Re:Search

The Undergraduate Literary Criticism Journal
at the University *of* Illinois

volume 4, issue 1 | 2017

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EDITORS' NOTE

There are many people we would like to thank for all the work they have poured into the fourth edition of *Re:Search, the Undergraduate Literary Criticism Journal at the University of Illinois*. In addition to the students who have contributed to our vision of an undergraduate-produced, peer-reviewed academic journal, we especially thank members of the University of Illinois faculty for their continued support. Thank you to the faculty mentors who have guided our authors for the past four years: our dedicated faculty advisor, Lori Humphrey Newcomb, whose relentless enthusiasm kept us on task and available to many students, and our graduate student advisors, Debojoy Chanda (Fall) and Brandon Jones (Spring), who offered incredible contributions to our student recruitment and copyediting processes.

Additionally, we give special thanks to the Office of Undergraduate Research, which dutifully encourages and foregrounds scholarship within the undergraduate student body; Harriett Green, the Interim Head of Scholarly Communication and Publishing; as well as to Dylan Burns, who helped expand use of the Open Journals System in our triple-blind peer review process; and Illini Union Document Services, who once more published a beautiful print version of our journal. Thank you to the team in the English Advising Office, including Anna Ivy, Kristine McCoskey, and Kirstin Wilcox, for broadcasting opportunities to participate in the journal to current and prospective students; Director of Undergraduate Studies, Andrea Stevens, for making space for *Re:Search* and its authors in the English Symposium; and Head of the English Department, Vicki Mahaffey, whose thoughts are included in this year's journal in the Note from the Department Head. From the beginning, you have all shown us the collaborative impulse needed to present undergraduate research in the humanities to increasingly wider audiences.

We are in the process of building up an impressive collection of works searchable on Google Scholar, the University Library Catalog, and IDEALS (Illinois Digital Environment for Access to Learning and Scholarship). Our authors have explored and discovered connections across a number of texts—some of which have been extensively studied, others of which have only recently come into scholarly consideration—in order to rigorously engage with current critical conversations.

Transmediality, both early modern and contemporary theatre, liner notes, and questions of gender are topics investigated by our authors in this volume. We are also pleased to include in this year's volume papers from both new and seasoned English majors alike, as well as students from both English and Creative Writing, many of whom presented their work at the English Research Symposium and Undergraduate Research Symposiums in April. Our authors have put forth insightful work that they and their faculty mentors should take pride in. We are thrilled to

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present a selection of works that showcase the dynamic interests and intellectual curiosity of students in English and related departments.

On a final note, we would like to thank Nick Millman and the 2014 Executive Board for getting this project off the ground, as well as the subsequent boards for continuing to uphold its vision. Thank you for laying the foundations to establish a platform where undergraduate research in the humanities may be read and appreciated by both students and faculty, and celebrated jointly on print and digital platforms. We look forward to seeing the kinds of work that students at Illinois continually and inventively accomplish, with increasingly interdisciplinary results.

Marilyn MacNamara and Ana V. Fleming,

Co-Editors in Chief

LETTER FROM DEPARTMENT HEAD

It is a special pleasure to welcome you to this year's issue of *Re:Search: The Undergraduate Literary Criticism Journal at the University of Illinois.* Each issue is the outcome of collaboration between students who carefully select, edit, and publish the essays. Faculty members serve as mentors for individual authors as well as providing general guidance for research and writing. Professor Lori Newcomb, the journal's faculty advisor, supports the executive board and authors throughout the year. This year and last, graduate advisor Brandon Jones played a crucial role in guiding the publication to completion.

Re:Search is a key part of a departmental and campus-wide effort to promote research by undergraduates. Students who contribute to the journal can serve as authors, editor, peer reviewers, copy editors, or members of the executive board. Many earn credit toward the Undergraduate Research Certificate offered by the Office of Undergraduate Research. Papers published in the journal have also been presented at the Undergraduate Research Symposium.

The students who contribute so much time and effort to the process of publishing research essays are curious, creative, and dedicated to accuracy and fluency. They take the undergraduate major in English to the next level, in which scholars, editors, and colleagues work together to present significant, polished work to a wider audience.

I am delighted to introduce this volume, which gives ample evidence of the high quality of undergraduate research being conducted on our campus.

Vicki Mahaffey
Kirkpatrick Professor and Head of the Department of English

AIMS & SCOPE

Re:Search: The Undergraduate Literary Criticism Journal at Illinois is an undergraduate produced, peer-reviewed open-access online journal designed to annually publish works exclusively by undergraduate students. We seek to create a place for undergraduate students to showcase and publish literary criticism within a greater academic discourse while nurturing a collaborative community between faculty, administration, and undergraduate students. All published work is by Illinois students; students from any discipline may submit to *Re:Search* as long as the submissions are in accordance with our vision of the journal as a site of critical analysis. We encourage undergraduate students to submit literary, media, or cultural criticism. We accept revisions of papers written previously for a class, current or completed honors theses, and even projects conceived outside the classroom. The most important criterion for acceptance is that the author offers fresh, new critical analysis of a text, film or other work. We welcome an analysis of texts from any period or language, given that modern English translation is provided for any material quoted within the submission. Although theory is not the journal's primary topic, we encourage submissions that refer to, reflect on, and engage with theory to provide richer and more nuanced analyses. Our audience includes university students, instructors, administration, alumni, and prospective students.

Re:Search is unique among journals of its type in supporting students throughout the research and publication process by working closely with the Illinois English Department, the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR), the English Student Council (ESC), and the Scholarly Commons in the University Library. The process includes faculty mentorship, in which students work side-by-side with a faculty advisor throughout the writing process. The OUR and ESC will offer opportunities to share work-in-progress and train students in the Open Journal Systems online platform to participate in the peer-review and copy editing processes, and the Library will provide a fully-indexed platform for completed articles. This journal fosters collaboration between faculty, administration, and undergraduate students, and we hope for this to flourish as a long-lasting joint project.

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Re:Search

On *Mr. Burns*, *A Post-Electric Play* and a Western Understanding of the Human Response to the Loss of Electricity

Theonesse Cheon, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

ABSTRACT

This essay is in part a "psychological" analysis and in part an experimentation on applying media studies to interpret a contemporary piece of literature, *Mr. Burns, A Post-Electric Play*, by Anne Washburn. This is because I find this play as a proposal in that it offers us one illustration of how humans may react to the sudden loss of electricity. I intend to analyze this reaction and offer a way to understand why humans may react to the sudden loss of electricity the way the characters in the play do. It is of course not the only way and I am aware of some of the problems that may arise in going with this interpretation. Yet I do want to demonstrate how far, given the space provided, such an interpretation may go. With that said, I propose that the play offers us how people may cope with the loss of electricity, suggesting that how they cope reflects a bias that media studies can explain.

KEYWORDS

Sarah Bay-Cheng, Ritual storytelling, Theatre guilds, Opera, Coping mechanisms, Bias, Television, Marshall McLuhan, Extension

Mr. Burns, *A Post-Electric Play* by Anne Washburn (first performed in 2012) concerns a world where, due to a vague nuclear incident, electricity and the technologies associated with it cease to operate. In Act I, after this incident, the characters in the play gather around a fire to talk about a television show they used to watch: *The Simpsons*. In Act II, seven years after this conversation, the same characters act out everything they used to watch on television, including *The Simpsons,* to make a living. In Act III, seventy-five years later, we are left with the performance of a play that centers around the Simpsons family during a nuclear incident without knowing which character, if any, wrote it. Overall, throughout the three acts, what we are witnessing is the human mind adapting to a sudden change, i.e., the loss of electricity in its environment. This essay, then, is an examination of the process by which the characters in *Mr. Burns* are trying to cope with the consequences of losing electricity.

According to Sarah Bay-Cheng, in her article, "Virtual Realisms: Dramatic Forays into the Future," *Mr. Burns* "stages a future where the threat is not from too much technology, but too little. [Washburn] envisions a time without electricity as the return of theatre as the dominant form of mass media, ironically by remediating media of the past" (693). In other words, a world without television as its dominant form of mass media necessitates the emergence of another form of mass media to take its place: theatre. Theatre resolves the threat, or rather, the question of how to progress from a culture now made obsolete, where television was the dominant form of mass media. It is appropriate, then, that in *Mr. Burns*, the characters do not completely turn away from television, which would disregard the fact that we do not necessarily stop thinking about what we once relied on that easily. It is more likely that we would still think about it, with the real question being what do we then do with those thoughts. Thus, it follows that theatre does not neglect technology just because it has ceased functioning; rather, theater preserves technology. The play assumes that technology has played a significant part in people's lives where television was a dominant form of mass media entertainment. It is in this sense that we understand the idea of theatre remediating media of the past, notably television's most well-known content: *The Simpsons*. *The Simpsons* serves as the artifact of a society that once possessed a certain technology (Bay-Cheng 694). Out of all the artifacts a past society could be represented by, the characters in *Mr. Burns* go with *The Simpsons*, a form of mass media entertainment. As Bay-Cheng puts it, "*Mr Burns* imagines a world in which the largest source of

collective knowledge is an irreverent television show and the only form of media left is theatre" (695).

As for how she supports her claim that theatre becomes the dominant form of mass media, Bay-Cheng notes how each act of the play reflects a form of theatre. In Act I, the characters recall a Simpsons episode. During their conversation, they notice a stranger and react by pointing guns at him. However, they eventually calm down, tolerating his presence. After the fact that the stranger is not hostile is established, they act out "a sad shared ritual" in which each one announces "the names and ages of lost loved ones" from their notebooks with the hope that the stranger met some of them and could offer new information about them (Bay-Cheng 694). Following this ritual of "post-Internet, solemn social networking" is the "shared ritual of collective storytelling", a cheerful activity, featuring the stranger performing a song that the Simpsons episode they recalled made a reference to (Bay-Cheng 694).

Seven years later, in Act II, the same characters form "theatre guilds," practicing roles for commercials, songs, and the Simpson episode they talked about earlier (Bay-Cheng 695-97). Further, they compete with other guilds in recreating them. To enact television shows, they pay whoever can provide accurate knowledge about their content such as specific lines of the cartoon characters. Already we can notice a relationship between *The Simpsons* and theatre. Theatre is being used to preserve *The Simpsons*, as well as other things they used to enjoy on television. Bay-Cheng thinks that the purpose of this preservation is to relieve the characters from the harsh reality of living without electricity. This is supported in a quotation from Quincy, one of the characters, in which he explains why they refuse to let meaning, the most powerful reminder of their reality, be part of the entertainment they produce: "Things aren't funny when they're true they're awful. Meaning is everywhere. We get *Meaning* for free, whether we like it or not. Meaningless Entertainment, on the other hand, is actually really hard" (Washburn 70). All their efforts are directed to producing a reality that has no reference to reality. It is a setting that only theatre can contrive, a setting where the only type of entertainment that exists is that which keeps their attention away from the harsh reality of their world (Bay-Cheng 697).

However, Bay-Cheng claims that Act III, set 75 years after the previous act, is absent of this need for relief. Act III presents us with with only the performance of a play. Though theatre is still used to present *The Simpsons*, it presents the show as a meaningful "tragic high opera" in contrast with the literal reenactments of cartoon scenes in Act II (Bay-Cheng 697). Everything is

sung or rapped. The main characters of this *Simpsons* play—Homer, Marge, Bart, and Lisa—experience a nuclear incident and are forced to seek refuge within a boat. However, Mr. Burns appears, threatening to kill them. As the play goes on, Mr. Burns kills every family member except Bart, who, in turn, manages to stop him. Both Mr. Burns and Bart have lines that reflect their views of the world. When Bart is about to dump Mr. Burns into the river, the latter discourages the former from thinking he has in any sense won by stating, "God or fate, fortune or / any assortment of sentimental / somesuch" (Washburn 93). He assures Bart that he will continue to haunt him. As for Bart, after this haunting message, he remains optimistic: "I'm a boy who could be anything / And now I will do everything" (Washburn 94). Thus, Bay-Cheng's conclusion reflects that the thespians and their audience no longer view theatre and *The Simpsons* as a source of relief from reality (697). This is partly because the television show has achieved literary status as a myth, reenacted repeatedly through theatre (Bay-Cheng 697). Thus, the purpose of reenacting *The Simpsons* as only an amusing television show they used to watch was to find relief from reality in Act II. According to Bay-Cheng, the purpose of reenacting it as a tragic opera is to demonstrate how humanity, through theatre, reconciles creatively with the fact that they have lost electricity permanently (698). The opera itself serves as a cultural artifact of this reconciliation, of a society that has recently lost electricity whereas as mentioned earlier, *The Simpsons* serves as a cultural artifact of a society where electricity existed. As for the phrase "through theatre," I mean it in the most encompassing sense, since Bay-Cheng notes its presence throughout all the acts of *Mr Burns*. In Act I, theatre resided in ritual storytelling, or the casual, passive reenactments of past mass media entertainment – *The Simpsons* (Bay-Cheng 697). What I mean is that the characters were merely recalling the episode and repeating some of the lines to keep a conversation going. Bay-Cheng also notes that a stranger performed a song that the episode referenced to add on to the gaiety of the conversation (697). In Act II, the characters functioned as theatre guilds, where they strictly and literally reenacted past mass media entertainment. In addition, theatre guilds valued accurate knowledge of the original material to base their performances off of (Bay-Cheng 697). In Act III, we were left with an opera, a meaningful reenactment of past mass media entertainment (Bay-Cheng 697).

