mode.

The subsequent floods that occur after Haze's and Everett's encounters with law enforcement also function differently. In *O Brother,* Everett undergoes a brief transformation during his pleading prayer to God that Sheriff Cooley allows him before the execution. He prays,

> Oh Lord, please look down and recognize us poor sinners. Please, Lord. I just want to see my daughters again. I've been separated from my family for so long. I know I've been guilty of pride and sharp dealing. I'm sorry that I turned my back on you. Forgive me. We're helpless, Lord. For the sake of my family, for Tommy's sake, for Pete's and Delmar's, let me see my daughters again, Lord. Help us, please. (1:36)

Just as he ends his plea, the entire valley floods with water brought in to construct a human-made lake. Whether it is divine intervention or mere coincidence, the flood finally saves Everett and his trio of friends from the relentless sheriff. Upon reuniting with his two fellow runaways on a piece of driftwood, Everett asserts that there is a scientific reason for what just happened, which is true. Earlier in the film, the shot closes in on a burning newspaper headline that

reads: "T.V.A. Finalizing Plans for Flooding of Arktabutta Valley," which is the very place where Sherriff Cooley arrests the runaways at the end of the film (00:40). Pete and Delmar perceive the timing of the flood as providential intervention, even commenting, "We prayed to God, and he pitied us" (1:39). In response, Everett recants his religious plea by responding, "Well, it never fails. Once again, you two hayseeds are showin' how much you want for intellect. There's a perfectly scientific explanation for what just happened" (1:40). As Pete notes, Everett's comments contrast with the "tune [he] was singin' back at the gallows," showing that his transformative experience was brief and temporary (1:40). The lake flooding literally washes him back towards a secular-modern world view. He even claims that the lake construction represents a historical transition where "the old spiritual mumbo-jumbo, the superstitions, and the backward ways" are replaced by "a veritable age of reason, like the one they had in France" (1:40). This reference to the T.V.A. and the valley flooding does not simply place *O Brother* within the historical context of the Great Depression and Roosevelt's New Deal politics. Sickels claims that the Coens intentionally leverage filmic genres from that period of early Hollywood. Namely, *O Brother* plays on the screwball romantic comedy genre that proliferated throughout the '30s and '40s. These films were primarily interested in exploring "American courtship rituals through the lens of the social and economic conflicts of Depression-era America" (Sickels 116). Roosevelt's economic plan not only saves the lives of the four men Cooley threatens, but it also rescues Everett's marriage to Penny. Sheriff Cooley's violation of human law temporarily pushes Everett to the brink of pleading with God, but the lake flood saves him from any permanent change. Through science and Depression-era government programs, Everett can renew his marriage with Penny and the narrative thrust of *O Brother* remains an adherent to the traditional comedy structure.

Flannery O'Connor critiques this traditional narrative style, favoring stories that focus on mystery through the grotesque. She writes, "Since the 18th century, the popular spirit of each succeeding age has tended more and more to the view that the ills and mysteries of life will eventually fall before the scientific advances of man" ("Some Aspects" 815). According to her, many novelists and storytellers craft narratives committed to this belief, which results in a "tragic naturalism" or realism ("Some Aspects" 815). Contrary to this "narrow vision," O'Connor claims that authors who see life as "essentially mysterious" will use surface level events to emphasize the depths of mystery in the world ("Some Aspects" 815-16). For O'Connor, the grotesque is precisely the tool capable of combining elements of realism with the inexplicable mystery of life. In *O Brother,* Everett's literal reference to an "age of reason" coupled with the fact that there is a scientific explanation for the flooding of the valley completely disrupts the grotesque narrative mode. The Coen film quite literally returns to an ending that can be understood and reasoned out. On the other hand, most of O'Connor's stories, including *Wise Blood,* maintain the mysterious through the grotesque. Surface-level events appear to contradict what is occurring beneath them. In a parallel telling of *O Brother* that adheres to the grotesque, Everett and his trio would be executed by Sheriff Cooley. No explainable human-made flood would abruptly wash them away from their inevitable demise. Yet, Everett's death would also lead to his transformation. The prayer he utters before his execution would remain permanent, and the flooding would not allow him to revoke his plea. However, like the earlier Klan scene, the Coen Brothers do not remain committed to depictions of the grotesque. They "pull back" to a more classical comedic structure—one that makes sense for surface pageantry without deep reflections.

In contrast, as *Wise Blood* concludes, O'Connor does not remove her grotesque style from the narrative. After he loses his Essex, Haze returns to his rented room where his

landlady, Mrs. Flood, becomes deeply interested in his religious ascetism. At first, Mrs. Flood is uneasy around Haze because of his strange behavior. Farrell O'Gorman suggests that this unease stems from the anti-Catholic sentiments still prevalent in the 20th century South (189). After all, when Haze and Mrs. Flood first interact, she only permits him to lodge in her home so long as he does not practice any "foreign" religion (106). Now that he has accepted a Catholic-like Christianity, Mrs. Flood is completely confused by the blinded Haze, who wraps barbed wire around his body and walks with rocks in his shoes as a method of penance for his wrongdoing. This change leads her to seek out ways to take advantage of him. After Haze blinds himself, Mrs. Flood repeatedly investigates his face "as if she expected to see something she hadn't seen before" (213). His mysterious blindness leaves the landlady feeling cheated, and it is for this reason that she lets him remain in her home. She wants to determine how the blind man is grifting her before evicting him from her residence.

Because of his status as an injured war veteran, Haze receives a monthly government check that allows him to avoid employment. This frustrates Mrs. Flood, who "felt justified in getting any of it [i.e., his money] back that she could" (214). The landlady even steams open one such envelope containing Haze's monthly stipend and raises his rent when she realizes how much money he receives (216). Eventually, she plans to take all of Haze's stipend by marrying and then shipping him off to a nearby insane asylum. Mrs. Flood's money-minded approach directly correlates to the nature of her city of residence: Taulkinham, Tennessee. Throughout the novel, O'Connor continually depicts the urban environment as a corrupt place rife with rampant capitalism (Gooch 138-39; Gordon 89- 122). From Onnie Jay Holy's street preaching sham to the business competition between Asa Hawkes and the potato peeler salesman, characters routinely jostle with each other for financial gain. For instance, Mrs. Flood calls the "Welfare

people" to send Sabbath Lily to a detention home when she learns that the young girl is also after Haze's government money (216). According to Steve Pinkerton, commerce and consumption are the religious ideals in Taulkinham, while Christianity acts as just another form of business there (456). Mrs. Flood falls directly in line with this "deification of consumption" rather comically (Pinkerton 449). Because of her commitment to earning money, Mrs. Flood finds the entire idea of a veteran welfare system to be "a gigantic act of fraud perpetrated against her personally" (Edmunds 200).

Up until his voluntary blinding, Haze also attempts to subscribe to the ways of the city through the purchase of his beloved Essex. Before his conversion, he even claims, "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified" (113). His entire perspective on the matter changes when the patrolman pushes his car down a hill to its destruction. Yet, his association with Mrs. Flood threatens metaphorically to wash him back to the corrupted wasteland of Taulkinham. In an imagined alternate ending to *Wise Blood,* we can see where O'Connor might similarly "pull back" from the grotesque by having Haze marry Mrs. Flood. Like the valley flooding, the landlady could serve as a lifeline to Haze and save him from his progression towards ascetism and death. Of course, O'Connor does not pursue this route and remains wholly committed to her grotesque vision through Mrs. Flood's unexpected transformation.

The landlady becomes deeply impacted by Haze's religious commitment. Every time she plots a way to take more money from the blind man, she still cannot "get rid of the feeling that she was being cheated" (216). As the narrative closes, Mrs. Flood functions in the opposite manner to the T.V.A. flooding in *O Brother, Where Art Thou.* Whereas Everett is physically removed from the danger Sheriff Cooley poses, Haze refuses to get caught up in Mrs. Flood's obsession with monetary possession. On the contrary, the landlady experiences the beginnings of a transformation due to her exposure to Haze. Towards the

end of the text, Haze disappears from Mrs. Flood's residence, which prompts her to call the police in hopes that they can track him down. When they finally locate Haze and return his dead body to her, she exclaims, "'I've been waiting for you. And you needn't to pay any more rent but have it free here, any way you like, upstairs or down. Just however you want it and with me to wait on you, or if you want to go on somewhere, we'll both go'" (231). These final comments coupled with her locating a "pin point of light but so far away" in Haze's eyes indicates that Mrs. Flood has experienced the beginnings of some kind of change (231). Marshall Bruce Gentry argues that Mrs. Flood's desire to possess everything, including Haze himself, leads her towards "a process of transformation" as she stares into Haze's eyes in the final paragraph of the novel (Gentry 135). Susan Edmunds even calls Mrs. Flood a "sulky Noah" who finally distances herself from the materialistic world of Taulkinham after Haze's death (201). In *O Brother,* Everett humorously rejects his transformative experience before the gallows by celebrating "the veritable age of reason" that he predicts the T.V.A. represents for the American South (1:40). Haze is also given an option to be washed away from his own tragic demise through the role Mrs. Flood plays, but because he is seemingly convinced that the patrolman's intervention was divine, he remains committed to the religion he once rejected.

In the final moments leading up to Haze's death, he once again encounters two officers who violently abuse their roles as law enforcement agents. The two men find Haze lying face down in a ditch beside a construction project in Taulkinham. Completely unconcerned for Haze's wellbeing, the two argue over whether the injured man's suit is blue or not. The first cop says, "'Quit pushing up so close to me. Get out and I'll show you it's blue'" (230). As they approach Haze in the ditch, they continue to argue about the color of his suit:

> [The officers] both had yellow hair with sideburns, and they were both fat, but one was much fatter than the other.
> "It might have uster been blue," the fatter one admitted.
> "You reckon he's daid?" the first one said.
> "Ast him," the other said.
> "No, he ain't daid. He's moving." (230)

As Haze awakes, the cops inform him that he must pay his rent to Mrs. Flood, and they plan to return him to her residence. It is at this moment that Haze says to the two: "'I want to go on where I'm going'" (230). Sensing trouble in the blind man where there is none whatsoever, one of the officers hits him over the head with a billy club. As the cops haul him off to Mrs. Flood's home, Haze dies in the squad car without either taking any notice (231). O'Connor's caricatured police officers strike an oddly humorous tone in what is perhaps the most tragic sequence in *Wise Blood*. Like the patrolman who destroys the Essex, they have no reason to act out violently towards Haze, who is blind and extremely ill by this point in the narrative. Yet, through their abuse of power, they finally and ironically send him off to the spiritual plane beyond the material world of Taulkinham—the very place he longs to go. The grotesque is evident in this moment because it holds in tension police violence and a religious salvation. In fact, it is through an egregious abuse of power that Haze attains his salvation.