However, while Bay-Cheng characterizes ritual storytelling, theatre guilds, and opera as forms of theatre, I find them to be different ways of coping with the present situation. In other words, I find ritual storytelling, theatre guilds, and opera to be coping mechanisms. I also

consider the activity where the characters announce the names of their loved ones as a coping mechanism as well. If you recall, this was where Bay-Cheng found it reminiscent of social networking. This leads me to my first claim to illustrate what is the process by which these characters respond to the loss of electricity. My first claim, then, is that *Mr. Burns* proposes a future where humanity, through a series of coping mechanisms, attempt to leave behind one that is the most effective. The announcement of names, ritual storytelling, theatre guilds, and opera make up this series. They are all different types of activities designed for relief. How, then, does each act demonstrate a coping mechanism at work?

If you recall, Bay-Cheng pointed out how Act I was reminiscent of social networking and ritual storytelling. The former is a coping mechanism in that it is a way characters try to comfort themselves, given the permanent situation they are in, by finding more information about individuals important to them. This is the least effective coping mechanism because it emphasizes the need for relief the most. It relies too much on the desperate hope of learning something more about their lost loved ones by the most meager means – the mere chance that a stranger has met them and can tell more about them. It is liable, then, to too much disappointment. It is also the least effective because of the way this mechanism is carried out. It is done without any feeling, except for the feeling of having your hopes crushed. For instance, when one character, Jenny, asks the stranger, Gibson, if he heard anything about someone named Casey Martin, the latter says he has. However, it turns out to be someone else. As Jenny says, "Oh. Fuck. / Okay. / Okay, that's not him . . . I haven't talked to the guy in over a year, anyway, I don't even know why he's on my list. Um . . . / Do I have more?"; this is followed by the description: "*She might be near tears at this point*" (Washburn 27).

The second coping mechanism, ritual storytelling, is more effective. Ritual storytelling is a coping mechanism in that the characters find relief by having a nostalgic conversation. As noted before, each character tries to remember something from the same Simpsons episode they watched. When Gibson recalls a character's line that others fail to remember, they respond with delight, enjoying his contribution. Matt says, "*Yes. Yes* . . . (*Laughter, thigh slapping*) Yes" (Washburn 37). When asked to try to recall the rest of the episode, Gibson confesses "I can't I can't I really wish I could" (Washburn 37). Thus, this coping mechanism has two problems. It is effective as far as they can keep remembering lines from a Simpsons episode and thus maintain the gaiety of their conversation. However, they cannot, needing others to provide more lines.

Secondly, the relief one can derive from recalling an episode and talking about it is limited because there is a desire to do something more with what they know.

These two problems necessitate a more effective coping mechanism – the theatre guilds in Act II. Functioning as a theatre guild, the same characters reenact commercials, popular songs, and Simpson scenes. They are preserving past mass media entertainment by imitating the content of television while paying anyone who can provide more content to imitate. In addition, this coping mechanism, the production of meaningless entertainment, provides relief from the reality they live in by substituting in place a reality where there is "[n]o motivation, no consequence. . . Where else do we get to experience that, *nowhere*"(Washburn 70). This difference makes the mechanism superior to previous ones. It is better than the social networking mechanism because it draws attention away from a reality that operates by consequences, by the fact that a nuclear incident has deprived them of contact with their loved ones. It is better than the ritual storytelling mechanism because it lets the characters to not just merely recall past entertainment, but perpetuate it through imitating it. In other words, their impression of *The Simpsons* is made stronger through performance than through conversation. Yet, this mechanism cannot last, as the ending of Act II shows where armed gunmen suddenly assault the characters, putting an end to their reenactments. This reflects the need of an even more effective mechanism that is not liable to the hostility of other theatre guilds in competition with each other for bigger audiences.

This leads to Act III, where we reach the last and most effective coping mechanism—a tragic opera about *The Simpsons* that anyone could act out (and thus not something exclusive to one guild), but more importantly, a mechanism that causes the thespians and their audience to forget their need for relief. Though this opera draws from the content of the previous two acts, it does not draw from it literally. For example, in Act I, the character Maria narrates how one person dies from radiation in their attempt to restore power: "And he's thinking, all I want is to get around that curve up there . . . Feets, just carry me that far. Feets don't fail me now" (Washburn 35). In the opera of Act III, Nelson from *The Simpsons* is given the line: "Feets don't fail me feets don't fail me . . ." (Washburn 76). A catchy line is then developed from a sad narration. In Act II, the characters enact a commercial where one of the lines is "Delicious. Rejuvenating. I feel like a Brand New Woman" (Washburn 52). In the opera of Act III, where one of the main roles is Homer, one of his lines is the optimistic phrase "I'm a brand new man" (Washburn 78). The line of a commercial becomes a line of hubris. Thus, Act III makes

figurative use of the content of Act I and Act II, and of the knowledge and performances of the characters in those acts. By figurative, I mean that Act III uses past experiences as material to base off for their opera.

To contrast, in Act II, the reality created by faithfully imitating past entertainment did not work because it was liable to the hostility of competition. What I mean is that any guild can reenact past entertainment using their own memories or relying on another's. In addition, since past entertainment was valued for its nostalgic relief, multiple guilds were set up to profit from that relief. However, an opera that figuratively presents *The Simpsons* is not bound by this necessity to be faithful to the original material. Consequently, this renders the value of imitating the content of television useless. The opera still provides relief however, but in a literary sense, like Aristotle's concept of the tragedy purging away an audience's emotions. Rather than providing the type of relief felt by performances directly reminiscent of television, the opera provides the type of relief felt when a play skillfully operates on the audience's emotional involvement with the plot and its characters. The audience that feels this relief forgets the need for the former type of relief. By having the audience invest their need for relief in their emotional involvement with the play, it sets aside their need to be relieved any further, specifically the need for relief through theatre guilds. This is how the opera works as a coping mechanism.

To reiterate, each act of *Mr. Burns* shows a coping mechanism at work, and each one is characterized by a need for relief. In Act I was the social networking mechanism and the ritual storytelling mechanism. The former sought relief in learning more about loved ones. The latter sought relief in recalling more about *The Simpsons*. In Act II was the theatre guild mechanism, which sought relief in recalling more about *The Simpsons* as well as other past entertainment and reenacting them truthfully. In Act III was the final coping mechanism that sought relief in reenacting *The Simpsons* and the past experiences of the characters themselves figuratively. This mechanism is the most effective as it is the only one in use after Act II, or after seventy-five years. Having answered the question in what way each act demonstrates coping mechanisms at work, the next question that will prompt us further in our search is: Do any of these coping mechanisms operate by some principle or bias that reveals more about the process by which the characters respond to the loss of electricity?

Going in order then, the social networking mechanism does not operate by anything that will tell us more about the process. There is nothing further to explain about the desire to know

about what has happened to your loved ones after a nuclear incident. It is for this reason that this coping mechanism is the most natural in that it does not operate by something hidden. What, then, do the other three mechanisms operate by? This leads to my second claim about the next two coping mechanisms in the following sentences. The collective storytelling mechanism and the theatre guild mechanism operate by a hidden bias. Both mechanisms reflect how much the characters throughout Act I and Act II unwittingly rely on television as their main perception (in other words, television is the bias) of others and of theatre, despite that television is no longer available. To be more precise, television influences how they derive relief from others and from other media. This claim partly derives from Neil Postman, a writer on media studies, who, in his *Amusing Ourselves to Death,* explores the idea of television affecting the way we perceive everything. He explains that television instills subtly within us the false idea that entertainment is how everything - all experience and subject matter - should be represented (Postman, 87). It instills within us the false idea that it is natural to assume that all experience and subject matter should be, in some way or another, entertaining (Postman 87). We take "how television stages the world" to be "the model for how the world is properly to be staged" (Postman 92). What I am doing here is deriving from Postman's idea that television makes entertainment the representation of everything, including relief. Thus, the characters derive relief from others and from other media only if they are entertained. This constitutes a bias as it will be seen in the ritual storytelling mechanism and the theatre guild mechanism.

As it was mentioned earlier, the bias is present in the ritual storytelling mechanism. It is present through the characters that seek relief not only in recalling more about a Simpsons episode, but also those who do recall more about it. In Act I, a group of characters talking about a Simpsons episode they watched discovers a stranger nearby named Gibson. Despite initial caution, they allow Gibson to participate in their conversation. At some point, the conversation stops because the group reflects upon the eerie subject of a man who died near a nuclear reactor, having failed to restore power in time after the nuclear incident. The silence continues until—"(*Creepy voice*.) O I'll stay away alright. I'll stay away. . .*forever*," at which point Gibson is threatened by guns (Washburn 36). However, he prudently assures the group, explaining that what he just said was the very line they were trying to recall earlier in their conversation about a Simpsons episode. At this point, relief takes over and laughter ensues: Gibson is alright. The voice and the italicization of "forever" is still sinister, but it's presented in a humorous light.

Furthermore, Gibson's expression of this line is ambiguous. To the tense campfire group, already occupied by macabre thoughts, it seemed a provocative threat. To the reader familiar with the show, it was an untimely attempt to lighten the mood, but to the manipulative, it was a moment's insight and a wasted opportunity on Gibson's part. The one who is familiar with the entertainment others relate to is the one who gains the trust expressed in relieved laughter. My claim that television influences how characters derive their relief from others is demonstrated in Gibson's line. It is when the understanding of his words as a threat suddenly changes to a joke. It is as if there were no further tests to determine Gibson's authenticity and amenability to the group, the only apparent test having been whether he had sufficient knowledge of a television show. To reiterate, because the group seeks relief in the recollection of a Simpsons episode, this implies in seeking relief from those who can recall it. Those who can recall entertain the listeners and gain their trust. This is implicit in the group's change in perception of Gibson's line from threat to joke.

The bias is also present in the theatre guild mechanism, where television influences how characters derive relief from other media – namely, theatre. They derive relief from theatre by living out the content of television as it were. This is demonstrated in Act II, where the characters act out the content of television, attempting to create a reality that is musical through performing chart hits such as,"I'm wet with the rain / I'm all drenched with tears" (Washburn 67); a reality that "is *welcoming*" through commercials (Washburn 53); and a reality that is meaningless through cartoons (Washburn 70). The reality these characters are recreating is the reality presented by television, with theatre being the only means. Furthermore, they justify their efforts to create this reality. For instance, when one character, Maria, desires to go further than imitating television, believing "[they] have an opportunity here to provide . . . *meaning*" (Washburn 70). Another character, Quincy, responds: "Things aren't funny when they're true they're awful. Meaning is everywhere. We get *Meaning* for free, whether we like it or not. Meaningless Entertainment, on the other hand, is actually really hard" (Washburn 70). Thus television influences their understanding of the relationship between meaning and theatre, how the latter must be in service of preserving past entertainment at the expense of the former.

So far, we have progressed from the first claim that the human response to the loss of electricity was a series of coping mechanisms, each one more effective than the last. Upon further examination, there was a bias running throughout the ritual storytelling mechanism and

the theatre guild mechanism. Both mechanisms demonstrated the influence of television at work. There remains then the last mechanism to search a bias for – the opera mechanism in Act III. However, the bias that runs through this mechanism comes from a source other than television. I mentioned earlier that the opera mechanism produces a different type of relief. I will be proposing then that this is attributed to a different bias. The bias that produces the relief achieved by the opera mechanism is different from the bias that produces the relief achieved by the last two. Marshall McLuhan, another thinker of media studies, described this bias in his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

McLuhan theorized that "[a]ny invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies" (54). By extension, he meant in the sense that all what we could not do originally, we did later with what we made (McLuhan 52). Each invention functioned far better than what our corresponding body part took much effort in engaging in (McLuhan 52). To offer a quick example, McLuhan analyzed the wheel as an extension of the foot (52). Besides using examples like this, he entrenched his theory of technologies being extensions of ourselves by bringing up self-amputation as an analogy (McLuhan 52). When the body suffers from irritation but fails to determine where this is caused or granted that it does determine where but cannot avoid it, the body resolves this issue by amputating a part of itself (McLuhan 52). More precisely, he says that when the central nervous system is under stress, it resolves this stress by separating itself from "the offending organ, sense, or function" (McLuhan 52). Through this separation arises the concept of the extension of the body (McLuhan 52). Returning to the wheel example, the need to keep up with the expansion of trade stressed the incapability of the feet to travel more and transport more goods (McLuhan 52). The foot was the offending body part (McLuhan 52). To meet this need, the foot was amputated (McLuhan 52). This is to really say that at some point, humans projected their stress - about their feet unable to meet the necessity - unto material, inventing the wheel (52). The wheel was a version of the foot, "the feet in rotation" (McLuhan 52). In turn, the wheel, though alleviating the stress, emphasized its own role as a substitute for the feet (McLuhan 52). Adopting the wheel, or any other invention comes at a cost (McLuhan 52). To bear the intensity an invention brings to human activity, the nervous system becomes numb (McLuhan 52). By numb, it is meant that the nervous system prevents itself from recognizing the wheel as an extension of the body part it enclosed against (McLuhan 52). In other words, whenever one invents something, he is only able to think

of how his invention will affect people practically (McLuhan 52). However, he does not foresee the larger picture of his invention (McLuhan 52). He is sensitive to its practical effects, but numb to its perceptual effects (McLuhan 52). This numbness is the bias I refer to in the opera-mechanism. To clarify something, the nervous system and one's understanding of an invention are the same. I merely wanted to show the progress of this analogy until reaching what it ultimately means to us.