Conclusion

By comparing the Coen film to the O'Connor novel, it is easy to fall into a dualistic trap that categorizes the *O Brother* ending as simple and the *Wise Blood* conclusion as complex. Yet, the Coens' *O Brother* is not as straightforward as it might seem. Joseph McBride identifies the Coen Brothers' skill in tonal shifts as the primary strength of their filmmaking (28). The final shot of *O Brother* is one of these moments in tonal shift. The lake flooding scene closes with relief and a sense

of optimism because the four have survived Sheriff Cooley and the subsequent flood. Specifically, Everett can finally reunite with his wife. In the closing scene, what should be a joyous reunification between two estranged lovers turns into a stereotypical representation of a marital squabble between husband and wife. The scene opens with Everett quoting Shakespeare: "'All's well that ends well,' some poet said" (1:41). His wife responds, "That's right, honey," which seems to be a dismissive stock phrase that she is accustomed to repeating to her talkative husband (1:41). Everett's continuous speech is the primary sign that he has not changed much since his experience with Sheriff Cooley and the flood. Sickels calls him "a classic screwball lead" because "he talks melodiously, with mock eloquence, and with an unprecedented rapidity" (119). Thus, his relentless pace of speech reveals that Everett has remained static throughout the entirety of the film. When he shows his wife her old ring, she quickly replies, "That's not my ring," stopping Everett mid-sentence (1:41). Everett, of course, tries unsuccessfully to convince her that it is indeed her ring:

Everett: You said it was in the roll-top desk.

Penny: I said I thought it was in the roll-top desk.

E: No, you said that--

P: Or under the mattress. Or maybe in my chifforobe. I don't know.

E: Well, I'm sorry honey.

P: Well, we need that ring.

E: That ring is at the bottom of a pretty durn big lake.

P: Uh-uh.

E: A 9,000-hectare lake.

P: I don't care if it's 90,000. That lake was not my doing. (1:41-42)

The film essentially ends by suggesting that Penny will only re-marry Everett if he retrieves her old engagement ring from the bottom of the newly formed T.V.A. lake. Everett's return to his family is not some triumphal entry, nor is it a celebratory moment that centralizes his own experiences as

a prisoner and runaway convict. Rather, he and his wife pick up right where they left off with a humorous marital dispute.

On one level, this ending is heartwarming in its own strange way. The fact that Penny and Everett fall right back into their marital rapport indicates their relationship is on the mend. On another level, this ending of *O Brother* resists turning Everett into a character like Haze who is transformed by his experience and completely changes his ways. Hugh Ruppersburg argues that in *O Brother,* the Coens never abandon their amorality (10). Likewise, McBride insists that the Coens' lack of interest in morality often turns into cynicism, which in turn draws the ire of critical and popular audiences alike (21). In other words, the Coen Brothers are not trying to moralize their narrative like Flannery O'Connor does in *Wise Blood*. Everett briefly muses on his experience to Penny, saying, "Don't mind telling you I'm awful pleased my adventuring days have come to end" (1:41). Penny simply replies, "That's good, honey" (1:41). She does not provide him the space to ponder upon and then interpret his wily adventures into some moralized story meant to be transformative. Rather, Everett's escapades are just a sequence of experiences, and any transformative moment that could have happened to him has passed him by completely. Though he may have finally attained his long sought-after freedom from a restrictive society, that freedom does not shift his internal perspective in any palpable way.

Whereas O'Connor's grotesque ending transforms *Wise Blood* into a moral-religious narrative, the Coens' choice to end the story with Everett's return has led many critics to speculate on the extent of moralization in *O Brother Where Art Thou*. Sickels argues that, like the many screwball comedies from the '30s and '40s, humor is the moral of the Coen film (116). In other words, the comedy of *O Brother* itself has a restorative power that enables individuals to enjoy their livelihood despite the pressures of society. Within the film itself, Everett and his pals casually traverse the Mississippi countryside with mostly carefree attitudes despite the many

pressures they face from the sheriff, the Great Depression, and a variety of other sources. On the other hand, R. Barton Palmer sees the finale of the film as completely lacking in any "sharp engagement with social questions" (120). After all, the flooding of the Arktabutta Valley literally washes Everett away from the many problems he faces and allows him finally to return to his wife unencumbered. The same casualness can be said about other issues in the film, from the Klan scene to the Homer Stokes election campaign event. What both critics indicate here is that *O Brother Where Art Thou* has a commitment to the humorous or comedic at the expense of social commentary or moralizing While often employing elements of the grotesque, the film continually returns to a standard comedic template. If Sheriff Cooley were to exact his punishment on Everett and company, the carefree nature of the film would instantly be transformed into a darkly humorous tale about police abuse. Indeed, the film would immediately become a "serious" narrative that offers troves of obvious social or moral commentaries. The American South would appear as a region with bizarre grotesqueries that are inescapable and harmful. Since this change does not happen, however, audience members feel a sense of relief at Everett's salvation from the sheriff. They can laugh at his return home because, in the end, he remains a static character. Additionally, he scoffs at moralization in the final moments of the film. Pete and Delmar, who insist that Providential intervention is the reason they survive the sheriff, are harshly rebuked by Everett. By setting up the finale of the film in this way, the Coen Brothers intentionally disrupt the grotesque moment of revelation and transformation so common in Southern literature.

Flannery O'Connor sits on the other side of the spectrum in terms of such moralization. She frequently claimed that her intention was to reach those non-Christians in her audience by shaking them up with grotesque stories like *Wise Blood* ("The Fiction Writer" 805). Carol Schloss claims O'Connor's humor does "not seem to arise from

social anger or love" (7). It comes "rather from the need to wean oneself from social particulars through harsh comedy" (Schloss 7). Hence, Haze's transformative experience is not some sentimental moment where everything fits into place for him perfectly. Indeed, O'Connor describes sentimentalism as "a skipping of [the process of redemption] in its concrete reality and an early arrival at a mock state of innocence, which strongly suggests its opposite" ("The Church" 809). For her, then, transformative moments in fiction should be jarring and even tragic in their own way. In a word, these moments should be shockingly grotesque. Haze, of course, wants to die and move onto the spiritual plane at the end of *Wise Blood*, but his death does not make the ending any more pleasant to most audience members. He does not, as Frye claims of comedy, attain freedom from the strictures of the corrupt city of Taulkinham. Instead, he succumbs to the restrictive society that is represented in the three officers who violently abuse him. For some, the humor of *Wise Blood* is stifled by the sorrowful death of Hazel Motes. The restrictive society remains inescapable, according to *Wise Blood*. The only way to freedom or escape is through the religious commitment that both Haze and Mrs. Flood experience in the novel. As a result, the humor we see in *Wise Blood* becomes subsumed by the violent tragedy of Haze that O'Connor intentionally foregrounds through his insignificant death. This difference in ending to the Hollywood-produced Coen film aligns with Jimmy Dean Smith's claim that Flannery O'Connor herself believed picture shows lacked the capacity to startle an audience (57). While *Wise Blood* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou* have surprisingly similar finales, they ultimately function much differently based largely upon O'Connor's Catholic commitment and the Coens' lack of interest in religious moralizing. Taken another way, Everett's "happy ending" and Haze's grotesque death can best be interpreted through varying levels of commitment to the grotesque.

Though there are many other avenues to explore between Flannery O'Connor's work and the Coen brothers' filmography, their similar use of violence and humor is the obvious first step. Through such a comparison, we can better understand how both O'Connor's and the Coens' humor functions. We can see where their ideas converge and where they split apart. Ultimately, through such a comparison, we can study how Flannery O'Connor's use of comic violence has contributed to an entire vein of American humor that a variety of artists, like Joel and Ethan Coen, continue to use for their own purposes today.

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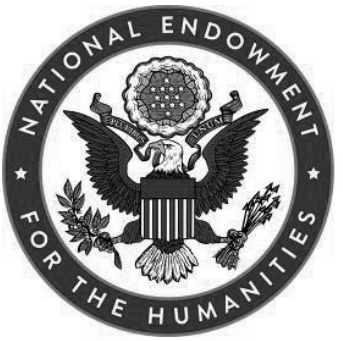

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Margaret Atwood's Narrative Design with Lines of Flight: The Dynamics of Inversion in "Impatient Griselda"

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Abstract
Margaret Atwood's short story "Impatient Griselda" is driven by the dynamics of inversion. Set during a quarantine, an alien resembling an octopus visits a group of humans and reads them a folklore story called "Impatient Griselda." On the one hand, the story can be interpreted as a "stay-at-home novel" that explores how to spend time during a pandemic. On the other hand, it also reflects the inverted nature of gender politics. For example, the title "Impatient Griselda" is an inversion of the original story, "Patient Griselda," written by Giovanni Boccaccio during the Black Death epidemic of the fourteenth century. In the original story, Griselda endures her husband's unreasonable orders and becomes a model wife. In "Impatient Griselda," Griselda splits into twin sisters, one of whom is patient and one of whom is impatient. "Impatient Griselda" inverts the patriarchally edifying tale into a feminist revenge drama as the Griselda sisters refuse to tolerate the husband's harassment and seek revenge. Intertextual references to Shakespeare's and Atwood's other works further enhance the inversibility of the text. In addition, analyzing "Impatient Griselda" in both the socio-political context of the #MeToo movement and by the philosophical concept of Gilles Deleuze's "line of flight" elucidates how Atwood's narrative design escapes a fixed theorization of the work.

Introduction

In November 2020, *The New York Times Magazine* published *The Decameron Project: 29 New Stories from the Pandemic*, a collection of short stories about the COVID-19 pandemic. Twenty-nine writers, mostly from English-speaking countries, contributed to this collection, including Margaret Atwood with her story "Impatient Griselda." The setting of this story exudes a kind of sci-fi eccentricity, similar to Atwood's other works. In this case, an octopus-like alien visits a group of humans living in quarantine due to a pandemic. Dispatched as part of a rescue mission called the "intergalactical-crises aid package" (Atwood, "Impatient" 70), the alien reads a folktale called "Impatient Griselda" to the humans who are tired of staying at home. Unable to fully understand human language, the alien relies on a simultaneous translator device which is so clumsy that the alien's monologue is effectively lost in translation.