An illustration McLuhan employs to clarify the idea of the nervous system being numb to an impactful invention is the audiac (53-54). The patient wears headphones and operates the audiac by increasing the volume (McLuhan 53-54). When the volume is high enough, the noise prevents the patient from feeling pain when the dentist uses his drill (McLuhan 53-54). By overstimulating one body part, the ear, the patient becomes numb to pain (McLuhan 53-54). Borrowing this analogy, McLuhan claims that the invention overstimulates by revolutionizing the ways people used to operate, rendering them insensitive to how it drills into us its own perception of the world (53-54). Numbness also ties into a more startling point when McLuhan interprets ancient texts to illustrate further about this bias. The first is the myth of Narcissus where he is so enamored by his aquatic reflection, thinking it to be someone else, that he neglects to do anything else, - even keeping his body alive and thus dies, fixated (McLuhan 51). Narcissus becomes numb, dulled to be a passive observer of an "extension of himself by mirror" (McLuhan 51). The takeaway from this is that "men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves" (McLuhan 51). In the myth, his body was extended in water and Narcissus, in complete, ignorance was in rapture of it. Had he been deprived of water, it would be no exaggeration to say that he would not have yearned for it because it was necessary for his body, but that it was a pleasurable extension of it. The other ancient text McLuhan refers to is Psalm 119: "Their idols are silver and gold, / The work of men's hands. . . .They that make them shall be like unto them; / Yea, every one that trusteth in them" (54-55). The idol, just as Narcissus's reflection, is an extension of humans themselves in material other than themselves (55). McLuhan gleans from this that "the Psalmist insists that the beholding of idols, or the use of technology, conforms men to them," that humans come to worship extensions of themselves and embody those extensions (55). The takeaway from this text is that we cannot effectively use them unless we suspend our will, otherwise our will interferes with their use (McLuhan 55). It is difficult, then, to be detached from the media we use

since we first make ourselves passive agents (McLuhan 55). Media is not meant to suit us; we are meant to suit it.

As to how this relates to my third claim, what I want to apply from McLuhan's thoughts is the general idea that what we produce corresponds to a desire within us. A desire can be frustrated by our inability to fulfill it, becoming a source of stress. However, with access to outside materials, we can fulfill our desire by producing something. This comes at a cost—ignorance. We become ignorant of our product's real functions as a mirror and idol. My third claim, then, is that the opera-mechanism operates the same way as this product. In McLuhan's example of the wheel, people felt compelled to keep up with the increasing demands of trade, such as more travel and more goods. In *Mr. Burns* the characters are compelled to meet the demands of their environment: living without electricity. In McLuhan's example, the foot was the source of stress, the offending organ, the frustrating reminder of their own limits. They externalized this stress unto material, producing the wheel.

In *Mr. Burns*, their stress derives from the desire to find relief in meaning which both the ritual storytelling mechanism and the theatre guild mechanism cannot provide. Both of these mechanisms ultimately stem from the desire to find relief in meaningless entertainment. Thus, the desire for relief in meaning was necessitated by a reliance on meaningless entertainment as their main source of relief, producing stress. Drawing from the first claim, the characters go through multiple ways of coping with their situation. This continues until they touch upon the one coping mechanism that succeeds in fulfilling this desire by externalizing their stress unto theatre, the product being the opera. Drawing from the second claim, the coping mechanisms all operate on some bias. Ritual storytelling reflects the bias of television pervading the characters' perceptions of others. Theatre guilds reflect the bias of television pervading their perceptions of theatre. The opera reflects the bias of an inventor that pervades his perception of his own creation. The effect of this bias is that the characters, whether the characters from the first two acts or the thespians and the audience of the last, do not realize that the opera is an extension of themselves. They do not realize that they externalized their stress through non-electric means: the opera. The opera then functions like the aquatic mirror for Narcissus, preventing the characters from perceiving the opera as the externalization of this stress. Lastly, the opera serves as an idol, a reality where wills are fully suspended. The thespians must continually perform it, like an idol's priests, because of its effectiveness as a coping mechanism as passive agents, or

roles in the play. The audience are also passive agents in that they behold the idol—the performance of the opera. In summary, I attribute the human response to the sudden loss of electricity, as presented by *Mr. Burns*, to coping mechanisms that operate by the hidden biases of technology, whether it be the technology of the past or the technology that one invents.

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Re:Search

A New Devil:
An Analysis of Character Shifts in a Production of Webster's *The White Devil*

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ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the interpretation of characters in John Webster's *The White Devil*, comparing how they were intended to how they are portrayed today in order to exemplify the changes in our society. The play has several misogynistic views that were acceptable and favored in the time they were written, but that are no longer laughed at or shrugged away. Characters who represent those views cannot be played in the same manner as before because the audience will not receive them as readily as they once did, and this leads to a completely different play. I examine the roles of Vittoria and Flamineo and how alterations (or lack thereof) to their characters can create a completely different, more empowering production of *The White Devil.*

KEYWORDS

Christina Luckyj, Feminism, Representation, Early Modern, Theater, John Webster, production, artistic interpretation

The White Devil by John Webster is a play centered on the corruption of the Italian court, love and affairs, and the power dynamics between men and women. In classical productions of the play, the character that represents the titular 'White Devil' is Vittoria Corombona, a gentlewoman who assists in the murder of her husband and the Duke of Brachiano's wife so that they can be together. She is played as a liar and a manipulator and, when produced in that way, is well-deserving of the title of White Devil. Today, however, we are able to open the play up to further interpretations and must ask the question: in our modern society, who do we really see as the White Devil? As Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker state in *In Another Country,* "Texts are open to history and reinterpretation" (5). I submit that in a modern production, audiences are more inclined to interpret the White Devil as Flamineo, Vittoria's brother, who commits the majority of the murders of the play and drives the plot as a servant trying to make his way up the rankings. How we have looked at *The White Devil* through critical theory and as performance, which will be discussed heavily throughout this paper, has changed over time due to new perspectives in our society. I have exemplified the ability to interpret the play in this manner by directing a more feminist production of the show, in which the White Devil was Flamineo, without losing any textual integrity.

To understand this change in interpretation we first need to understand the original point. *The White Devil* is a revenge tragedy written by John Webster in 1612 and is loosely based on the life of Vittoria Accoramboni. Many of the plot points are extremely similar to what happened to her: Vittoria's husband is still the first to die and suffer from the affair in Webster's dramatic retelling. The full historical events were that her brother, wanting her to marry the Duke of Bracciano, had her husband murdered, and it was thought Bracciano had his first wife killed so he could be with Vittoria. They were married shortly after, but the uncle of Vittoria's first husband became pope and made his resentment and desire for revenge towards them known, so they fled Rome. The duke died and eventually, upon the division of his property, Lodovico Orsini had Vittoria assassinated and all complicit in that crime were put to death (Seiden).

In the play, there are three concurrent plots based on these events. The first is that of Count Lodovico, who is a notorious murderer attempting to repeal his banishment from Rome. The second plot is the romance of Brachiano and Vittoria, both of whom are married to other people. Flamineo is Brachiano's secretary and Vittoria's brother, who attempts to use his sister to raise his ranking in society. He pushes the two of them together in the hopes that Brachiano will

reward him, and to do this, he resorts to murdering both of their significant others. The third plot is that of Monticelso, a cardinal who later becomes Pope, and Francisco, the Duke of Florence. Monticelso is related to Vittoria's husband and Francisco is the brother of Brachiano's wife, Isabella. Theirs is the revenge plot, blaming the murders of their relatives on the secret couple and attempting to publicly shame and then kill them. We can see how all of the plots intertwine and lead to further development among each other. It is a very complex and interlocking play that is only made clear by the fact that the characters are constantly saying exactly what they are doing. Even then it is still confusing, and many critics agree that the play is clearer when looked at scene-by-scene, but tends to fall apart when examined as a whole for a moral code. While there are no good or bad people in the play, there is a group of people who vary in intent and who display the vices and motivations of the real people they are based on, making things ambiguous.

The White Devil premiered in 1612 and its first performance was not well-received. Pearson recounts that "John Webster's introduction to. . .The White Devil (1612), admits that the play had been a box-office failure" (53). It was performed by Queen Anne's Men, a group known at the time for playing relatively low-brow theater for a rowdy and lascivious audience. A rowdy audience in this time referred to "an audience constantly in need of taming. It might throw stones. . . .It often threw fruit" (Stern 26-27). It is clear to see why *The White Devil* failed, then, as an audience used to immediate gratification and humor would not sit well with a play as serious and complex as that being performed by actors who were unused to the style of material themselves. It went on a short hiatus because of that original reception, but it is also probable that it underperformed due to the growing discomfort with bloody revenge tragedies during the time it was written. It was brought back after a period of time and re-performed.

John Webster is an author who has continued, through time, to be analyzed. His plays are criticized as pieces that focus heavily on spectacle and in-the-moment action. They are said to be taken better on a scene-to-scene basis as they fail to represent a cohesive concept. Another way of putting it is that he is very good at creating small, concrete moments but terrible at creating a larger cohesive construct. There are many inconsistencies in his characters, and his ideas get meshed together. He is a writer very much of the moment, and *The White Devil* is a good example of that. The lack of cohesion in this case is typically due to issues with a lack of consistency among the morals of the play (Luckyj xviii-xxii). I do not see this as being as much

of an issue as it seems, and do not think it means that the play is problematic or does not make sense. In *The White Devil,* characters' morals change. They do not remain static as morals tend to in most revenge tragedies, where there are clearly bad and good sides. The most notable change is in the case of Monticelso, who wishes to repent for the plots he and Francisco made once he became Pope, but there are even smaller, subtler changes. The alliance of Lodovico changes frequently, and how he feels about his actions are in a constant state of flux, which makes his characterization complex and confusing. Those who critique the play's moral inconsistency compare it to other plays of the time such as *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare or even *The Duchess of Malfi*, another work by Webster. In these plays, there is a clear "good" side and a clear "bad" side that the audience is meant to identify and judge accordingly, but in *The White Devil* there is no good or bad side, there are just people acting on their own desires.

The fact that every character in the play is acting on their own desires and morals is critical to my argument. The fact that there is no clear good and bad to begin with makes it easy to reinterpret the order of who is better and worse in terms of morals, which shift over time. The order that was established at the time of the play's writing was clear—Vittoria Corombona was the titular "White Devil," arguably the most corrupt and insidious character in the entire play. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a "White Devil" is "the devil disguised as a virtuous being" ("white," special uses). A White Devil is one who masks their devilishness and cunning behind a curtain of innocence, the way Vittoria hides her adultery. They pretend to be weaker than they are when really they are the puppet master of a situation, are in complete control, and manipulate the beliefs and emotions of those around them to get what they want. That would also apply to a White Devil Vittoria who pretends to be scared to convince Brachiano to murder their spouses without ever having to tell him to. There are many White Devils in the play—arguably, almost every character is one—but there is always a character that fits the mold more than the rest depending on the situation. After all, it is not called "The White Devils"; while critical reception of the play can argue that there is a multitude, during a live performance we are meant either as director, actor, or audience member to decide for ourselves who the White Devil is, and that decision is based heavily on acting and directing choices as well as social context of our time.

As mentioned previously, the character meant to be the White Devil in the play is Vittoria Corombona. This is clear in the way other characters, including her own brother Flamineo, talk

about her, saying things like "she's mad," "She's turned fury," and addressing her as "Oh thou glorious strumpet" (Webster 3.2.275, 3.2.278, 5.6.203). This fits in with the social climate of the time and of the way the real-life Vittoria was viewed at that time. It is also clear in the way she responds to her treatment, most notably in the infamous Trial Scene.[1] As she is prosecuted she stands up for herself and dismisses all knowledge of the murders of her husband and Brachiano's wife, plays and wins a game of wit with her over-spoken lawyer, and holds her head high as she is sent to what is ostensibly a whore house. In her word-game with the lawyer, as he is making several literary references, she responds in kind with references to powerful and innocent women. It matters whether or not she has knowledge of the murders because that is what she is subtly being interrogated for, but it is important to note that that is not what she is on trial for.

In the Trial Scene, Vittoria is on trial for adultery, not murder, even though that is what she is brought to the stand for. Before the trial Monticelso states, "Sir you know we have nought but circumstances / To charge her with, about her husband's death; / Their approbation therefore to the proofs / Of her black lust, shall make her infamous" (Webster 3.1.4-7). The court, more specifically Francisco and Monticelso, use the murder of Vittoria's husband and their ability to insinuate that it was her fault to put her on the stand and publicly shame her as a whore. During the scene in which Monticelso interrogates, or more plainly attacks, her, he has a page-long monologue describing what a whore is, saying such things as, "they are the true material fire of hell," and, "They are worse, / Worse than dead bodies, which are begged at gallows / and wrought upon by surgeons, to teach man / Wherein he is imperfect," which is enough to show the view of women at the time and how they are trying to paint Vittoria (Webster 3.2.86, 3.2.96-99). They attack her for not mourning her husband when, in the context of the play, they arrested her soon after his death when she was not there.Monticelso states to a jury of nobles, "And look upon this creature was his wife. / She comes not like a widow: she comes armed / With scorn and impudence. Is this a mourning habit?" (Webster 3.2.120-123). She is not persecuted as a person in her own right, but as a bad wife and she is attacked for defending herself against the slew of hate Monticelso throws at her. The fact that she defends herself and promotes her own agency reinforces the way the men treat her in the scene. It was thought that "All 'ungoverned women'. . .were a threat to the social order," and Vittoria is ungoverned due to her husband's death. It is not just that though. Laura G. Bromley writes, "Any woman whose behavior departs from the norms of passivity and silence is labeled and condemned as a 'whore,' 'fury,' or 'devil,'" which

is exactly what Monticelso does to Vittoria as she assesses her situation and chooses to fight against the patriarchal control of her life and choices (50).

Because of that, no matter how we interpret her character, Vittoria is, in a modern sense, justified in her response to being prosecuted the way she is. What is important for this interpretation is how we now view her motives for dissent in contrast to how an early modern audience viewed her motives. We must decide how much Vittoria knows because it determines what she is covering up or what she is railing against. How justified she is in this scene, and how much she is aware and manipulating. If she does not know about the murders, she is completely justified in her outrage—she would have only just found out about her husband's death, but she is treated like a harlot and blamed in front of the entire court. If she knew of the murder beforehand, and was part of it, she is not only lying about her affair, but she is also lying and manipulating the court to pity her. She states blatantly, "Had I foreknown his death as you suggest, / I would have bespoke my mourning" (Webster 3.2.122-123). Is this the truth or manipulation of the court? In the first case, she is not asking for pity from anyone and is, in a way, comes across much stronger because she does not purposely make herself look weaker, a clear instigation of the title of White Devil as explained in the *OED*. Either way, it is very important to know if she is implicated in the murders or not, as it affects the audience's perception of her character greatly.

In her first scene with Brachiano, she describes a dream in which a large tree falls and kills both her husband and his wife as they were digging her grave. The interaction can be interpreted in various ways since the tree is described by Vittoria as a yew tree. So as she is speaking, saying phrases like, "This harmless yew," and especially, "both were struck dead by that sacred yew," she could be solely referring to the tree or she could be using it to subtly say "you," to imply she meant Brachiano without directly saying anything to him (Webster 1.2.223, 1.2.236).

In early productions this was acted out as a moment in which she subtly persuades Brachiano to perform the murders by making him think it was his idea. The dream itself is not what reveals this the most, but rather Flamineo's side comments. He explicitly says, "Excellent devil. / She hath taught him in a dream / To make away his Duchess and her husband" (Webster 1.2.238-240). This is the way throughout the play that other characters state she is plotting or being devious, and we once more see her brother referring to her as being a Devil. Unlike most

of the characters, we learn about Vittoria's motivations either clearly or skewed by those around her instead of from her directly. This sets her apart because everyone else either states what they do directly to other characters or to the audience in soliloquies or asides. Those moments are taken as truth to the audience watching simply because of convention. There is no one for the character to lie to, so when they clearly state their plans out loud to the audience in these moments, we accept that. In the case of Vittoria, she has none of those moments herself throughout the play. Her brother, Francisco, or Monticelso narrate her actions to us, or they are not spoken about and it is up to the audience to piece her motives together based on the actions we see. There are no trustworthy characters who convey her motives or thoughts.

Vittoria was written as the White Devil mainly due to the way women were viewed and treated at the time. A powerful woman was dangerous. If we were to write the play today and base it off the real events that Webster looked at we would get a very different play with a very different interpretation of Vittoria It would be something closer to my own interpretation of the play that I will discuss later. Vittoria would not be the White Devil; she would be a victim, but because of the social climate at the time, she was painted in a negative light. To make it even clearer that she was set up to be a "bad woman," Webster utilized a convention popular in Early Modern Drama, a foil. A foil is a character acting differently than another character in order to highlight specific traits within the character of focus, normally the protagonist. Foils can be complete opposites from the protagonist or they can be very alike but with a defining trait that sets them apart. Vittoria finds her foil in Isabella, Brachiano's murdered wife.

Isabella is typically portrayed as a faithful and loving wife. She speaks lovingly to her husband even as he is spurning her for Vittoria, and has little agency of her own. She ultimately sacrifices everything for Brachiano and is murdered by her idolatry of him when she kisses a poisoned portrait of him that she visits nightly after he leaves her. She is not her own woman—we see her as a wife to Brachiano, a sister to Francisco, a mother to Giovanni. She is epitomized as a plot point and rarely gets spoken of by name. In the same scene Francisco says to Brachiano, "Thou hast a wife, our sister," and, "You know Vittoria" (Webster 2.1.64, 2.1.52). He blatantly refers to Vittoria by name, even though she is also married, but not once in the scene does he refer to Isabella by name. He keeps this separation throughout the play, frequently displaying the difference in agency of the two women. The intended preference of the women is made clear through the conventions of revenge tragedy. A virtuous woman dies early on in the play to

provoke revenge. We can see this multiple times: the Lady in *The Lady's Tragedy* kills herself halfway through the play, and Vindice's wife kills herself along with the wife of Antonio because of rape in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Another Webster play, *The Duchess of Malfi*, sees the titular character killed before the end of the play. While most of these deaths are acted out by the virtuous woman in an effort to redeem herself after having been "tainted" by society, Webster's females are all murdered. Still, the reason for the murders of the Duchess and Isabella evoke sympathy. Isabella dies after kissing a picture of her husband, kneeling and praying to it as though he were a god.

The stage direction reads, "*she kneels down as to prayers, then draws the curtain of the picture, does three reverences to it, and kisses it thrice*" (Webster 49). It is methodical, practiced, and a perfect example of what people of the time would want in a wife, not speaking even as she dies. On the other hand, we see Vittoria being thrown down and stabbed to death, and even then, she delivers wit in the face of adversity saying to her murderer, "'Twas a manly blow. / The next thou giv'st, murder some sucking infant / And then thou wilt be famous" (Webster 5.6.227-229). The way they are killed, one gracefully fainting to the ground, and the other gasping and bleeding out slowly, clearly shows preference to Isabella as the good woman who should die in good circumstances and be avenged by her brother. In her book, *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy*, Dympna Callaghan states that "Female characters oscillate uneasily between their functions as objects of uncertainty and embodiments of perfect truth" (65). Vittoria embodies power in herself and that is dangerous to men at this time, whereas the representation of Isabella, played as her foil, a woman who would do anything to please her husband, including taking the blame for their marital issues to stop her brother from attacking him, embodies virtue, obedience, and purity. It is fitting that Brachiano, husband to both women, is the one who sums it up most succinctly in the play; "Woman to man / is either a god or a wolf" (Webster 4.2.87-88).

We no longer have those views of women. Our society as a whole is much more open minded and so we see more possibilities when we return to this play. We can see the value and messages we can send using what was a very misogynistic and patriarchal work and turning it into a feminist critique, reclaiming it in a way. Changes have been made in productions to shy away from the view of Vittoria as a central villain, and the easiest way to do this is to shift the focus to the character who has the most lines—Flamineo. I also want to argue that it is not

helpful to simply keep the affair plot in the background; vital to creating a modern interpretation of this play is shifting the audience's perspective of who the White Devil is, and the most obvious target for the title is Flamineo. Yes, Vittoria has an affair, but Flamineo murders to maintain it out of selfishness and greed.

Flamineo spends the entire play attempting to climb the social ladder at any cost, even within his own family. He commits several murders and deceptions under the guise of being a simple secretary. He plots, plans, and speaks directly to the audience so they know how two-faced he is and they can tell that he feigns many if not all of his emotional connections with those around him. While we can frame many characters as the White Devil based on the *OED* definition of it, Flamineo is by far the easiest, even surpassing Vittoria in sheer visibility of deceit and masking of it.

The reason it is so important to cast Flamineo as the White Devil is that he is the one who implicates Vittoria in the crimes. It is always Flamineo who points out that she may be manipulating the situation and so, in order to create a more justified Vittoria, we need to devalue Flamineo's input. The less the audience trusts him, the better. It is also important because Flamineo spends entire pages demoralizing and shaming women, especially Vittoria. While right in front of her while she is upset, he says to Brachiano, "What a damned imposthume is a woman's will?...Women are caught as you take tortoises / She must be turned on her back" (Webster 4.2.144-47). In the Early Modern era, it would have been common for the main character to do this to women because that was how women were viewed. This can be seen in cases such as Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, in which he speaks several rhyming couplets—small phrases that rhyme that the audience could take away as a repeatable phrase—that comment on the lack of integrity of women and their evil and lustful natures. Stern says "Plays provided a source of jests and anecdotes; they supplied the quips and one-liners that could be used to spice up conversation later" (20). People went to plays for the same reason many watch popular shows on Netflix now: to find references that can apply to real life situations.

To transpose the motivation for seeing plays then to a modern setting, as I just did with Netflix-referencing, is easy, but it is impossible with this play and other plays with negative inlaid messages about women if we want to create the same type of reaction to the character. Those phrases that would make a character relatable and likable would now make them seem sleazy, untrustworthy, and hated—which is what happens when we now view Flamineo. He

connects with the audience through his asides and monologues still, but in a modern setting, he is not liked and has to be played very charismatically to be tolerated given the amount of stage time he gets. Instead of being the relatable servant attempting to do whatever he can to climb the ranks in an unfair society like he was in Early Modern productions, he becomes the character we love to hate. He is the one we do not want to succeed. He has to make the audience like him in some way, which furthers his representation as the White Devil because it adds another necessary level of masking his true despicable nature.

It is also important to consider the severity of his crimes when we think about why he is the White Devil now, but previously wasn't. In the Early Modern period, the concept of death was ever-present. An audience of the time would have been relatively desensitized to the concept of a dead body. Murder was a common plot convention in plays because at the time murders could happen with an ease that is not possible today. With all of that, the fact that Flamineo murders the spouses does not strike the audience very hard, especially due to the fact that they are the residents of the shadier side of London where these events are part of daily life. In contrast, today we do not use murder in modern plays with anywhere near the frequency we once did. The style of the dumbshow murders as graphic and taking place in the home or in sport would signal to a modern audience just how despicable Flamineo is.[2] He murders Isabella with poison as she kisses a portrait of her unloving husband, and breaks Camillo's neck as they compete on a vaulting horse. The showmanship of the murders is played to the extreme so the audience has no choice but to focus on them, and they are undeniably horrible in a modern context.

In many modern performances the concept of who the White Devil is may not even be brought up due to the flourish of the murders and other events. The play, because of its extravagant plot, is able to be played highly for spectacle, and can move very quickly when that is the focus. Every few scenes there are large and epic moments of tension and extravagance that, when laced together, keep the audience in a state of heightened emotion. The further along we get, the more we wonder how they can continue to get tenser. This is extremely important to make the viewing experience enjoyable because without it the audience can get confused if they miss one piece of information and the plot could fall apart for them. It is much easier to focus on spectacle and not question the issue of Vittoria and Flamineo, but that is not what I did when I staged it.