In terms of the pandemic setting, this work can at first be read as a "stay-at-home novel" that uses parody and sarcasm to explore the question of how we should spend our time during quarantine. On the other hand, it also reflects the inverted nature of gender politics. In fact, the dynamics of inversion run through the story from beginning to end. First, the title is an inversion as "Impatient Griselda" has its origin in "Patient Griselda," a short story included in *The Decameron* written by Giovanni Boccaccio. Second, the inversion of the title is indicative of a change in the narrative content. In "Patient Griselda," the heroine is the wife of the Duke, a character portrayed as a patriarchal husband. Griselda tries to endure her husband's various unreasonable orders and eventually finds happiness as a good wife and wise mother. Thus, the story of "Patient Griselda" aims to teach the reader a patriarchal moral lesson to obey the "man of the house." In "Impatient Griselda," in contrast, Griselda splits into twin sisters—Impatient Griselda, called Imp, and Patient Griselda, referred to as Pat, who becomes the Duke's wife. As in the original story, Pat endures all the insolence

from the Duke. Imp, however, is not patient enough to forgive the Duke for his excessive sexual harassment of Pat. In the end, Imp cooperates with Pat to take revenge on the Duke. "Impatient Griselda" thus inverts the patriarchally-edifying tale into a feminist revenge drama.

In addition to the title and content, a close reading with intertextual reference to Shakespeare's work reveals inversible elements latent in the text—for example, a gender inversion through cross-dressing as a traditional literary motif often found in Shakespeare's plays. Furthermore, interpreting "Impatient Griselda" intertextually with Atwood's other works, particularly *The Edible Woman* (1969) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), illuminates a more complex inversion—that is, an inversion of victims and victimizers over gender issues in the twenty-first century. Such a complex inversion in "Impatient Griselda" can be understood, moreover. in the socio-political context of the #MeToo movement.

Thus, "Impatient Griselda" might leave the reader somewhat perplexed and frustrated, since it re-inverts what has already been inverted. However, it is in such a perplexing and frustrating narrative design that Atwood's creativity thrives. Gilles Deleuze's concept of a "line of flight" elucidates how Atwood's creative narrative style succeeds in confronting readers with complex realities, thereby stimulating their autonomous thinking.

The Shakespearean Strategy of Inversion

The dynamics of inversion reside in the details of the text. For example, the alien, who has no concept of gender, refers to humans as "Sir-Madam" or "Madam-Sir" as it reads the story to them. This alternating use of "Sir-Madam" and "Madam-Sir" suggests a consistent inversion of power politics between women and men throughout the story rather than promoting a position of gender neutrality.

The Griselda sisters' revenge strategy is also underpinned by the dynamics of inversion. To save Pat from

her husband, who sexually harasses her, Imp dresses as a man and sneaks into the Duke's house to switch places with Pat and gain access to their enemy. In addition to the reversal of the twin sisters, Imp also inverts her gender by disguising herself as a man. This kind of cross-dressing is a motif often seen in Shakespearean plays, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. In these plays, when confronted with problems, the heroines often cross-dress to challenge and shake up gender norms and thus pave the way toward a resolution (Matsuo 72-73). In this sense, cross-dressing serves as a survival strategy for women in a male-dominated society, which also works effectively in the revenge drama of the Griselda sisters.

In addition to cross-dressing, "Impatient Griselda" exhibits a clear intertextuality with Shakespeare through works like Atwood's *Hag-Seed* (2016), which is a modern retelling of *The Tempest*. When Imp lures the Duke into a moonlit rendezvous to take her revenge, she says to him, "*Well* met by moonlight, my lord" (Atwood, "Impatient" 75; emphasis added). This unique phrase is adapted from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the original is "*Ill* met by moonlight, proud Titania" (Shakespeare, *Midsummer* 2.1.60; emphasis added). This is what the fairy king Oberon says sarcastically to his wife Titania when he happens to meet her in the forest. His remark implies their uneasy marital relationship, since they quarrel over which of them should have the keeping of a changeling boy. Just as Titania is disobedient to her husband, the heroine Hermia also has the strength to resist patriarchal oppression, for example, by refusing to marry a man whom her father has unilaterally chosen for her. In that she is a woman with a strong independent spirit who is disobedient to men, Hermia as heroine overlaps with that of Imp. Furthermore, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, nonhuman beings, such as the fairies, exert a great influence on the story by perturbing the order of the human world in much the

same way that the alien of "Impatient Griselda" upsets that order.

In spite of these similarities, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is pure comedy, but "Impatient Griselda" is not necessarily so. Rather, the ending of "Impatient Griselda" marks the story as a comedy that suddenly turns tragic. Imp's remark "Well met by moonlight, my lord" superficially satisfies the Duke's desire, yet this is a very ironic line, since an "ill" consequence befalls the Duke afterwards. In contrast, the tragedy that happens to the Duke satisfies the desire of the Griselda sisters. Thus, the word "well" can easily be inverted to "ill" when the positions of men and women are switched. This dizzying inversion of "well" and "ill" eloquently illustrates the dynamics of inversion that occur between men and women in the story

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare expresses the inversibility of the world with the phrase, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.12). "Impatient Griselda" also offers a vision of how something can become the exact opposite if viewed from a different perspective. The alien, for example, explains the lack of efficiency on the part of the simultaneous translator device by saying, "half an oblong wheat-flour product is better than none" (Atwood, "Impatient" 70), referencing the proverb that "even half a loaf of bread is better than none." Similarly, Pat explains why she continues to endure the Duke's sexual harassment when she states, "A receptacle for drinking liquid that is half full is better than one that is half empty" (Atwood, "Impatient" 73). These remarks indicate that the same thing can look very different, depending on whether one sees it as "only half" or as "much as half." In other words, just as even a half loaf of bread is better than none, by this reading, even a less-than-perfect husband is better than none. Once again, we see the perspective of inversion in the seemingly trivial remarks of both the alien and Pat.

From *The Edible Woman* to "Impatient Griselda"

The dynamics of inversion that operate throughout the "Impatient Griselda" story reach a critical point when the sisters get their revenge: after Imp slits the Duke's throat, they joyfully devour his body to the bone. Obviously, the cannibalistic ending of "Impatient Griselda" is intertextual with Atwood's 1969 debut novel, *The Edible Woman*, which portrays the heroine Marian being consumed as a commodity within the social system of marriage in the 1960s. In *The Edible Woman*, Marian's fiancé Peter is a tall, handsome, promising legal apprentice. Although Peter appears to be an ideal marriage partner, "two rifles, a pistol and several wicked-looking knives" hanging in his room evoke the image of a hunter who preys on women (Atwood, *Edible* 58-59). Shortly after Peter proposes to Marian, she develops an eating disorder, a symbolic form of rejection of the cannibalistic system of marriage. With no cure for her eating disorder, she must play the happy fiancée at her engagement party where she wears her hair curled high and a bright red dress to be the woman Peter likes her to be.

Realizing that in a patriarchal society marriage is nothing more than a woman being metaphorically "eaten" by a man, Marian leaves the party and runs to her friend Duncan, a kind of androgynous trickster who is the opposite of Peter. Desiring to be "shapeless and flexible" like an "amoeba," Duncan shakes up fixed gender norms (Atwood, *Edible* 220). In this way, Duncan is a kindred spirit to the alien of "Impatient Griselda," which has no gender concept or "skeleton" like an amoeba. Betraying Peter, Marian spends the night with Duncan, who seems to release her from the role of innocent bride. However, Duncan himself does not solve Marian's problems and "refuses to rescue her" (Bromberg 20); instead, he encourages Marian to acquire her own subjectivity by proclaiming, "it's your own personal cul-de-sac, you invented it, you'll have to think of your own way out" (Atwood, *Edible* 291).

In the end, Marian attempts to transform herself from an "edible" woman into an "eating" woman. She makes an overdecorated cake in the shape of the ideal woman that Peter, who represents the consumers of the sixties, longs for. However, when Marian offers him the cake, Peter is confused, rejects it, and leaves her. Suddenly, Marian feels extremely hungry and eats the cake herself. By inverting herself from the edible woman to the eating woman, Marian also liberates herself from male-dominated consumerism or "cannibalism" and thus gains her own subjectivity.

Like Marian, the Griselda sisters become "eating" women at the end of the story; however, their target of consumption is completely different from that of Marian's. In taking revenge on the Duke, the sisters kill and *literally* eat him. Whereas *The Edible Woman* presents women being cannibalized by men, "Impatient Griselda" inverts this traditional activity; in other words, it presents a new type of cannibalism in which women consume or "eat" men.

Reading "Impatient Griselda" in the Context of #MeToo

In addition to the gender inversion present in Atwood's "Impatient Griselda," there is another inversive element that must be taken into consideration: even though Pat has been treated so badly by the Duke, do the sisters really need to kill and eat him? Here, the roles of "victim" and "victimizer" have been inverted. In this light, a critical analysis should be given to the shocking ending of "Impatient Griselda."

Towards the end of the story, readers learn that the sisters eat not only the Duke but also his relatives, who have become suspicious of his disappearance; but is there any justification for eating the relatives, who are not the direct victimizers, even though they are on the Duke's side? It seems that the sisters are hungry to punish someone, or anyone, connected with their first victim. According to neuroscientist Nobuko Nakano, when we administer "righteous punishment" to others, the pleasure center of the

brain is stimulated to release dopamine (5). Nakano calls this phenomenon "justice addiction," a state that results in punishing others in the name of justice (6). Is it possible the Griselda sisters enter a state of justice addiction after eating the Duke?

Interestingly, in the language of the alien, there emerges the new word "hangry," or "angry" and "hungry," at the same time (Atwood, "Impatient" 72). The word implies a change in the sisters' attitude toward the Duke's harassment. At first, the sisters are focused on punishing the Duke for his immoral behavior. As for the Duke's relatives, however, it is less clear whether the sisters eat them because they are "angry" or simply because they are "hungry." It is possible that the anger that the sisters initially feel toward the Duke has morphed into the hunger for righteous punishment.

This is not the first time Atwood has depicted "hangry" women punishing men. In her 1985 classic *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel set in a dystopian state known as the Republic of Gilead which sexually exploits fertile women called "Handmaids," Atwood had already portrayed the potential threat of strong solidarity among women intent on passing righteous judgment. Specifically, this cautionary warning is illustrated in the execution scene called "Particicution": under the direction of Aunt Lydia, an older woman who indoctrinates Handmaids, a group of Handmaids lynch a man falsely accused of rape until he is dead. As if to relieve their daily repression, the Handmaids attack the man like an exuberant crowd at a rock concert (Atwood, *Handmaid's* 279). This scene was filmed in the TV drama version of *The Handmaid's Tale*, which began streaming on Hulu in 2017. In fact, the violence depicted in the TV drama is even more severe than that of the original text. In the book, Offred, one of the Handmaids and the heroine of the story, simply watches the lynching from a distance, suppressing the violent impulses that well up in her (Atwood, *Handmaid's* 279). In contrast, in the TV drama version,

Offred is the first to kick at the man, becoming so violent that she loses her mind during the lynching ("Offred"). Thus, the man abused by the Handmaids reminds us of those relatives who are devoured by the Griselda sisters.