In the Fall of 2016, I put on a production of *The White Devil* with the What You Will Shakespeare Company. I cut as little from the script as I could in an attempt to retain the full plot. The majority of lines that were taken out were filler language and unnecessary repetition. The focus of the production was an interpretation of Flamineo as the White Devil and of Vittoria as innocent of the murders. Vittoria being innocent of the murders does not paint her as a saint; she still cheats on her husband with Brachiano while he is alive. She is not perfect, and if she were, she would not be in a Webster play. I was not concerned that people would view the change as being too easy on her. The major concerns I had with this interpretation were how well the first scene with Vittoria and Brachiano would translate. If it is not set up clearly that Vittoria is not planting the idea of murder in Brachiano's head on purpose, and that it is truly Brachiano and Flamineo who devise the murder of the spouses, then the audience will be left in confusion, or worse, miss the fact that Vittoria is not the White Devil altogether and just think she is very good at faking her emotions to manipulate. The pressure in that lies heavily on the actress who plays Vittoria being able to appear innocent and as if she is really just recounting a nightmare she had. For an audience with no prior knowledge or predisposed ideas of the play, this fares much better.

That would be impossible to achieve given staging conventions in the Early Modern Era. At that time, actors were extremely typecast. So in the case of Vittoria, the boy playing her would be the one who plays the older more devious style of woman, not the troupe ingénue.[3] The audience would have a clear idea of what type of personality the characters are even before they start. These concepts are beneficial today if we are producing plays with archetypes in them from troupes that try to maintain traditional methods of performance (keeping the lights on, interacting with the audience, seating on stage, etc) who keep the same general cast and do several plays, because in that case we can incite the same personality relation that theater hinged on in the Early Modern period. The difference between now and then in these situations is that more and more the actress who is playing Vittoria is also playing the role of likable women in power or ingénues. Seeing an ingénue actress play Vittoria gives the character an immediate impression of innocence that counteracts presumptions of her character on the part of other characters like Flamineo and Francisco who attempt to shame her. Watching her played by someone who plays likable, powerful women gives her a sense of maturity and solid strength that

makes her interesting and beloved in the eyes of an audience increasingly looking for powerful women characters as role models.

While my goal was ultimately achieved, there are certain things in this interpretation that lose power. It can be argued that by removing her knowledge and involvement in the murder plot, this interpretation removes Vittoria's agency. The Trial Scene changes from a moment where she is controlling the entire situation and manipulating the nobles, lawyer, and Monticelso into a scene in which she is acting in response. She is unfairly prosecuted and is unable to do anything to help her situation on her own. While I submit that that view has some value in it, I believe the benefits of the change outweigh the minor lack of agency it causes, especially because she gains agency in a different way. While losing her manipulative control of the Trial Scene, Vittoria gains a new type of superiority. She is completely and undeniably in the right in her indignation and in her condemnation of the male-oriented judgment during her sentencing, and the audience is on her side as she displays her dominant will over everyone else in the room. If she is played to be the White Devil, to be lying at that moment, then her banishment is a failure and a loss on her part to maintain power and control. If she is played as being honest and indignant, then her sentencing isn't failure on her part, but corruption on the part of the court that is sentencing her.

In today's society, we should condemn the depiction of women as this play originally presented them. This play can no longer be viewed the way it once was because our views on women and death are so drastically different now that attempts to reconcile them would lead to a problematic and diminishing performance. We still read this play today, and it is still performed, but the way we interpret the text has shifted to accommodate our altered views on the agency, power, and value of women, which shows that our views are still changing and progressing toward a better sense of equality.

NOTES

[1] The Trial Scene is one of the most notable and famous excerpts from *The White Devil*. It is referenced through the Essay and is the entirety of Act 3 Scene 2 in the cited edition.

[2] A dumbshow is a short, non-scripted enactment of an event within a play. It can be within the stage directions of a play as it is in *The White Devil* for the murder dumbshows (see pages 48-50) or it can be added by a director to reinforce their own artistic vision of a play.

[3] In the Early Modern period, there were no women actors and so all female parts were played by younger men/boys who had yet to go through puberty. An ingénue is a typecast that represents young women who are innocent and pure, i.e., Bianca in *Taming of the Shrew*, Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing*, or Castiza in *The Revenger's Tragedy.*

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Tonight Will Not Swing:
Frank Sinatra through the Liner Notes of Stan Cornyn

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ABSTRACT

Frank Sinatra was a towering figure in popular music of the twenty-first century. He designed the basic approach to album making called the "Concept Album." Part of that album-making process was devised outside of the studio, in the form of liner notes. Few critics have approached the albums of Frank Sinatra through the lens of Stan Cornyn's award-winning liner notes during Sinatra's tenure with Reprise Records, particularly the words of Softly, As I Leave You (1964) through My Way (1968). Cornyn's notes' use of poetic mechanisms and their conversational structure allow him to assess Sinatra's work to the most minute detail. Through object association or dialogue between characters, Cornyn colorizes Sinatra's songs as if the liner notes were a part of the music itself. In my essay, I look into several Cornyn notes to unify themes and discuss Cornyn's analysis of Sinatra's character in his music, ultimately bridging Sinatra's concepts into other aspects of the album form, particularly liner notes.

KEYWORDS

Frank Sinatra, Stan Cornyn, liner notes, music, traditional pop, album, September

Liner notes, a product of an earlier generation of the music industry, began as simple epithets attached to the backside of a long-playing (LP) vinyl record to lure a potential listener by a variety of tactics. These notes could be articles from newspapers or rave reviews of the record. The liner note grew up alongside popular music criticism with the likes of *Rolling Stone* founders Ralph J. Gleason and Jann Wenner, "jazz critics, who started to push popular music writing into thoughtful, politically oriented directions in the 1950s" (Powers 13). Liner notes became a standard for the LP market and became more experimental by the mid1960s, with artists like Bob Dylan writing their own notes. With a well-written liner, a writer can take on many forms within the world of the artist. They could become a performer themselves. They could ultimately become an eyewitness to the art.

Eyewitness. This mild description became the title of Stan Cornyn's final liner note essay for Frank Sinatra on the colossal *Complete Reprise Studio Recordings* box in 1995. He was the eyewitness to the Chairman's act as a studio charlatan—eyewitness to the inner workings "[b]ehind that thick door, the one with the red light that will later light up and say 'Recording. Do Not Enter'" (Cornyn, "Eye Witness" 56). In each of his essays appearing on Sinatra's mid'60s records, Cornyn measures his own details and detains them within two separate themes that ultimately lead to an understanding Cornyn presents of the character of Frank Sinatra. The first theme, Cornyn argues, is that the studio acts as a player in Sinatra's unfolding drama. The second is the conflict between the man and his muse—the cultural dynamics of Sinatra's dissonance with the counterculture America. A good liner consists of these traits as a complement to the album form.

The studio is a character in Cornyn's writing as much as Sinatra himself. He gives life to what is living and what is not, appropriating action to all in the room. He is a cataloguer above all else, meticulous in his metaphors as in the case of *Moonlight Sinatra*, where "[t]he romantic *mis en scene*, Mendelssohnian in its aluminum newness, closes in around [the Ring-a-Ding Kid]" (Cornyn, *Moonlight*). Writing about an album on clichés, Cornyn masks this trait to make it seem much less meager, thus the comparison to Mendelssohn. It is all a renewing in this passage. Cornyn is taking on weary waters to wade Sinatra's words of the moon, but he nonetheless evokes brilliance to the banality:

> To sing of the moon, and not of missiles, of romance and not of fudge, of love and not lollipops, is old-fashioned. Something out of Grandma's day. Out of date, like the stars. Non-chic, like Valentines. Corny, like your own heart's beat.But if a man chooses to sing

> of the Moon, he cannot be pinchpenny with words of praise. His songs will fall on greedy ears.
> (*Moonlight*)

Every detail is important. Fudge and lollies add a naivety to love, concerning it to candy, disapproving of it just the same as Valentines. Love is not to be handed out. If it was, only those with "greedy ears" would hear these songs of love. It is earned. It is lived. It is another corny part of life, "like your own heart's beat" (Cornyn, *Moonlight*). Cornyn's notes would follow suit to this kind of imagery from the very beginning.

Although Cornyn began writing for Sinatra in 1964 during the singer's second collaboration with Count Basie, *It Might as Well Be Swing*'s liner notes were an extensive interview with arranger Quincy Jones. These were hardly an example of the enigmatic essays that began with *Softly, As I Leave You*, Sinatra's pick-up album of singles and movie songs. The liner of this latter record recounts a scene of Sinatra's studio, with musicians waiting for their master to make his appearance. Suddenly, as Cornyn's pen comes down, the man moves into the room. "His wide-branded hat is tipped back," Cornyn says, "He doesn't come in with fanfare. He's there though" (*Softly*). There is no easy atmosphere, no leisure as the leader lumbers in. The tension—Cornyn's conflict—tumbles onto the scene with him. A weight wavers on the woodwinds and brass. Even a string band plays hot in the presence of Frank Sinatra.

There is a three-step process in Cornyn's liner notes, each step a siren wringing the reader closer to the studio, closer to Sinatra. The first pushes the listener into the craft, establishing the entertainer's entrance, the second arouses the action, and the third leaves the listener in silence filled only by the music. *Softly, As I Leave You*, the first real Cornyn liner, was the first to use this process in full.

"He steps up into the singer's booth," Cornyn writes, watching as if he is Sinatra's shadow, "a window behind him, a scrubbed-up ashtray to his right hand.
He gets behind the music stand; it has his name engraved on it" (*Softly*). This is Sinatra's studio now; the etching of his name professes the nature of Sinatra's character. This moment is Cornyn's first foray into the character; it is his first as the shadow. "He takes a second to shuffle through the music, his piano player standing close by, in case. He shoots his cuffs, three-quarters of an inch. He came here to sing. He speaks straight into his mike" (Cornyn, *Softly*). The attention to detail is Cornyn's trademark. The mannerisms mask him in anxious action. He

doesn't sing—he speaks. He *breathes* the words, the music, and the moment itself through his voice. "'Everybody straight?" he has the audacity to ask, a tactful move to fracture any doubts deluding the room (Cornyn, *Softly)*. He's asking *them* if they are ready. Not the man himself, fiddling with his cufflinks.

Confidence is a Sinatra trademark (Zehme). When Cornyn writes the "Everybody straight?" question, he captures this confidence in a single line. With the actor on the stage, Cornyn begins reciting the script: "His hands stuff into his pockets. His knees bend half an inch. . .. He studies the microphone—friend or enemy? . . .He balances on the balls of his feet, his eyes feeling their way through the already memorized poetry before him" (*Softly)*. His body is ready. The action of inaction absorbs Sinatra's thought in this scene, almost playfully. The conflict is there. The sheet music is there. Even so, Sinatra would rather joggle his pockets or caress the steel microphone than sing; it is a tease. "He sings. The words come out wise, and sure. The girl in the crowd, the one against the wall, forgets to wonder if he's noticed her. He's singing now. Everyone feels the groove of the rhythm. Thirty right feet silently tapping" (Cornyn, *Softly*).

The passage above illustrates the final stage: releasing the listener into the music. The words are wise, aged by the writer's relentless leaden pace, another theme Cornyn would visit during Sinatra's folk-rock period as the decade (and
Sinatra's career) reached Indian summer. It is the moment when Sinatra sings that Cornyn neglects those trinkets and hands, even the woman, a symbol for philandering, failing to plunder Sinatra's survey. Thirty tapping feet are just a bonus. The infectious friction between the jazzman and his fans is apparent as it was when the man entered and said "Evenin', Sunshine" (Cornyn, *Softly*).

Cornyn's assessment of the studio relies on two constructs. First, to apprehend Sinatra at the moment of entrance, as introduced with *Softly, As I Leave You*. The second, however, is the functionality of how the other objects respond to Sinatra or vice-versa. It begins with the studio without intrusion, as a bystander intent on listening, relenting the ruse of Sinatra's craft. Take the case of Cornyn's liner to *Francis A. and Edward K.*, where he describes the scene of Sinatra's only studio sessions with Duke Ellington. Cornyn stands by the reader, as in a theater, watching drama unfold, listening for the echoes of Sinatra's soft temperate dissolve into the music of the Duke. Before the scene unfolds, it must first be made. Cornyn designs set pieces almost from

imagination, the objects becoming increasingly outrageous for even a Sinatra session—though, for an Ellington session, perhaps they are right—an ensemble of American artifacts.

"For the next five minutes," Cornyn observes:

> with the thoughtful ceremony of a Sumo wrestler, Ellington arranges his cafeteria of sine qua non's. Across the music stand of his Steinway he lays out his cafeteria: One six pack of Cokes. One pkg. Pall Malls. A Kleenex box. A cafeteria spoon. A one lb. box of C&H cube sugar. One Hilton Hotel's bottle opener (no church key at such a session). Six inches from the left piano leg, a plaid two-gallon ice cooler. Ash tray, aluminum. Qantas Airlines flight bag, with towel in. (*Francis*)

When Cornyn takes a minute to curate his cafeteria, he takes in every detail, the sound of a Coke bottle in the timbre of Ellington's American jazz. Sinatra's vocals are rusty like afterhours cigarette smoke, but there is a hint of that sugar cube—as on the playful sway of "Follow Me" or "All I Need Is the Girl." "I Like the Sunrise" pulls in by pulling away the now-sweat-ridden towel that closes Cornyn's curation.

Francis A. and Edward K. is a weary record, so Cornyn naturally gives weary notes, dilating the Duke's "wisely sad" eyes, describing how the "old days" were now "[t]alked over, and a bit sung and played over," melding a melancholy to the muse of both jazz masters (*Francis*). This conversation captures the tensions of the room through interaction rather than inaction, as the description were on *Softly.* There was a four-year gap between these two records, and there is time overarching their sensibilities. Beatlemania had erupted and rock 'n' roll had become an imposing threat to Sinatra's artistry, as the 1968 Grammy's had granted the Beatles "Album of the Year" over Sinatra's collaboration with Antonio Carlos Jobim. His music was fading.

Cornyn, a Reprise Records executive at the time, began to notice. His liners let off caressing commentary by imagining Sinatra in his setting: the studio. It always returned to the studio; a shelter from the storm. "They hear back their music. Sinatra's eyes, when his song is happening, they also happen" (Cornyn, *Francis).* Playback is the mirror any artist visits to assess their art, twisted in a house of horrors for some, but here it becomes a reflection of feeling. Sinatra knows his music is no longer in demand—Reprise's sales figures can tell him that much. But what makes him cry here is hearing the echo of a ghost. Cornyn placed this exchange at the end of his notes to *Francis A.* because he knew the sun was low on Sinatra. Coincidently,

Francis A. & Edward K. would be the final brass band Sinatra album until 1984's *L.A. Is My Lady*.

But even by the time the Sinatra-Ellington album was underway, the Chairman cleared the airwaves of his occasional swing records. It would be Stan Cornyn, on his Underwood typewriter, who made this observation on April 23, 1965: "Tonight will not swing," he declared, "Tonight is for serious" (*September*). This line opened Cornyn's liner to *September of My Years*, his magnum opus among Sinatra's catalogue.

What made these particular notes so successful is the way Cornyn used the dialogue between Sinatra and arranger Gordon Jenkins. He developed an autumnal drama by playing off the thematic compression of air during these sessions. Cornyn used that compression to give us the scene, with every fiddle player accounted for. Sinatra doesn't show up until the fifth paragraph, and at the moment he does, the scene erupts: "Thirty orchestra wives wish they had the late scores memorized. Four men look around for a transistor radio. [Sinatra asks] 'Hello, Sidney, how are ya. What's happening in the music business?" (Cornyn, *September*). Action. Jenkins then begins his arrangements, slow and calculating, never sparingly.

September's notes were all studio in scene, but the tension that surrounded Gordon Jenkins gave it conflict. The "posture-free" Jenkins was almost of another world in these notes, absent from the performance but almost omnipresent, "[rehearsing] voice empty arrangements" (Cornyn, *September*). He was the maker, the creator of the world to which Sinatra has been sent. Jenkins, both conductor and arranger on *September*, holds complete control; Cornyn observes he is not "leading the orchestra: [he is] being the orchestra" (*September*). Sinatra, crowned Prince in these notes, is the Christ figure, the connection between earth and heaven, between the listener and the studio. The Holy Ghost becomes the ghost of love, the theme of *September*, aged with wisdom that comes with experience on the fault lines of love. Cornyn produces this trinity to complement this record on death and dying. They are the characters of the drama Sinatra sings. Cornyn talks of the fall of his Christ figure in a sense of hesitation. "He sings with perspective," Cornyn says, "This vital man, this archetype of the good life, this idolized star..." (*September*). Both Sinatra and Cornyn pause, for they know he is not to stay on this earth. "He looks back. He remembers," Cornyn turns the paragraph, adjusting the vision into dreams, the only relief the tension receives (Cornyn, *September*). The duty is there for the Prince to command, and thus he

shutters aside into the September darkness. In his notes, Cornyn's characters fail to resolve the conflict. He simply lets it dissolve in the music to segue the liner into the opening song.

The opening song, a Sammy Cahn-Jimmy Van Heusen tune, is absent from the writers' other works that bounced in their buoyancy. "The September of My Years" was not recorded when Cornyn wrote the liner to the record at that time dubbed *September Songs* (Kaplan 623). But comparing its opening bars to the opening lines of Cornyn's notes, one cannot think the writer had this track in mind. A pulse of violins, almost in a fade-in, assaults the listener from the beginning, after which Sinatra turns abruptly to the microphone and, in his huskiest phrasing, asserts, "One day you turn around, it's summer" but the next day "it's fall" (Cornyn, *September*). It is a hook, much in the same way Cornyn opens with his declaration, "Tonight will not swing" (*September*). It becomes a bold statement, a warning to potential listeners, while at the same time serving as appreciation for the tonal qualities in Sinatra's music. The statement addresses an outward conflict, one unrelated to the rest of the notes, but one that would recur in subsequent records: a conflict around the audience and their response to Sinatra's art.

The mere notion that a night with Sinatra that would not swing alienates those who scurried far for Rat Pack debauchery in 1960, or who grew up on early concepts like *Swing Easy!* or the perennial *Songs for Swingin' Lovers!* The statement Cornyn makes turns away those fans. *September* is the polar opposite to Sinatra's first Album of the Year-winner *Come Dance with Me!*, substituting that Billy May record's heavy brass for sweeping strings and less-muted timbres. *September* was no swing record. No dancing. Rather, it was to be an "easy chair" album.

"Tonight is for serious," Cornyn deduces (*September*). Through this statement, Cornyn juxtaposes the notion of "not swinging" with that of a sort of high art only found on uptight records. In Sinatra's case, the four saloon albums of the '50s prove consistently to be his most serious and most *artsy* records. *Wee Small Hours* standardized the "concept album," after all. The seriousness in his voice as he sings the songs on *September* is also noticeable in this line. Sinatra's diction takes on new heights not seen elsewhere on record. The looseness gone, his voice is rigid and steep, as frugal as Jenkins is generous. He accepts his reality by relenting to Cornyn's words. Life is not fun and, therefore, tonight there will be no swinging, he seems to say.

These words would open the door to the folk-rock period of Sinatra's career, an allusion to what was to come. Upon hearing these sessions, Cornyn wrote in conjecture to what he

believed would result from these sessions. Many later records were not as successful as *September*, but there are a number of quality pieces that make Cornyn's observations right in some respects. Sinatra would pursue "not swinging" as an artistic move, dropping other elements of his style by the 1970s, even dropping his career into a retirement "for reflection, reading, [and] self-examination" (Tina 125).

September, and its centerpiece, top-forty epic "It Was a Very Good Year," would begin Sinatra's mid-'60s renaissance that I call the "Popular Sinatra," citing the subtitle to his incessant hit *Strangers in the Night*, the funkiest collection he ever did, jiving like a live record would. Stan Cornyn makes use of the loose rhythm in his liner by lecturing on the legend, "the master of pop singing form" (*Strangers*). He takes us onto the stage, much like his early forays into the studio, lending an ear or an eye to sense Sinatra's seduction of a show: [I]f he tosses off a tired joke about his tired tonsils...If he smiles about hoping one of his kids comes along soon so he can retire...If he clears his throat with a line about having just swallowed a shot glass, the people all laugh. If they didn't, he'd know he was in trouble. (*Strangers*)

Running down a Sinatra monologue from 1966 is like watching a sitcom sped up so that it only lasts six to eight minutes. It would be a miniature rave off those Rat Pack shows during the filming of *Ocean's Eleven.* The same jokes, aged like the cigarette butts he smoked, were recited as he would his songs. It's a part of the canon, with the booze and the women. The legend. Used effectively, the monologue is a part of the pop form—look at Bruce Springsteen's legendary raps on stage. This is why Cornyn takes his time to make fun of these jokes, leaning in on even the lightest moment of a Sinatra show. He wants to breathe in the best, taking it all in at once. When the audience falls from his breath, that is when it is over. That connection is what Cornyn cares so much for here. "If he runs out of gas on a phrase, [h]e sings like he's got an extra tank of Texaco in his tummy" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). A show with Sinatra is a Sunday drive with a stranger to the end of days.

A stranger in the night, perhaps? Cornyn believes Sinatra to be such a stranger, a character right out of film noir, a Sam Spade of show tunes. Hats aside,
Sinatra by '66 was a man who had "been belly to belly with Reality" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). Ten years prior he was "paying back taxes he'd owed [since 1951],. . .supporting one ex-wife. . .and three children" (Kaplan 177). Even with celebrity, his life was a tornado, twisting around other people as it wreaked havoc, about to fade. Sinatra was a man who could use those

tired jokes, even when singing to empty tables, and make someone laugh, as he would later translate when he recorded Johnny Mercer's final song in 1977:

> Without you around to applaud me,
> Every night's just like closing night,
> And I'm singing, singing the same old numbers, And I'm telling the same sad jokes,
> And there's nothing out front but memories. ("Empty")

This connection between singer and audience was the most prominent theme on Sinatra's '70s records, most masterfully woven in the grooves of *Watertown*, where, as Gilbert Gigliotti notes in his book *A Storied Singer*, Sinatra "never fully gives up on the possibility of his love's returning, never fully stops wanting his audience back" (53). The Popular Sinatra period ends where *Watertown* begins, where it is this coincidental connection that shines brightest. It is a brave new world and Sinatra takes on the guise of a guide. But is this brave new world to be believed? Did everything turn out alright for those two strangers? If Sinatra truly tells us, it's in his scat, singing in the fade, that we find the answer. The *doobie-doo*'s are what makes us smile at that recording, alluding to a happy ending for the couple.

Just ask the eyewitness. "Sinatra, when he sings at you, doesn't look at you. He looks about six inches behind your eyes" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). He peers deep, releasing a tension without words, only in line of sight, hence the scats that close "Strangers." "His eyes a little far away. A little closer to where the truth lives" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). He is a guide. His blue-eyed stare is not intimidation, it is sincerity: "[i]f you want to pick a word for it, pick one in seven letters: Honesty" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). That is Sinatra's trademark: honesty, a lonely word, free from deceit in the face of compromise, confidence, and life.

Life. Since *September*, it feels as if Sinatra was living in the future, fixating himself on the prospects of age. *Strangers* was just a meddling of that age—an old man with a young man's band. His next venture would be an R&B tune to further develop that fixation. In the albums that follow *Strangers,* there is no evidence of Sinatra trying to recapture his audience directly until *Watertown*, but in the middle Sinatra seems not to grasp what he is losing, and this is where "That's Life" comes in. "Strangers in the Night" was such a sappy song, Sinatra felt he needed something with edge to follow. "That's Life" made the perfect follow-up with that same rhythm, now applied to blues.

"He went in to record ONE SONG," Cornyn asserts in the subsequent album's liner, "They had enough time left over at that recording session to play three slow games of Scrabble. Nobody in his right puttees goes in to record ONE SONG" (*That's Life*). The *That's Life* album began with this approach on October 18, 1966 (Ackelson 192). It was the only track on that record worthwhile by any means; the rest of the album came like throwaways. Will Friedwald observes that *That's Life* lifted songs that "are the sort Sinatra would do had he deigned to portray a singing villain in *Batman*. It's a strange combination" (425). Perhaps Cornyn took note of this same observation, and how these tracks were not quite attacking in the studio. "He went in to record ONE SONG," he professes in capital letters, "Mr. Sinatra went on to produce ONE SONG. A totally persuasive, percussive, permissive, unpassive [sic] thing. ONE SONG that had been recorded before, but unimportantly. . .Mr. Sinatra sang his ONE SONG *with* importance" (Cornyn, *That's Life*). No mentions of the other nine tracks make their way in the notes. The only allusion he makes is a joke on contingency tracks "in case of Accident, Slop, or Lassitude" (Cornyn, *That's Life*). The other songs simply fall short; they are as unmemorable as that aforementioned aside to an earlier reading of "That's Life." But what makes this track stand out among the rest? Why is it this "ONE SONG" the one Cornyn cares so much for?

It comes back to honesty. The honesty that Sinatra has with a lyric wreaks havoc all over this song, this "ONE SONG." His life had been no hayride; it was a tornado, and as a result, the song was too. In his book discussing Sinatra's studio escapades, Chuck Granata recalls the story from October 10, 1966 when "That's Life" was brought in:

> [Producer Jimmy] Bowen then stepped mighty close to the edge. "Frank said to me, 'That's your hit, isn't it?' and I said, 'Well, no. . .if you want a hit, you're going to have to do it one more time. . .that just doesn't add up.' And everybody got real quiet, and he gave me the coldest look an artist ever gave me. But he went right out, and instead of singing it hip, he was pissed. . .so he bit it. That's when he sang 'That's Life!'" (182)

He was mad. Was that all it was? Sinatra would occasionally go toe-to-toe with his producers and arrangers when he felt the need. It was not anything special for him to be mad in the studio and for that anger to affect a song or two, but no other track was this noticeable. You would swear Sinatra was overacting. Cornyn attributes this act as war, "with brand new arms [coming] again with 'That's Life'" (*That's Life*). The eyewitness must have seen this altercation between actor and director. "Life is a theatre of war," he almost seems to say.