The plot of "Impatient Griselda," in which the angry female victims of sexual harassment strengthen their solidarity against the male assailants, recalls the #MeToo movement that has gained momentum on social media since 2017. On the one hand, the #MeToo movement has undoubtedly empowered women in that it gives silenced female victims of sexual assault an opportunity to speak out. As such solidarity has grown stronger, however, some women have expressed concerns that the movement has gone too far in its attacks. French actress Catherine Deneuve and about 100 other French female artists and intellectuals, for example, published an open letter in which they accused the #MeToo movement of indiscriminately condemning men one after another without giving them sufficient opportunity to explain themselves (Safronova). The open letter, which hurt and shocked some victims of sexual harassment, provoked a huge controversy. In response to the backlash against the open letter, Deneuve publicly apologized to the victims who felt slighted (Willsher).

Atwood herself was also cautious about embracing the #MeToo movement. In the fall of 2016, when a Canadian writer and professor at the University of British Columbia (UBC) was accused of bullying and sexual harassment, Atwood, along with other Canadian writers, signed an open letter to protest his firing by the university without proper fact-finding procedures (BBC). As a result, Atwood was heavily criticized on social media for supporting the male professor (Howells 5). In response to the social media attacks, Atwood published her controversial article "Am I a Bad Feminist?" in which she expressed her concern that the #MeToo movement would become a kind of "vigilante justice—condemnation without a trial"—and warned that such "understandable and temporary vigilante

justice can morph into a culturally solidified lynch-mob habit, in which the available mode of justice is thrown out the window, and extralegal power structures are put into place and maintained" ("Am I"). To avoid such distorted justice, Atwood, herself a woman, tries in her fiction to portray gender from a neutral standpoint, like the alien in "Impatient Griselda." As she explains, "My fundamental position is that women are human beings, with the full range of saintly and demonic behaviours this entails, including criminal ones. They're not angels, incapable of wrongdoing. If they were, we wouldn't need a legal system" ("Am I"). Therefore, the sudden violent mutation of the Griselda sisters suggests that, whereas strong solidarity among women—the so-called "sisterhood"—can empower women as "victims," there is a danger that it will encourage the emergence of women as "victimizers" and, in turn, become unjustifiably abusive of men.

Atwood's Narrative Design with Lines of Flight

Atwood received another fierce feminist backlash over her controversial article "Am I a Bad Feminist?" Shortly thereafter, "she became one of the first funders of a new Canadian anti-sexual harassment program, AfterMeToo, which provided immediate legal counseling to victims of sexual violence and professional investigation of every claim" (Howells 5). Thus, it appears that Atwood does not endorse condemnation of the #MeToo movement through her depictions of women eating men in "Impatient Griselda." Rather, she takes issue with the flawed social institutions that radicalize such movements. Noting that the #MeToo movement is "a symptom of a broken legal system," Atwood argues that current systems have failed to adequately respond to complaints of sexual harassment ("Am I"). Therefore, people have turned to a convenient and influential tool: the Internet. However, Atwood is also cognizant of the danger of the Internet, which can have an

oversized impact on society and create divisions among people:

> If the legal system is bypassed because it is seen as ineffectual, what will take its place? Who will be the new power brokers? It won't be the Bad Feminists like me. We are acceptable neither to Right nor to Left. In times of extremes, extremists win. Their ideology becomes a religion, anyone who doesn't puppet their views is seen as an apostate, a heretic or a traitor, and moderates in the middle are annihilated. Fiction writers are particularly suspect because they write about human beings, and people are morally ambiguous. The aim of ideology is to eliminate ambiguity. ("Am I")

Thus, Atwood is concerned that radical ideology in a polarized society simplifies the complex realities of that society by getting rid of ambiguity, which lies at the very essence of human nature. Atwood, as a weaver of fiction, dares to design her stories in such a way as to let her readers drift back into a purposeful ambiguity.

In the story of "Impatient Griselda," it is not easy to determine who is righteous and who is evil. Indeed, one cannot help but be horrified by the scene in which the sisters eat the Duke; however, most of the story portrays the Duke as one-dimensional—a typical sexual harasser who lacks human empathy and deserves to be punished. Furthermore, the Griselda sisters, who are constructed with more depth than the Duke, go berserk so abruptly and so readily turn to eating him. Although some readers may fear the sisters, others may find a certain comedy in their sudden transformation. In many respects, the story comes to an end with that ambiguity unresolved. Such a narrative design, however, encourages readers to acknowledge the complex reality of human society and the diverse voices that continually invert good and evil, woman and man, victim and victimizer, tragedy and comedy.

This kind of ambiguity is also present in the ending of *The Handmaid's Tale*. The last scene, in which Offred attempts to escape from Gilead with the aid of an underground organization, is described as follows:

> The van waits in the driveway, its double doors stand open. The two of them, one on either side now, take me by the elbows to help me in. Whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can't be helped. And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light. (Atwood, *Handmaid's* 295)

Offred herself does not know whether the end or the beginning, the darkness or the light, awaits her after this rescue, and the story ends with her continuing safety left a mystery. The sustained ambiguity, however, allows readers to use their own imaginations to create a sequel to the escape drama.

The purpose of the alien coming to Earth in "Impatient Griselda" is also ambiguous. Initially, the alien is supposed to rescue humans from their quarantine; instead, the alien's story seems to traumatize them. Then, in the last scene, the alien leaves as if to escape, causing bewilderment for the humans: "Now I'll just ooze out underneath the door. It is so useful not to have a skeleton. Indeed, Sir-Madam, I hope the plague will be over soon, too. Then I can get back to my normal life" (Atwood, "Impatient" 73). This scene, which emphasizes the alien's amoebic physicality, is nothing less than a self-reference to the design of the story itself as porous or permeable.

Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson, discussing feminist fiction by Atwood and others, contends that "[t]o escape is to transgress, [as] contemporary feminist fiction explores escape as an act of resistance to the status quo" (1). In the case of Atwood's narratives, to escape can also be to transgress even the dominant and fixed feminist readings. Gilles Deleuze's concept of "line of flight" can provide

additional insight into Atwood's narrative design in this context. According to Deleuze, we "tend to think of things as sets of lines to be unraveled but also to be made to intersect" (*Negotiations* 160-61). This idea applies to the reading of literary works, given that they are sets of letters, and letters are sets of lines. In other words, the task of reading a literary work includes unraveling a complex and diverse set of lines. Additionally, when we explicate a literary work, we are not merely unraveling a single set of lines, but also crossing new lines and forming new sets of lines in the process.

Deleuze also sees escape as drawing a line and therefore regards drawing a line of flight as a creative act (Deleuze and Parnet 19-20). This line of flight, he states, avoids dichotomization and structuring (27). To borrow a phrase from the narrator of *Deadline*, a novel by the Deleuzian philosopher Masaya Chiba, a line of flight is for "escaping the existing order and living without ties" (Chiba 99; my trans.). Thus, a line of flight is a locus of movement that deviates from existing structures and norms, including those established by institutional feminism.

The alien's narration of "Impatient Griselda," steeped in the dynamics of inversion, is riddled with such lines of flight. For example, the people who hear about the Griselda sisters eating the Duke cannot hide their shock at the cruelty of this act. Their reaction reflects the stereotype that women are not supposed to commit such atrocities. However, the alien's narration, which is not bound by existing gender norms, allows for deviant female representation such as women eating men. Nevertheless, Atwood's works tend to be theorized and structured primarily by feminist theory.[1] A feminist reading of "Impatient Griselda" is a valid critical approach until about halfway through the story, when it becomes evident that there is something that cannot be captured by existing feminist frameworks, as in the scene where women prey on men and the victim/victimizer relationship is inverted. To

patiently contemplate this ambiguous something, and to keep asking what this is, is what liberates "Impatient Griselda" from the dominant feminist reading and draws a metaphoric line of flight in this work.

"Line of flight" is written in French as "Lingne de Fuite." In fact, the word "fuite" means to "leak out" as well as to "escape" ("fuite"). Therefore, a line of flight can also be paraphrased as a "line of leakage." In the last scene of "Impatient Griselda," the alien literally "oozes out" through the cracks of the structure. In this respect, the invertebrate, shapeless physicality of the alien is the perfect trope for the narrative design of "Impatient Griselda," which itself seeps out of existing frameworks that seek to fix or limit interpretations of the work.

Conclusion

Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which includes "Patient Griselda," was originally a collection of healing stories to forget the horrific reality of a medieval epidemic. Atwood's "Impatient Griselda" demands the exact opposite from readers: it forces them to transcend existing stereotypes and confront the intolerable complexity of human reality. In this sense, Atwood inverts the story of healing into one of suffering, thereby drawing her own line of flight out of Boccaccio's original text. Understandably, reading Atwood's works can often be agonizingly difficult; however, by patiently perusing her works, we acquire a kind of immunity from otherwise unbearable realities. Deleuze emphasizes that to draw a line of flight is not to escape reality, but rather to create a new reality or another life (Deleuze and Parnet 36-37). Accordingly, Atwood's narrative design is highly creative in that it continues to produce a wide variety of possible readings of the work, offering escape routes by stretching the dynamics of inversion throughout the story.

Note

[1]Atwood herself does not necessarily regard her other fictional work under consideration in this section, *The Handmaid's Tale,* as a feminist novel. Admitting that she wrote the novel under the influence of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Atwood insists as follows: "I want to try a dystopia from the female point of view—the world according to Julia, as it were. However, this does not make *The Handmaid's Tale* a 'feminist dystopia,' except insofar as giving a woman a voice and an inner life will always be considered 'feminist' by those who think women ought not to have these things" (*In Other Worlds* 146).

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Participation, Citizenship, and Violence: Redefining Rhetoric for Social Justice

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Abstract
Acts of violence, including mass shootings in the United States, require scholars involved in the teaching of rhetoric to rethink popular definitions of rhetoric, especially those that valorise the roles of participation and civil engagement in contemporary rhetorical theory. Many contemporary definitions of rhetoric fail to grapple explicitly with the field's difficult relationship to violence, aiding in the conceptualization of anti-Black and anti-LGBTQ+ violence as acts of "civil participation" in "defence" of exclusionary, white supremacist conceptualizations of citizenship. In this article, I emphasize rhetoric's role in developing problematic conceptualizations of citizenship and violence and encourage scholars, in the wake of recent mass violence and deployment of weaponizing political discourses, to develop more accessible, contextualized definitions of rhetoric. In my conclusion, I offer examples and formulate more nuanced conceptualizations of rhetorical and civil participation.