The theatre of war in the 1960s was Vietnam, which was arguably the most important event (save perhaps the Civil Rights Movement) affecting the new age of songwriters. The theme of making peace and not bombs was one that cycled the rock era of popular music in an inescapable way. It was simply a part of American life in this period. Always in the news, never absent from American consciousness, the war was subject to social dissonance, sparking rebellion everywhere from students to the patriarchal generation of old. Traditional popular music runs parallel to Vietnam in this respect. Pop and jazz were becoming more and more "old hat" as the '60s slogged on, with Sinatra, their champion, caught in the crossfire. There were casualties on both sides, battles won as well as lost, but the final blow came with that Grammy to The Beatles and *Sgt. Pepper*. At the time, Sinatra had won the same award twice consecutively and was nominated for a third time, but the blow, coming from what many see as the greatest rock album ever made, was a symbolic victory for the rock community. Maybe even the war ended there.

With the rule shifted to rockists, folkies, and beatniks, Sinatra's next project provided a commentary on his war, also including a straggling stab with a rewritten "Mrs. Robinson." The *My Way* album found Sinatra conceding for the most part, even playing a Beatles song to reflect pre-Beatles music. These ironic touches are what make the concept of this record stand out as a late bloomer in Sinatra's catalogue. The other standout from the record was of course Stan Cornyn's five-line liner notes.

Cornyn's *My Way* liner, the least prosaic of his notes for Frank Sinatra, sees the singer as a larger than life figure, accompanied by a photograph that focuses on Sinatra's feet and legs, looking up at him while he is in a sitting position. The photo portrays a giant. Sinatra "[walks] as if he knows the planets are watching him," Cornyn tells us in the first line (*My Way*). The spotlight, however dimmed by defeat, is still there, shining down. The defeat is referenced in the second line: "If a man grows in harmony with all his yesterdays, as these days now rush past him more suddenly—that man is Frank Sinatra" (*My Way*). *My Way* was a continuation of the 1968 album *Cycles*, another collection of folkrock and country-tinged ballads built on the theme of passing on through crisis, either in struggle or in death. This second line of Cornyn's, its reference to the Beatles song present on *My Way* notwithstanding, can be seen as an allusion to the title song from *Cycles*:

> There isn't much that I have learned

> Through all my foolish years
> Except that life keeps running in cycles:
> First there's laughter, then those tears. (Sinatra, "Cycles")

While Gayle Caldwell's lyric sounds cliché in the hands of Sinatra, one cannot think but look on to the tumultuous cycles taken through his life. The phrasing comes off as colloquial, but comforting in its sincerity. Cornyn further exemplifies Sinatra as "a man whose face looks less intimidated than others, because for all his years, he has known how to look deep into all of life's other faces," a powerful sentiment combing into Sinatra's interpretive ability, his acting prowess (*My Way*). It cycles back to Caldwell's song, depicting a crisis of character, which ends in such a way that cannot resolve Sinatra's existential purpose: "I'll keep on trying to sing/But please, just don't ask me how" (Sinatra, "Cycles"). The focal point to Cornyn's notes becomes this line of fractured character, complementing the theme throughout the *My Way* album as well.

The next line changes course from *Cycles* into *My Way* and what the latter's title means: "And if you hear a man who will do it his way—damn to high damn what other ways others expect from him—only 'my way'—then, that man is Frank Sinatra" (Cornyn, *My Way*). The face value of *My Way* is the sentiment that only Sinatra could do it "his way." He was the Chairman of the Board after all, but there is a deeper conflict in that Sinatra was this larger-than-life figure as Cornyn spent five years depicting. The key word is *hear*. It calls back to another moniker given to Sinatra at what seems like the moment he hit the airwaves: the voice. It was always through his voice and song by which he touched his audience. When Sinatra says he did it his way, he meant the words, music, and power exerted in song. In the songs of *My Way* one will find lush libations in "Didn't We?" and "Yesterday," but also rousted versions of "For Once in My Life" and "Mrs. Robinson," the latter actually sparking controversy with songwriter Paul Simon (Granata 190). Sporadic though their arrangements may be, these songs are meant to be so. It was Sinatra's intentions to create such a haphazard platter, akin to what rock 'n' rollers were making post-*Pepper*. By the time a listener gets to the line "How's your bird, Mrs. Robinson?" the listener should know this record was meant to be parody, a jocular commentary raised from Sinatra's distaste for the material presented (Sinatra, "Mrs. Robinson").

Cornyn reaches his conclusion on this note of self-reflection, adapting to the new world his subject has entered. He believes Sinatra is a man "who can remember and walk and grow and look in all these ways" (Cornyn, *My Way*). He gives us a final look at the evolution Sinatra has

made, a glimpse of the artistry unfolded, but it is just a tease as he dismounts on solid ground as the needle drops.

"That man," Cornyn ends, "is worth listening" (*My Way*).

Listening. This is the action that connects willing ears to the music, the registration of response to the call to action. Cornyn's notes to the bridge album would focus on this call and response. I say "bridge album" because *The World We Knew* is the record that turns Sinatra's career at its popular crossroads, answering the call of *Strangers* while fulfilling the promise of *September* within twenty-five minutes. The album, notable for containing the biggest pop single of Sinatra's career, also featured its liner notes on the *front* cover, a move by Sinatra that suggests experimentalism, a turn from the formulaic Ernie Freeman—in fact, the record had more arrangers than any other in his catalogue. It is an album that reeks of experiment.

This is also where Cornyn's liner notes reach their artistic climax. From the dialogue of *September* comes a condensed poem zigzagging across the profile of its subject, airing out the front cover with naturalistic urbanization of words: "The sun had plunged into the Pacific, / somewhere southwest of Bel-Air. / In Studio One, Sinatra, like the Pacific, makes / his own waves" (Cornyn, *World)*. Cornyn's liner opens with this call to action to take a swim with Sinatra, for when we listen to the radio we swim in the airwaves, the product of this Californian studio. California, Hollywood, celebrity: all are waves in the composition of an oceanic man in Sinatra. Cornyn culls his earlier process of studio writing to recreate it as an ocean, a vast open space of creative thought. The spotlight shining on the singer becomes a lighthouse that guides him ashore, where the audience awaits the sound of his voice once more. "He stands at the microphone," Cornyn suggests, to "[do] his best thing. . . / sharing" (*World*). Sinatra's gift is one to be shared, he says. It is to be approached as any audience should approach it: with an embrace. Cornyn further romanticizes the music as the front page closes, the poem curling around a smoking Sinatra:

> Sinatra at a microphone, nurturing a
> bouquet of emotions, then plucking them
> in full flower, without first checking
> for possible thorns. (*World*)

The cigarettes his roses, Sinatra absorbs the atmosphere, puffing in each careful gasp at air the way he would smell the flowers. The "bouquet of emotions," the phrases taken in ginger breaths, goes back to this recurring quality of honesty within Sinatra's music (Cornyn, *World*). The

honesty is the binding trait to Sinatra and the every-man, or, the legend and his muse. Cornyn builds on this connection with the liner's finale, found on the flipside of the record. "And, after a time," it reads, "he moves to one side. He sits down on raw wood. Listens back to his voice. And reacts like any man" (Cornyn, *World*). It fits that Cornyn would end by withdrawing into listening. The response to the call to action occurs in this final moment, ultimately connecting Sinatra to the music in his every-man smile, a simple setting of raw wood underfoot for a man who walks with planets and sings of the moon.

And so I close my lecture on the liners of Stan Cornyn with *The World We Knew* for two reasons. First, these liners provide the clearest example of his work at a crucial setting. Second, because they appear on the front cover. This latter point is most important to why it is the apex of Cornyn's body of work. The liner is complementary to the album form just as the album cover itself is. Connecting both how *World We Knew* does is what sparks its own experimental design's success. In short, *World We Knew,* however mixed a bag in content, is a standard of the album form. It took Sinatra twelve years from his first twelve-incher, *In the Wee Small Hours,* to *The World We Knew,* where he perfected his formula, his theory on concept albums to fit the post-*Beatles* rock era. Cornyn's notes are the complementary device that gave Sinatra these tools since the liner writer took on his loaded style with *Softly, As I Leave You*, and with that record, the art of writing liner notes softly entered.

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Re:Search

Yer A Franchise, Harry:
Transmediality in *Harry Potter* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*

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ABSTRACT

Harry Potter and *A Song of Ice and Fire* are two series currently at the forefront of our culture. Their popularity is partly due to their successful film adaptations that have increased the membership of their fan bases and allowed the story to expand itself into different mediums. While many scholars conduct literary analysis or film analysis of these texts, viewing them as separate and independent entities, I wish to examine how each series is connected to its adaptation, and how they influence each other, creating a cyclical adaptation process. I argue that the adaptations play an integral part in our readings of these texts, affecting us with their reinterpretations of events, embodiment of characters and visualization. These fundamental changes not only alter our definition of "canon," but also alter our understandings of authorship.

KEYWORDS

Transmedia, film adaptation, canon, contemporary fantasy, authorship, feminism

Today, individual books can be expanded into a movie, a trilogy of movies, an interactive website, an eBook, a graphic novel, a play, and a video game. Critics of adaptation theory have typically analyzed this progression in terms of linear adaptation, for example, from book to film. We are at a cultural moment, however, when the idea of linear adaptation has become practically irrelevant, since adaptation encompasses so many mediums, creating a transmedia story. Linda Hutcheon compares literary adaptation to Darwinism: "stories also evolve by adaptation and are not immutable over time. Sometimes, like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves migration to favorable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and different media" (31). It is true that adaptation is something we are accustomed to seeing in our society. We tend to ask not *if* a bestselling book will be adapted, but *when*. I believe that this expansion changes our perception of the original literature, and in doing so, expands our sense of the "canon" itself. In this essay, I will explore how multimedia adaptations of literary works transform and affect the original literature, for both the authors and the fans. I will focus primarily on two popular fantasy series: J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter a*nd George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire (ASOIAF)*. To explore this idea, I will first define the stakes of this project as well as some key terms, examine the differences between reading and watching, and discuss the matter of authorship. Finally, I will explore these issues through two case studies, one for each of the works. This will be an in-depth analysis of specific adaptation issues, the first examining the character of Hermione and how film adaptation has changed our perceptions of her, and the second examining how the Red Wedding translates from page to screen. Both cases will focus on studies in her essay on transmedia:

> For most of its relatively short history, the study of adaptation has been locked in something of a stalemate. Caught between literary, film, and cultural studies, the discipline seems to regard its liminal positioning as a hazard, desperately dealing in absolutes in the hope of establishing solid ground. Discussions of adaptation continue to revolve around the traditional binaries long dismantled in other disciplines—original versus copy, literature versus filthe issue of embodiment and how it significantly shapes interpretation, especially when it involves female characters.

Why *Harry Potter* and *ASOIAF*? Very few would consider these texts to be highbrow art. Some would include them in the British and American canons, respectively, but others would push against this classification. Popularity does not necessarily equal quality. In fact, the

category of popular art and quality art rarely intersect. These two literary series are also very different. *Harry Potter* is a British children's series. The last book was published in 2007. The intended readership is ages eight to twelve. It is known for its whimsical nature, bildungsroman plotline, and magical world. *ASOIAF*, conversely, is an American series written for adults. The story is still in progress; as I write, fans are waiting anxiously for the sixth installment to complement the latest season. *ASOIAF* is infamous for its violence, developed through the extreme number of character deaths, its complexity, and its compelling portrayal of humanity. These series share many elements of fantasy literature, but are fundamentally different in how they portray them. In spite of these differences, I have selected these two texts because of what they have in common—enormous followings. Millions of people have seen or read these stories, giving them an important effect on the future of literature. You would be hard-pressed to find a writer under thirty who had not read the *Potter* books in their childhood, or hasn't at least heard of *ASOIAF*. The decisions that the writers, directors, producers, etc. make for these series will impact literature for the rest of time.