Keywords: rhetoric; citizenship; participation; violence; normativity

Introduction

Acts of violence like the 2022 mass shooting at a Topps Supermarket in Buffalo, New York, and deployment of weaponizing political discourses in the aftermath of

2022's mass school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, do not happen randomly. These acts are not isolated incidents, but part of broader, systemic discourses that work to sanction—and even aim to justify—such acts of violence by aiding in their politically-motivated conceptualization as acts of civil and rhetorical "participation." As Lynn Worsham explains, this type of violence is the result of everyday exploitation and humiliation, a product of organizing discourses that pathologize and subjectivize individuals on the basis of race, gender, class, and other socially-constructed markers of identity. Michel Foucault also writes that these "disciplinary projects" call for "multiple separations, individualizing distributions, and organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power" (3), separations that often result in humiliation, exclusion, and violence. These organizing and pathologizing discourses exist at the root of acts of racist and gendered violence, particularly in instances of anti-Black and anti-LGBTQ+ violence in the United States.

Plenty of important scholarship examines the role that politically-charged and pathologizing white supremacist discourses and narratives play in perpetuating anti-Black and anti-LGBTQ+ violence in the United States (Reeves; Ore; Hsu). Others have also identified how popular definitions of citizenship, itself a structurally unstable concept and object of a tense political-ideological struggle (Carpentier), underpin acts of racially motivated and transphobic violence (Flores; Cram; Chavez). Therefore, rhetorical scholars and scholars engaged in the teaching of rhetoric would be well-served by diversifying and better contextualizing contemporary definitions of rhetoric, particularly those grounded in conservative, Greco-Roman discourses valorising the roles of participation and civil engagement in historical and contemporary

rhetorical theory. To that end, I provide an exigence and framework for establishing more diversified and contextualized definitions of rhetoric that are more cognizant of today's fraught political climate and explicitly critique white supremacist conceptualizations of rhetorical participation and citizenship.

Problematizing Rhetoric's Current Definitions

Many contemporary definitions of rhetoric explicitly link rhetoric to the concepts of participation, community, and advocacy. These terms are often broadly defined, but these definitions, and their associations with the concepts of community and advocacy, generally imply that rhetorical participation, as a concept, is inherently *good*. However, these definitions often neglect to consider gendered, racialized, or anti-LGBTQ+ violence as forms of rhetorical participation, especially in an effort to maintain a white, heteronormative status quo. These definitions are popularly cited and often distributed to first- and second-year undergraduate students beginning studies of rhetoric and composition.

James Martin's *Politics and Rhetoric: A Critical Introduction* and Scott Herrick's *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: An Introduction*, for instance, are broadly disseminated as required readings for undergraduate students beginning their studies of rhetoric, its origins, and its uses. Both Martin and Herrick emphasize popular rhetorical theory's Greco-Roman origins and rhetoric's role in community building and discourses of democracy (Martin 3). Herrick, in particular, notes that two of the principal functions of rhetoric are to "assist advocacy" and "build communities" (15), explicitly linking rhetoric to "acts of participation," including advocacy, coalition and community building, and acts of citizenry (e.g., voting). Likewise, Angela Haas defines rhetoric as "the negotiation of cultural

information—and its historical, social, economic, material, and political influences—to engage participation and social action, broadly understood" (145), conceptualizing the "community engagements" inherent in rhetoric as inherently good, decolonizing, and liberatory (144).

Barry Brummett also notes that "the ways we—both the general public and rhetorical scholars—think about and define rhetoric are grounded in the ways ancient Greeks thought about rhetoric" (7). Similarly, John Poulakos looks to Sophistic definitions of rhetoric to define rhetoric as "the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible" (36). Further, Poulakos argues that:

> By exploiting people's proclivity to perceive themselves in the future and their readiness to thrust themselves into unknown regions, the rhetorician tells them what they could be, brings out in them futuristic versions of themselves, and sets before them both goals and the directions which lead to those goals. (43)

Poulakos, like Sharon Crowley & Debra Hawhee, James J. Murphy, and Timothy Borchers & Heather Hundley, define rhetoric as a democratic meaning-making process, a definition that moves conceptualizations of rhetoric "from the sphere of actuality to that of possibility" (46). Likewise, Robert L. Scott defines rhetoric as epistemic, a form of "cooperative critical inquiry," rather than simply a way to "make a preconceived position effective" (135). All of these ideas are deeply embedded in classical Greco-Roman ideologies explicitly linking rhetoric to democracy and acts of "democratic participation" and "public decision-making" that are central to the

functioning of democracies and "management of important public business" (Brummett 15).

Brummett also acknowledges that contemporary rhetorics are often disseminated through more diverse forms of media, including "music, film, television, and the Internet" (5). Scholarship in digital rhetorics, digital citizenship, and online participatory culture has exploded in the last two decades. Scholars in digital rhetorics have similarly emphasized the potential for rhetorical advocacy and community building in online spaces as inherently good. James Zappen looks explicitly at the emergence of digital rhetorics in the 2000s. While he notes several potential constraints upon such digital rhetorics, Zappen is generally positive in suggesting "affordances" of digital rhetoric, celebrating its ability to create room for "self-expression, exploration of identities, and the building of communities of shared interest" (322). Similarly, Henry Jenkins et al., like Peter Dahlgren and Douglas Eyman, envision digital participation as an accessible form of civic engagement, emphasizing the inherent value of collaboration, contribution, and community building in digital spaces, explaining that "participatory culture offers many opportunities for youths to engage in civic debates, participate in community life, and even become political leaders" (12).

These popular contemporary references and the definitions of rhetoric they offer establish an inextricable link between rhetoric and acts of civil participation, conceptualizing the dissemination of rhetoric and rhetorical acts as forms of such civil participation. Rhetorical scholars should closely consider, however, the potentially problematic nature of valorising advocacy, participation, community building, and citizenry in contemporary rhetorical theory, especially in the wake of recent acts of anti-

Black and anti-LGBTQ+ (and other white supremacist) violence rhetorically conceptualized as civil participation. Similarly, rhetors should also more explicitly problematize the romanticization of ready access to digital spaces of "self-expression" and coalition and community building as inherently liberatory, especially as online spaces continue to operate as outlets for proliferating white supremacist ideology and premeditated acts of violence, like the 2022 mass shooting in Buffalo, New York. Further, questions can and should also be raised about how accessibility concerns can help heighten the exclusivity of access to outlets for "civil participation" and perpetuate acts of racist, ableist, and homo- and transphobic participation, particularly when white, heteronormative bodies are the only bodies with access to these online sites.

There already exists some scholarship that *is* highly critical of rhetoric's and other vernacular discourses' roles in perpetuating inequity and violence (Mao; Ono & Sloop; Walker), and Brummett also acknowledges that "even a rhetorically managed democracy will exclude and disempower some people" (15). However, these definitions are not as widely distributed as those that *valorise* the roles of participation and civil engagement in contemporary rhetorical theory. Also, the complicated definitions of rhetoric offered by LuMing Mao and others that interrogate potentially problematic forms of rhetorical "participation" and its effects are rarely assigned readings in the introductory courses that will likely be most students' only engagement with rhetoric as they progress into other courses more central to their majors. For instance, two of the standard learning objectives for the University of Utah's introductory and general education courses in Writing & Rhetoric

Studies ("Writing & Rhetoric Studies") simply require students to:

1. Understand and participate in social contexts (cultural, political, economic, and religious) for rhetorical and literate activity.
2. Use rhetorical competencies to take action in a variety of contexts, learning from and contributing to the rhetorical life of the city, state, and region.

Even Brummett's work explains that discussions of the potentially exclusionary and disempowering nature of participatory rhetoric come just in the later chapters of his book. Only recently have studies in digital rhetorics begun to acknowledge the potentially problematic effects of digital "self-expression" and virtual coalition and community building (Davisson & Leone; Haas; Benjamin) and how white supremacists and other extremists "use the participatory nature of the web and the free speech free-for-all" of social media to "launch [violent] culture wars" (Donovan et al. 11).

Scott's work on rhetoric as epistemic and similar works on the potentially oppressive nature of rhetoric may be (and often are) a great starting point for diversifying definitions of rhetoric in undergraduate rhetoric and composition courses. Further, Yanar Hashlamon writes, "We must continuously question and critique dominant genealogies of rhetorical theory to more critically foreground decolonial, antiracist, and anti-ableist epistemologies amid the stability of neoliberalism and its debilitative effects" (29). Similarly, Malea D. Powell calls for the discipline to "focus [. . .] on a wider social practice, context, and discourse than has been considered relevant to both the teaching of writing and the study of rhetoric before" (41). Therefore, it is worth taking the time in the classroom to identify early on how dominant, participatory definitions of rhetoric can aid in the

violent and discursive oppression of nonwhite and nonheteronormative individuals. It is also worth offering more accessible and better contextualized definitions of rhetoric to students beginning their studies of rhetoric, rather than overloading them with jargon and theory-laden interpretations of the causal relationship between rhetoric, participation, and violence.

Rhetorical Participation and Citizenship

Rhetorical scholarship and pedagogy often implicitly and explicitly link rhetorical participation to citizenship, an idea that "reaches back to [. . .] the democratic principles that serve as the foundation of the classical rhetorics of Quintilian and Isocrates, among others" (Banaji et al.). But interrogating what "counts" as rhetorical participation is a site of contention that problematizes popular definitions of citizenship, exposing the ways this concept is socially and politically constructed and comprised of specific acts that are often made intentionally inaccessible to nonwhite as well as nonheteronormative individuals. As such, denial of "citizenship" and restricting access to specific acts of "participation" that popularly constitute citizenship (including voting and donating blood, among others) are strategies often used in service of maintaining the hegemony of whiteness and perpetuating the stigmatization of nonheteronormative and disabled bodies in the United States.

Moreover, citizenship itself is an unstable, politically and socially constructed concept. Scholars tend to agree that the term "citizenship" is difficult to define for this very reason. Linda Bosniak writes that it is "possible to argue that the idea is more symbol than substance and that in analytical terms, our understandings of citizenship are highly fragmented, if not incoherent" (17). Bosniak also explains:

> From an internal perspective, the citizenship ideal is warm and inclusive, extending, in theory, to embrace "everyone." But this embrace is, in fact, circumscribed; the ideal of citizenship, from a boundary-conscious perspective, is exclusive, demarcating not merely a class of national community members but also, in the process, a class of community outsiders. (102)

Similarly, Michelle A. Holling writes that the conceptualization of citizenship—or production of "the people"—is "a process (re)produced continually by a rhetor, leader, or vernacular community through [. . .] ideologies, political myths [. . .] or a state force that collectivizes a body of individuals" (73). "Citizenship," then, is clearly constituted by specific acts, behaviours, *and* appearances. As Josue Cisneros writes, "to enact citizenship is to perform a certain way of being rooted in specific *affects* and emotions [. . . .] Performing particular types of difference, even if unintentional, can compel feelings of 'alien-ness' and be construed as evidence of non-belonging" (133). Holling and Cisneros identify how white supremacy-laden public rhetorics effectively exclude Mexican, Mexican American, Latinx, and other brown bodies from popular conceptualizations of citizenship in the United States. Holling in particular emphasises how rhetorics paralleling "national concern with a 'Mexican problem' in which the presence of Mexican (Americans) in the United States was perceived increasingly as a problem" (65) helped make inaccessible Mexican Americans' "complete incorporation into the state replete with citizenship right" (Holling 69). Holling also explains how denial of "replete citizenship rights" has historically denied nonwhite bodies in the U.S. access to civil liberties like voting and resulted in "poor health

conditions, inferior educational opportunities, and suppressed cultural [political, and civil] rights" (72).

Other authors, including Avigail Eisenberg & Patti Tamara Lenard, have similarly problematized popular definitions of citizenship, particularly those that exclude nonwhite bodies, writing that "differences in class and cultural identity [. . .] intersect with public policies, with the effect of denying access for some people to certain key benefits of citizenship and thereby creating a de facto class of [. . .] second-class citizenship" (213). Joan Donovan and colleagues point out that, in the centuries since the U.S. was founded:

> […] to be "an American" meant to be a full citizen of the United States, a status reserved for free white men [. . . .] [Prior to WWII], the belief that "real Americans" were Protestant white people of Anglo descent was pervasive enough [. . .] that whoever did not conform to that designation was considered a "hyphenate American." (323)

Like Holling, Cisneros, Eisenberg & Lenard, Donovan and others clearly emphasize the relationship between white supremacy and historical conceptualizations of American "citizenship," a relationship that has historically contributed to acts of anti-Black and anti-LGBTQ+ violence.

Jay Dolmage further examines the ambiguity and performativity inherent in the concept of "citizenship" from a critical disability studies perspective, emphasizing how disability is often used to further narrow notions of citizenship and establish distinct "classes" of citizenship. Dolmage, like his contemporaries Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and Brenda Jo Brueggeman, among others, situates disability as socially and politically constructed sites of limitation and stigmatization, writing that in the early-

to-mid 20th century, "anti-immigrant rhetoric led to draconian crackdowns on the movement of bodies" aiming to limit "movement and to construct migrants as dangerous and undesirable" (1). Dolmage attributes historically problematic and disparaging associations of race and disability to white supremacy, arguing that the labelling of nonwhite and other "non-normative" bodies as "disabled" functions to affirm white supremacy in the United States by denying nonwhite and "nonnormative" individuals the ability to participate in acts of citizenship and access to formal citizenship rights.

The denial of such "formal" citizenship rights makes several participatory acts essential to white supremacist conceptualizations of citizenship inaccessible, further perpetuating the exclusion and *alienization* of nonwhite and other "non-normative" bodies in the United States. Alienization, Karma R. Chávez explains: "refers to a structure of thinking that insists that some are necessarily members of a community, and some are recognized as not belonging, even if they physically reside there. The alien-outside is not a part of a simple dichotomy constituted by a firm boundary between two easily identifiable positions" (5). The outright denial of "formal" citizenship rights and politically motivated discursive and legislative acts that deny individuals, namely queer and Black individuals, the ability to participate in acts of citizenship effectively enact limitations on these individuals' very conceptualization as citizens. Jeffrey Bennett explains, for instance, that blood bans during the AIDS crisis and post-9/11 offer "a sire for probing the discursive constraints placed on queer identity in American culture" (3-4). Bennett further emphasizes the ambiguity of the concept of "citizenship" and its performative and fluid, politically-constructed nature:

> Citizenship itself is an essentially contested concept and there is no universal agreement about its social utility, political expediency, or ethical merits. Discussions of citizenship take on diffuse permutations depending on the emphasis given to the term [. . .] and its ideological situatedness[. . . .] The frequent slippage between "people" and "citizens" highlights the marginalization citizenship can foster. (7-8)

Denying queer bodies from participating in blood drives, Bennett explains, worked to position those bodies outside of popular conceptualizations of citizenship, enabling the alienization of nonheteronormative bodies by denying them access to replete citizenship and civil rights.

This frequent positioning of nonwhite, nonheteronormative, and generally "non-normative" bodies outside of popular notions of citizenship is critical to understanding how citizenship and definitions of rhetoric valorising participation and civil engagement weaponizes these bodies. When definitions of rhetoric inadvertently valorise even the most perverse forms of "civil participation" and fail to acknowledge the strategic inaccessibility of participatory behaviours that often constitute popular definitions of citizenship, they help perpetuate exclusionary attitudes that often lead to violence.

Weaponizing and Disabling Bodies

Sara Ahmed writes that "narratives [of hate] work by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject [. . .] but to take the place of the subject" (251-52). Ahmed also notes the following: "the circulation of hate involves movement

and fixity; some bodies precisely by sealing others as objects of hate. Tracking the history of hate involves reading the surfaces of bodies, as well as listening to those who have been shaped by this history" (264). For white Americans, the interpellative violence Ahmed describes (via the rhetorical positioning of nonwhite and other "non-normative" bodies as "noncitizen") is enacted out of fear of a weaponized minority, one frequently and carefully conceptualized as a threat to white Americans' social, political, and economic sovereignty and—more implicitly—hegemony. This fear works to encourage white Americans' weaponization of these bodies in popular political discourse, clearly marking them as dangerous or undesirable.

Arjun Appadurai explains that to perpetuate fear of the minority, white supremacist and alienizing rhetorics of citizenship turn a "benign social identity into a predatory identity [. . .] based on claims about, and on behalf of, a threatened majority [. . .] [.or] majority identities that [are able to] successfully mobilize" against supposed threats to their social, political, and economic sovereignty (236). Ultimately, Appadurai concedes that a long extant fear of the minority, the fragility of white supremacy, and historically oppressive notions of citizenship work in collaboration continually to ensure the weaponization and exploitation of nonwhite and other "non-normative" bodies in the United States and abroad. This exploitation often serves a singular purpose: to perpetuate racist and other inflammatory discord and violence.

Lisa A. Flores provides a specific example of weaponizing and alienizing logics in action and their effects. Specifically, Flores' book *Deportable and Disposable: Public Rhetoric and the Making of the "Illegal" Immigrant* explores the rhetorical construction of the

Mexican and Mexican American as "illegal alien," a figure "circulat[ing] as both essentialized and fixed figures" (12-13). In doing so, Flores emphasizes the liquidity of the concept of "citizenship" and exemplifies how participatory rhetorics and exclusivity in definitions of "citizenship" can be dangerous, explaining that "the production of 'illegality' lies in the intersections of the legal, the extra legal, and the rhetorical. The consequence of 'illegality' is, of course, deportability" (34). Flores' book is the first in a long line of accessible scholarship acknowledging the relationship between problematic notions of "citizenship" and how white Americans utilize alienizing logics to perpetuate the weaponization of nonwhite and other "non-normative" bodies for the sake of maintaining American white supremacy.

Karma Chávez similarly outlines how the bodies of (namely Black) homosexual men were rhetorically alienized and criminalized during the AIDS crisis in the United States in the early-to-mid-1980s. Like Flores, Chávez demonstrates the relationship between weaponizing, alienizing rhetorics and overt acts of anti-Black and anti-LGBTQ+ violence, identifying how meticulously redefining the concept of "citizenship" and limiting access to specific acts of citizenship for alienized groups positioned these groups as "oppositional" to popular (white and heteronormative) definitions of citizenship, thereby weaponizing these bodies and encouraging acts of "retaliatory" violence—including murder—that could be easily and popularly conceptualized as acts of "defense" and "civil participation."

Alienizing rhetorics are not only enacted based on race, though oppression of disabled and nonheteronormative bodies often operates as an extension of racism and white supremacy. As Dolmage writes, "Race and disability rhetorically reinforced each

other and worked together to stigmatize [. . ., and] the categories of the physically and mentally defective were created and used in service of racism" (25). Capitalist ideologies also play a role in the social construction of popular notions of disability and "normativity" (Grinker), rhetorically producing disability from a distinctly materialist perspective that identifies marked characteristics, such as physical impairments and mental health conditions, as deficit (Garland-Thomson). Lennard Davis emphasizes the pervasive nature of the concepts of normativity and the stigmatization of disability, writing: "The introduction of the concept of normality [. . .] created an imperative to be normal [. . .] that continues quite effectively to drive humans into daily frenzies of consuming reading, viewing, exercising, testing, dieting, and so on—all in pursuit of the ultimate goal of being considered normal" (39).

The rhetorical construction and stigmatization of disabled bodies has similar effects as the weaponization of other "non-normative" bodies, including alienization and the positioning of these bodies outside of popular definitions of citizenship, ultimately presenting disabled bodies as "dangerous and undesirable" (Dolmage 1) and again denying them access to formal citizenship rights, subjecting them to "poor health conditions, inferior educational opportunities, and suppressed cultural [, political, and civil] rights" (Holling 72). This also makes specific groups marked as "disabled" more susceptible to retaliatory, defensive violence.

The problematic relationship between race and disability created by exclusionary, white supremacist conceptualizations of citizenship is pervasive. Katie Lynn Walkup describes how *cognitive* disabilities and other mental health conditions, like schizophrenia and manic-depressive disorder (53), *also* mark specific

bodies as "dangerous." Walkup explains that the historical stigmatization of mental illness as disability functions to limit mentally ill individuals' rights and ability to participate in acts of citizenship or access replete citizenship rights (5), including the right to bodily autonomy (85). The stigmatization of mental illness also lends itself to the weaponization of mentally ill bodies and individuals, a linkage that is often used to demonize, forcibly institutionalize, and further stigmatize mentally ill people, especially in the aftermath of episodes of mass violence (Rosenberg et al.). This stigmatization has implications not only for bodies marked "disabled," but also more easily enables the weaponization of nonheterosexuality in the United States.

V. Jo Hsu explicitly links problematic associations between transness, mental illness, and violence, explaining, "anti-trans activists channel other social anxieties into transphobia [. . .] fram[ing] trans people as infinitesimally rare and as threats to all other communities" (62). These claims, Hsu explains, "rely on the same narratives used to stigmatize mental illness, to dehumanize people of color and queer people, and to police the bodies and behaviour of cisgender women" (62). These "narratives," Hsu explains, include fears of a minority (68), the "plight of cisgender white men" (68), and a need to defend against the "instability that genuine trans of color liberation would introduce to extant social hierarchies" (70). This weaponization of trans bodies both marks these bodies as "unfit" to participate in acts of "citizenship"—which includes merely being able to inhabit public spaces safely (Hsu)—but also makes trans bodies the target of "reciprocated" violence.

Retaliatory Violence as Acts of "Defense"

A clear relationship exists between the valorisation of participation and civil engagement in contemporary rhetorical theory, problematic conceptualizations of citizenship, and the weaponization of "non-normative" bodies. The final step in this extended, causal relationship is overt, retaliatory violence against specific bodies rhetorically marked as "non-normative." In other words, the positioning of individuals and groups—including Black, brown, disabled, and queer individuals—outside of popular definitions of citizenship (or as oppositional to citizenship) and their subsequent weaponization enable violence against these bodies as acts of rhetorical "participation" or as "retaliatory." This "retaliatory" violence often includes both physical and discursive violence enacted in the name of "defense" of popular (white) notions of citizenship and the hegemony of white heteropatriarchy in the United States. As Flores explains:

> [V]iolence has a social meaning that is deeply laden with racial, gendered, sexual, and national hierarchies. Historically serving the US white heteropatriarchal orders as a means of maintaining the dominance of hegemonic white masculinity, violence situates white men as the guardians of the nation and the arbiters of social disputes. (57)

Similarly, Joshua Reeves writes, "authorities and institutions cultivate deliberative rhetorical norms as a means of regulating citizens' political conduct" (91), arguing that the sort of constitutive rhetorics named above—rhetorics that weaponize and disable nonwhite, non-heteronormative bodies—mark certain subjects as appropriate targets of violent, collective

action by the dominant majority, including acts of violent suppression and criminalization.

Chávez provides a specific example of overt, "retaliatory" violence conceptualized as an act of "defense," noting how notions of "out-of-control borders feature in anti-immigrant and nativist discourse in order to bolster the need to regain control that has apparently only recently been lost" (57). These discourses further link immigrants to "terrorism" (60), perpetuating the notion that extant social, political, and economic hierarchies are in danger, with immigrants representing a source of "pollution" of these hierarchies. As such, Chávez advocates for a move away from a "rhetoric of security" deeply rooted in white supremacist ideologies and toward a "rhetoric of militarization." Chávez encourages rhetorical scholars and critics to label

> militarization what it is [. . .] [to] refus[e] to see it as a necessary evil in the plight to protect "national security," and [. . .] [to be] a progressive and vital civic voice in the preservation and protection of a host of human rights that currently and essentially do not exist within the conditions of border militarization. (62)

Chávez explains that physical violence, including the rape and murder of immigrant men and women in the name of "national security" (60), is a distinct product of racist, weaponizing discourses and exclusionary conceptualizations of citizenship. Chávez also explains that moving away from a rhetoric of "defense" will better emphasize the violent, embodied effects of problematic notions of "citizenship" and rhetorical "participation."

A rhetoric of "defense" not only validates the reciprocal, individualized violence Chávez describes, but it also aims to justify the existence and collective

actions of white supremacist groups, including vigilante groups, like those that attempted to "Liberate Michigan" from Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2020 and those that continue to operate on the U.S.-Mexico border. Writing of the latter, Marouf Hasian Jr. & George F. McHendry Jr. note that rhetorics metaphorizing immigrants as "pollution," and participatory rhetorics advocating for vigilante approaches to "managing" the U.S.-Mexico border in response to dissatisfaction with federal approaches, have distinctly material effects. "Such a danger is reinforced by the relationship of immigration policies and the sovereign body," Hasian Jr. & McHendry Jr. explain (108-09). In other words, these acts of violence are effectively cloaked in "legalistic rhetorics" (114) sanctioning such violence as acts of "defense" of "citizenship" and, more implicitly, the hegemony of white heteropatriarchy.

Alison Phipps and Ersula Ore also examine the embodied links between violent collective action and American civic identity, citizenship, and whiteness. Phipps writes that the white privilege inherent in "claims to victimhood in mainstream feminism often end up strengthening the intersecting violence of racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy" (81). Ore, meanwhile, pays particular attention to how the historical weaponization of Black bodies in the United States has *rhetorically identified* them as dangerous (31) and positioned Black Americans "outside" of popular conceptualizations of citizenship. The exclusion and weaponization of Black bodies enable not only the civic exclusion of Black Americans from rhetorical acts of citizenship, Ore explains, but positions lynching and anti-Black violence as acts of "civil participation" (55). Like Chávez, Phipps and Ore explicitly link acts of "citizenry" to white supremacy and the preservation of white supremacy in the United States, establishing an

indelible connection between the historical, rhetorical weaponization, alienization, and exclusion of Black bodies and violent acts of retribution, firmly troubling the notion of participation as inherently "good" in public and political rhetoric, particularly in the United States.

"Reciprocal" violence levied against bodies rhetorically marked as "disabled" or "nonheteronormative" can be physical, though it often takes on discursive forms, manifesting via the ratification of discriminatory policy or legislation, nonconsensual institutionalization or medicalization, and/or the increased stigmatization of mental illness and transness. Edwin Black, for instance, carefully analyzes how markers of disability (and race) have been used to justify the involuntary sterilization of "undesirable" populations and the development of eugenics programs in the United States. Similarly, E. Cram identifies how eugenics programs in the U. S. were popularly conceptualized as a necessary form of "rhetorical participation" to preserve the purity of "environmental energy"—a fictitious concept advocated for by racial eugenicists in the mid-19th and early-20th centuries. This "energy" was supposedly stored in bodies and, eugenicists argued, should ultimately be curated on the bases of race, disability status, and sexuality in order to eliminate "delinquent behavior" (1).

Sara Brightman and others as well as V. Jo Hsu also identify how "retaliatory" discursive violence is levied against nonheteronormative bodies. As Hsu contends, narratives of transphobia in the United States "rely on the same narratives used to stigmatize mental illness, to dehumanize people of color and queer people, and to police the bodies and behaviour of cisgender women" (62). While problematic connections between transness and mental illness are

often established through ill-informed public and political discourses, Dewey and Gesbeck explain that this connection is also established (and sanctioned) in medical and technical writing. Specifically, the authors explain, "In order for trans-identified people to access medical and surgical services, they must submit to a complex mental health diagnostic process that relies on criteria set by the American Psychiatric Association and the World Professional Association of Transgender Health (WPATH)" (37). Such public policy exists because of "the inherent belief that [. . .] mental illness and gender variance are intimately intertwined" (57), further linking transness and mental illness and providing the basis for problematic associations often perpetuated in public discourse and by the exclusion of trans bodies from popular (white) conceptualizations of citizenship.

Brightman and colleagues and Hsu exemplify how these problematic associations breed anti-trans violence: anti-trans policies that dehumanize and weaponize trans bodies are directly correlated with fatal acts of violence against trans people; as of 2023, an "increase in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric [. . .] coupled with a surge in anti-transgender legislation, has resulted in increased instances of violence against the LGBTQ+ community, especially transgender people" (Brightman et al. 251). Meanwhile, Hsu explains that transphobic rhetoric "locates the threat of trans people not in any action but in [their] very bodies," and that notions of the trans and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) body as a non-image in popular public and political discourse identifies the trans body, without referent, as "monstrous," scary, and as a "sign of moral perversion" (262). Such conceptualizations, Hsu argues, aim to justify the persecution and the imprisonment, murder, or injury of cisgender men of

color, cisgender women of color, and trans and gender-nonconforming people (266).

An Urgent Call

Further adding to the urgency of this call for revised definitions of rhetoric are recent acts of violence against bodies rhetorically deemed "non-normative" in popular public discourse. The act of mass violence committed at a Tops Friendly Supermarket in Buffalo, New York, in 2022, and discursive violence enacted in the aftermath of a deadly school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, the same year, exemplify the causal relationship between definitions of rhetoric valorising the roles of participation and civil engagement in contemporary rhetorical theory.

In mid-May 2022, a lone gunman opened fire in the parking lot of the Tops Friendly Supermarket in Buffalo, New York. The shooter wielded a modified semiautomatic assault rifle and a shotgun. Wearing body armour and an "advanced combat helmet" affixed with a camera capable of live-streaming the attack, the eighteen-year-old assailant eventually made his way into the supermarket before ultimately surrendering to a police force assembled outside just a few minutes later. It was later revealed that the shooter, operating in a predominantly Black neighborhood and aiming to "kill as many Black people as possible," murdered ten people and injured three others; of the shooter's 13 victims, 11 were Black and two were white (McWhirter and Gurman). Public officials in Buffalo, including Erie County Sheriff John Garcia, quickly condemned the attack and described it as a "hate crime" and the shooter as "pure evil" (qtd. in Specht et al.).

American politicians' response to the tragedy and the white, teenage shooter's ideologies cast an even darker shadow over the shooting: in the immediate

aftermath of the massacre, some political figures were hesitant to denounce several of the ideas espoused by the shooter in his 180-page "manifesto," a document he posted online shortly before attacking shoppers at the Tops Supermarket. In particular, many of these (predominantly "far-right-wing") politicians, when questioned about the shooter's motivation for the attack—which was allegedly "to prevent Black people from replacing white people and eliminating the white race, and to inspire others to commit similar racially motivated attacks" (NPR)—were reluctant to denounce such a theory or merely side-stepped questions concerning the "Great Replacement Theory" altogether (Metzger). Among them included Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Arizona GOP Senate candidate Blake Masters, Ohio Senate Republican nominee J.D. Vance, and political figurehead Tucker Carlson, who had previously espoused support for the "Great Replacement Theory" in 2021 (Slisco). Their reactions represented an adaptation of white America's historicized inclination to envision Black and Brown bodies as inherently dangerous and as threats to the hegemony of white heteropatriarchy. It also suggested white politicians' implicit support of acts of anti-Black violence conceptualized as acts conducted in "defense" of popular (white) ideologies of citizenship and white heteropatriarchy (as the shooter suggested was his motive in his "manifesto").

Only ten days after the tragedy in Buffalo, news of another mass shooting was broadcast across the United States: outlets reported that, just as in the case of the Buffalo massacre, a lone shooter had entered an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, opening fire just before noon with an AR-15 style rifle. Unfortunately, prior to police intervention, the shooter murdered nineteen children and two teachers in two classrooms,

making it the third-deadliest school shooting in the United States and the deadliest ever to occur in Texas. Despite these parallels, the Uvalde shooter had not posted any apparent motives in an online manifesto prior to the shooting.

Despite this lack of a clear motive for the shooting in Uvalde, public (and later political) discourses immediately sought to establish a link between "discriminatory perceptions of mental illness" and (mis)understandings of transgender identity to establish a causal relationship between mental illness, transness, and gun violence (Hsu). To that end, images of a transgender woman wearing a skirt and brandishing a flag with light blue, pink, and white stripes—a flag that Monica Helms created in 1999 as the "trans pride flag" (Gray and Vagianos)—were circulated on social media sites like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. In attempts to justify ultimately baseless claims that there was a clear link between transness, mental illness, and mass violence, social media users suggested that the woman pictured was the Uvalde shooter. The photograph, however, was not of the Uvalde shooter, but of a transgender woman who lived in Georgia (not Texas) and had nothing to do with the shooting (Yurcaba et al.).

Though the claims were rapidly disproved and the photographed woman's true identity quickly uncovered, several notable political figures, including Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R., and Arizona Rep. Paul Gosar R.—often known for their extremist ideologies—had thrown their support behind the theory, condemning the shooter's actions and explicitly linking transness, mental illness, and mass violence by sharing, retweeting, and perpetuating the spread of misinformation in the aftermath of the shooting. In doing so, politicians "fram[ed] transgender identity as an attack on children and the 'American family' [. . .] to

shore up protections for white, middle-class respectability and gender norms [. . .] thus provid[ing] an outlet for anxieties about perceived threats to white social and economic capital" (Hsu). In adding their voices to these threads of misinformation, extremist political actors like Greene and Gosar engaged in a perverse form of digital "civil participation," one that encouraged the further weaponization of (and added "retaliatory" physical and discursive violence against) trans bodies in the United States.

In the case of the tragedies in Buffalo and Uvalde and their highly contentious aftermaths, American political actors dehumanized, criminalized, and ultimately weaponized nonwhite and nonheteronormative bodies and implicitly supported white supremacist and white American colonialist ideologies by emphasizing the supposed *ideological* danger of "nonnormative" bodies in the United States. Their actions not only endangered the lives of Black, brown, and other nonwhite Americans, but also demonstrated a need to reconsider how rhetors can better and more accessibly problematize the concept of rhetorical participation and illustrate rhetoric's complicated relationship with violence. Otherwise, public and political discourses in the United States will continue to justify anti-Black and anti-LGBTQ+ violence and motivating ideologies (like the "Great Replacement Theory") as acts of "rhetorical participation," conducted in "defense" of popular (white) conceptualizations of citizenship and a white heteropatriarchal status quo.

Implications and Conclusions

Contemporary definitions of rhetoric, particularly those marketed to undergraduate students in the early stages of rhetorical studies (which also include students

who may only ever take one course in rhetoric as a general education requirement), can only benefit from greater cultural contextualization and diversification. Specifically, these definitions should more explicitly grapple with rhetoric's complicated relationship to violence. To that end, contemporary scholars should develop definitions of rhetoric that are more cognizant of today's fraught political climate and explicitly critical of white supremacist conceptualizations of rhetorical participation, critiquing, in particular, connections between acts of anti-Black and anti-LGBTQ+ violence and popular, exclusionary notions of "citizenship."

Several authors already offer diversified and uniquely contextualized definitions of rhetoric that are interrogative of the role of participation in rhetoric and rhetoric's role in shaping popular definitions of "citizenship." Vivian Louie and Anahi Viladrich—as well as Robert Lestón—present decolonial and anti-racist approaches to understanding rhetoric that may prove useful for emphasizing to students the complicated relationship between rhetoric and violence and that may provide pedagogical strategies for problematizing the concept of "rhetorical participation." However, more work needs to be done to emphasize these relationships, including moving away from an overreliance on simplistic white, Greco-Roman definitions of rhetoric and moving towards more contextualized definitions of rhetoric that are cognizant and critical of rhetoric's role in the perpetuation of violence.

Inspired in particular by Kenneth Walker's concept of "pluriversal rhetorics"—rhetorics "that study and/or practice rhetoric as an ecological (a material and relational) system that functions across heterogeneously entangled worlds against the power differentials of coloniality" (47)—I offer a few examples of some revised definitions. The first, which

leans on LuMing Mao's concept of "critical suspicion," implements varying perspectives: "Rhetoric is the art of persuasion and the study of its composition, both of which should be the subject of ongoing, critical interrogations aiming to contextualize them from unique perspectives, including from historical and critical race, gender, disability, and sexuality studies perspectives." Another example that offers students an accessible definition free of jargon and composed of terms with which they are likely already familiar is as follows: "Rhetoric is the strategic use of language, symbols, and discursive practices to persuade, influence, or manipulate audiences within specific cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts, which may have liberatory or dominative effects on its intended subjects." These revised definitions encourage students to see the multitude of forms "participation" can take and thus challenge the notion that all rhetorical or civil participation is inherently *good*.

In addition, these definitions contrast with popular contemporary definitions grounded in conservative, Greco-Roman discourses, which primarily privilege the existing hegemony of white, heteronormative voices. Furthermore, they acknowledge and better incorporate potentially marginalized populations' perspectives and embodied experiences, encouraging students to broadly consider the effects of rhetoric and public discourse in a variety of contexts. As Barry Brummett mentions, public rhetoric is essential to the functioning of democracies and "management of important public business" (15). These definitions thus challenge students to think about how voices often *excluded* from popular public discourse have value and require a more prominent role in public decision-making and acts of democratic participation.

To redefine "civil participation," I lean heavily on Joan Donovan and others' advice on "redefining" civil participation in the wake of white supremacists storming the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, an event that never "would have happened without the evolution of social media and the intensification of community building [. . .] online" (306). Specifically, their work is useful because it grapples closely with the idea that it is important not to invalidate, censor, or limit acts of free speech, but that it is also imperative to safeguard against the sort of "participatory" violence enacted on January 6, arguing that we must "resist the easy reactions that inflammatory content can generate" and avoid generating and spreading ideas that "do not communicate the necessarily complicated and nuanced reality of public policy and legislation" (Donovan et al. 330). As such, I suggest conceptualizing rhetorical and civil participation as "Participatory behaviors and activities that are inclusive and subject to ongoing ethical and legal evaluations that condemn violence against—or the persecution of—these actions' intended and interpellated subjects."

These definitions are not perfect. They do, however, follow the work of other scholars attempting to diversify popular conceptualizations of rhetoric and rhetorical and civil participation for the sake of better incorporating social justice aims like inclusivity, race consciousness, and equity. Moreover, they attempt to establish better senses of ethical, political, and social *accountability*, which many contemporary definitions of rhetoric and rhetorical and civil participation seem to lack. In short, these definitions and this article are just a few of many resources that will be created for use in rhetoric courses and their curricula to diversify students' conceptualizations of rhetoric in ways that are contextualized, nuanced, and, perhaps above all else, accessible. I advocate for other scholars in

rhetoric to develop their own scholarship and unique definitions that also explicitly problematize these relationships, emphasize to students the complicated relationship between rhetoric and violence, and better contextualize students' awareness of rhetoric's effects, histories, and implications from more socially just perspectives.

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A Review of Catherine J. Denial's *A Pedagogy of Kindness*

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Catherine J. Denial's 2024 *A Pedagogy of Kindness* is a radical book. Denial's thesis—that everything we educators do in the classroom should be founded on "attending to justice, believing people, and believing *in* people (2)—will most certainly be met with skepticism by many in the academy. However, Denial makes a cogent argument that grounding pedagogy in kindness eliminates the adversarial relationship with students that so many of us experience and allows us to extend to students the same sort of grace we expect and appreciate from our employers when our lives hit roadblocks.

Denial first defines kindness in contrast to niceness. Niceness, she says, "is being agreeable in all circumstances" in order not to rock the boat (2); "kindness is real, it's honest, and it demands integrity" (2). Setting boundaries and having difficult conversations with students, colleagues, and administrators are just two examples that Denial offers of kindness before she delves into the particulars of why she developed this approach to teaching.

Denial describes the sink-or-swim graduate school training in pedagogy (what little she received) that many of us teaching in higher education can remember from our own graduate school days. She was encouraged to see her students as enemies of sorts—they were going to cheat, they weren't going to read, and they were going to skip class and lie about

why they were doing so. Consequently, she felt compelled to craft strict penalties for missing assignments and missing class with the idea that one of her duties as an instructor was to police misbehavior. This attitude persisted into the first years of her teaching career, but gradually, through experiences both professional and personal, Denial's outlook began to change.

The book is divided into four main chapters: "Kindness toward the Self," "Kindness and the Syllabus," "Kindness and Assessment," and "Kindness in the Classroom." The first chapter, "Kindness toward the Self," is probably the least controversial chapter in the book. In it, Denial advocates for the kinds of self-care that many of us probably already employ—for example, scheduling breaks, refusing to say yes to every request from our institutions, and building community with our colleagues. Similarly, the final main chapter, "Kindness in the Classroom," contains suggestions for creating a welcoming classroom environment and fostering class participation that are unlikely to strike many readers as too extreme to implement.

The middle chapters of the book are potentially more divisive. "Kindness and the Syllabus" argues that this document sets the tone for the entire semester and should therefore move beyond the "legalistic contract" (40) that so many of us are used to crafting. Denial proposes instead that we think very carefully about what the language we use on our syllabi implies about us as teachers and what we value as well as who we believe our students to be. One recommendation she makes is to allow students to craft the syllabus themselves; this may not be possible for instructors who are required by their institutions to submit syllabi before the start of classes. However, Denial's recommendation to have students annotate syllabi to

answer the following questions—"'What do you like and why? What are your concerns? What needs clarifying?'" (57)—should be workable in most classrooms. Even online courses could require students to use tools like Perusal or the Track Changes function in Word to complete this assignment.

"Kindness and Assessment" focuses heavily on "ungrading," an approach to assessment that has gained traction with instructors in higher education in recent years. Ungrading is a spectrum of methods of assessment that ranges from doing away with grades entirely to contract grading to Pass/Fail grading. Denial's attitude toward ungrading, like her attitude toward syllabi, is rooted in collaboration with students. For example, she creates rubrics for grading with student input and solicits constructive criticism from her students on the way she delivers feedback. She has also moved to giving verbal rather than written feedback, and she designs assignments based on the principles of Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TiLT). Denial acknowledges that instructors with heavy teaching loads and high student caps in their classes may struggle with implementing ungrading. In addition, most institutions require instructors to turn in grades at the end of each semester, and some administrators are suspicious of nontraditional grading methods, especially those which cede some or all of the power over the process to students. Nonetheless, Denial concludes this chapter in part by saying, "What's key, whether we affix numbers and letters to the ends of assessments or not, is to honestly grapple with the pros and cons of those systems for students of all abilities and backgrounds, and to be able to defend our practices on the basis of reasoning that reaches far beyond the fallback position of 'tradition'" (80).

A Pedagogy of Kindness is a valuable addition to the body of scholarship of teaching and learning. Full of practical information grounded in research, it offers a new vision of the college classroom and the relationship between instructor and students. I eagerly look forward to Denial's next project.

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