Perhaps the most important question before going forward is this: what is an adaptation? Adaptation scholars have argued over the definition since the dawn of the field. The limitations of adaptation are difficult to pin down. Zoë Shacklock summarizes the current state of adaptation m, author versus consumer, and so on. These frames of reference form the core of the everyday definition of adaptation—a screen version of a literary work, best discussed in terms of its faithfulness to that single, original source. (263)

In her book, *Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon broadly defines adaptation as, "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works; a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging; an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (8). This definition coincides with our inherent understanding of the book-to-movie adaptation. The movie "transposes" the story to the film medium in a "creative and an interpretive act" and this creates "intertextual engagement." However, this definition only goes in one direction—original to adaptation. I argue that film adaptation is a much more cyclical process. When we read the book and then see the film, the reinterpretation affects our original perceptions of the literature in terms of visuals, character understanding, and plot. If, as they say, reading is rereading, then each adaptation is a new interpretation, a rereading of the original text.

Furthermore, the proliferation of adaptations in our society elicits the question: why do we create adaptations? What satisfaction are we deriving from them? John Bryant states that "adaptation is not only inevitable; it is a form of retelling that is so inherently irresistible to human beings that it is an inalienable right. It is a remix; it is a mash-up" (55). Hutcheon agrees, suggesting that the pleasure of adaptation comes from "the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise" (4). Essentially, we love to hear the same story told again and again. It isn't any different than rereading a favorite novel. A film adaptation allows us to relive the tale in a way that is both familiar and fresh.

There are several terms that I will be using throughout this essay in regards to adaptation studies. First is the word "canon." Canon can be a broad term, referring to the entire British canon, or the literary canon in general. My concern in this essay is the canon in a much smaller sense. I am interested in the *Harry Potter* canon and the *ASOIAF* canon as their own subgroups of literature. The *Harry Potter* canon is anything that is produced by J. K. Rowling, whether it be the original seven books, the new material on Pottermore, or *Quidditch Through the Ages*. All of these are explicitly stamped as wizard world canon by the author herself. For *ASOIAF*, the official canon consists of the five existing books and the anthologies George R. R. Martin has written on Westeros history and culture.

This still leaves the question of whether or not the films are part of the official canon. Christopher Bell outlines several definitions of canon in his introduction to *From Here to Hogwarts*, stating that the films are "alternative canon" because they do not perfectly parallel the story line. Fan-made productions like *A Very Potter Musical* are paracanon, since they are "decidedly noncanonical, although they do inform our interpretations of the canonical texts" (3). The comments and expansions J. K. Rowling has made in interviews and social media are referred to as "metacanon—in the original Greek sense of the term 'meta' as meaning 'after,' 'beyond' or 'adding to'" (3). As Bell directly states, these definitions are open for debate, but I will use them as they are defined here.

The second term is transmediality. The definition of this is fairly straightforward—trans meaning across, so across multiple forms of media. Henry Jenkins defines transmedia storytelling as "[unfolding] across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a

distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (97-98). Jenkins states that transmediality is not a new phenomenon:

> Take, for example, the story of Jesus as told in the Middle Ages. Unless you were literate, Jesus was not rooted in a book but was something you encountered at multiple levels in your culture. Each representation (a stained-glass window, a tapestry, a psalm, a sermon, a live performance) assumed that you already knew the character and his story from someplace else. (121-22)

Obviously, new technological platforms have made transmedia stories available across mediums such as online content, video games, movies, and books. *Harry Potter* has content across many different mediums as well. The content on Pottermore or released on J. K. Rowling's Twitter page changes and adds to the story constantly, developing the metacanon. Many wouldn't consider you a true fan unless you had read all of the online content, and thus had consumed the whole story. There are countless online quizzes assessing whether you are an adequately dedicated fan, testing fans on incredibly obscure information, from both the books and the films. There is even a WikiHow article that outlines a fourteen-step process for "How to Become A Harry Potter Fan." It states that you must read all the books, watch all the films, write fan fiction, buy the merchandise, and visit the *Wizarding World* in Orlando, among other things. This article has eighty-eight contributors, so this guide is not just one fan's opinion. It is the general consensus of the co-authors that a true fan would have consumed the story in all of its different media platforms, including the alternate canon, paracanon and metacanon. With *ASOIAF*, the majority of fans only consume one medium or the other—the HBO show or the novels. Discussing the story with someone who watches the show can be confusing if you've only read the books, since the show often delves into new plot lines. There are separate chat threads on forum websites to divide the show watchers from the book readers, in order to avoid spoilers. In reality, there are two complete stories, and you need knowledge of both of them to be abreast of the whole fandom.

What is the effect of watching versus reading? Different mediums of art have different things to offer the spectator. We have all heard the mantra: the book is always better than the movie. Most would agree that this is the case, at least for the majority of film adaptations. However, watching a film and reading a book are very different experiences. For example, "a novel's description of action, setting or character can be long or short, detailed or vague, and . . .

the reader judges significance from the time spent on it by the narrator. In the film people appear within a setting in action all at once" (Hutcheon 64). The stereotype that films cannot deliver these same aspects is not necessarily true. A movie can spend longer shots on something important, and a camera can zoom in and out, essentially recreating the effects described by Hutcheon, but a camera certainly cannot be vague. Specifically with setting, a camera can show us a room in more detail than an author could ever give. In *Harry Potter*, seeing the image of the Hogwarts castle finally gives us the image of each individual tower and window. It would have been tedious for Rowling to go into so much detail on Gothic architecture, but a film can accomplish this level of visual detail with ease. J. K. Rowling admits that she was jealous of the filmmakers because "in thirty seconds of well-written script, you could say what it took [her] three pages to tell the reader" (Misshef). So goes the old saying: a picture is worth a thousand words.

The portrayal and effects of time is another major difference between films and novels. Novels take much longer to read than films take to watch, and when seeing a film in theaters, you have to sit all the way through it (Hutcheon 133). This has changed with online streaming services, but the aesthetic of watching is still the same. We typically feel compelled to make a two-hour commitment. Films also have the audible advantage of soundtrack. Music in movies "enhance[s] and direct[s] audience response to characters and action" (Hutcheon 41). The music from both adaptations is popular and well-known. The adaptation advantage with sound can also be seen with written song lyrics in books. When we read *ASOIAF*, we can learn the words to "The Bear and the Maiden Fair" but we'll never know the tune. The show can bring us this multisensory experience. The adaptation does not just offer a tune, but solidifies one. Before seeing the show, we could all guess how the song was supposed to go. We could imagine what key and time signature it was in. The writers of the show get the privilege of deciding once and for all. This shows us that regardless of the quality of an original work or an adaptation, the medium has a distinct effect on the story, and thus our reaction to it.

Perhaps an obvious point is that film adaptations greatly affect how spectators visualize a written text. This is especially true when it comes to actors embodying print characters. Most readers who have seen the *Harry Potter* movies have a hard time reading the books without seeing Daniel Radcliffe's face as the protagonist in their heads. Shacklock examines this kind of

thinking through her study of meme culture. In the *ASOIAF* fandom, there are a number of memes that circulate online, prompting reexaminations of characters and bringing them into modernity. The memes use "images of the television program and the content of the novels" (Shacklock 274). Even if you created a meme that referred to content in the books, you'd have to use the face of an actor to portray your meaning. The actor's faces have come to represent the character visually, even when we aren't discussing the adaptation and are focusing on specific aspects of the original literature. The portrayal and the character are intricately linked in our minds.

The creation of adaptations prompts questions about authorship and authorial control. We all agree that J. K. Rowling wrote the *Potter* books, but who made the movies? A book typically has one credited author. Even so, a book is edited, copyedited, and digitized by a collection of people. The quantity of authors and influencers varies for each manuscript. Some are self-published and some go through rigorous editing in big publishing companies. Ultimately, it is the author who gets the credit, approves all changes, and is known as the creator of the work, even if a team of people worked to finesse and influence the final product. The nature of film is entirely different in its ownership. No one person creates the film, or gets all of the credit for authorship. Usually, the director gets to be considered the chief contributor, but many others—the producer, the screenwriter, the lead actor—could throw their name in for consideration as "author." James Russell talks about the many contributors to the *Harry Potter* movies in his essay on authorship:

> David Heyman has acted as supervising producer on every release . . . Steve Kloves has written seven out of the eight scripts for the movies, and his work has increasingly taken on a focus of its own, as the novels got longer and the need for significant trimming became apparent. Stuart Craig (and many members of his team) has acted as production designer on every film – a vital role, bearing in mind the centrality of art direction and design to the look, and promotional viability, of the films. Other contributors have changed more frequently. The Potter films have had four directors as well as six cinematographers and four composers. (396)

This is an extensive list of players for the overall product, and it doesn't even include the dozens of actors that physically brought the characters to life. Daniel Radcliffe has just as much a place on the list of creators since he was the face of the franchise. *Game of Thrones* would have an even more extensive list of collaborators since individual episodes have different directors and the writers have taken much more creative freedom, inventing major characters that didn't exist

in the novels and redirecting the subplots. George R. R. Martin said in an interview that "David Benioff and Dan Weiss, who are the showrunners, they're killing characters who are still alive in the books, so as bloody as I am, David and Dan are always turning things up to eleven" (Team Coco). In a film adaptation, the original author no longer has a solitary ownership of the work. They have to trust it to hundreds more authors in order to bring their original vision from page to screen.

Many authors take a hands-on role in film adaptations of their work. George R. R. Martin, for example, writes one episode per season and stays connected to the show through this involvement (Team Coco). J. K. Rowling also had a lot of influence. During the production of the films, she corresponded with Steve Kloves, the screenwriter. He often emailed her and asked her questions about the books. He said, "It was very easy to email [her] . . . I once asked, I think, about Ron's uncle . . . and I got back like five pages" (Misshef). In addition to having direct influence, Rowling was thrilled with the work that Alfonso Cuarón did on the third Potter film, changes and all. Russell states that in an interview with Rowling, Kloves, and Cuarón, "she occasionally even seemed to imply that the film realized her intentions more completely than her own novel, when she noted that the filmmakers had inadvertently included scenes which anticipate events in the later, then unpublished, books" (392). It is interesting to think that the author approves these changes so wholeheartedly that she herself suggests the new version is an improved one. That certainly goes against our mantra of "the book is always better," and it certainly contradicts the notion that the author is the owner of her own world if Cuarón can write it better. Granted, Rowling still did most of the world-building legwork. We can't say that ownership has been taken away from her completely, especially since she worked hands-on with the filmmakers.

The problem of authorship is proliferated by the invention of new plotlines and the subtraction of old ones in film adaptations. John Bryant states that "the anxiety over the fidelity of an original is absurd because it is a phantom that exists not in the original but only after the original is adapted" (55). His opinion is that examining a film's faithfulness to the original material is not productive; we are studying something that exists between the book and the film, some kind of third element (what he refers to as a phantom) that doesn't really exist. Indeed, there is nothing to compare a book to if there isn't a movie, but I disagree with the notion that

fidelity is a phantom. Books have a tone, a logic, themes, motifs and character development that can be discussed regardless of comparable material. When it is adapted, the movie either keeps these literary devices, or it alters them. This altering is not a phantom. It is something we can point to rather directly and examine. We are examining a very real space between the books and the movies, a third story that has been developed by the adaptation.

Book to movie stories are infamous for cutting down the material, from extraneous characters to entire subplots. In the *Potter* books, for example, characters such as Peeves, Professor Binns, and Ludo Bagman never made it into the movies. Arguably, these characters never had that much impact on the plot. Their contributions were easily moved to other characters that made the cut. The movie of *Order of the Phoenix* cut the entire romance subplot between Lupin and Tonks. This plotline didn't interfere with the overall story arc, but it is important to the themes of the series. Their death leaves behind an orphan son, paralleling Harry's own existence. Through the subtraction of this plotline, they eliminated the resolution of Harry getting to be the loving Godfather he never had. What does this do to our overall perceptions of the literature? It makes this plotline between Lupin and Tonks seem unimportant, a story that didn't need to be added. When fans discuss it, it is referred to as a plot that was only in the books and was lost in translation. It retains a certain imaginative quality, unaltered by visualization in the mind of the reader.

In *Game of Thrones*, Loras' two older brothers didn't make it into the show. Loras is a minor character in the show, who is best known for his connections to the powerful Tyrell family and his intimate relationship with Renly, one of the many candidates for the throne. The elimination of his older brothers doesn't change the overall plot arc of the story, but it drastically changes Loras' role as a character. He is now the heir to Highgarden and the decisions he makes have more weight. In addition to minor changes, there are often complete rewrites. In the *Deathly Hallows* movie, there is an added scene in which Harry and Hermione dance together. Many have interpreted this as romantic. A potential subplot is being created that we can reflect back onto the books. In *Game of Thrones*, we have entirely new characters such as Talisa and Ros. This prompts us to reinterpret existing characters. For example, Robb's marriage to Talisa makes him a more three-dimensional character than in the books when he married Jeyne Westerling. This reflects badly on his book-version self, who seems rather shallow in comparison. The film

interpretations of these series prompt us to reexamine characters, motifs, and plotlines that we otherwise wouldn't have reexamined. In short, it prompts us to view the story in a different way.

Essentially, the directors of the films are writing fan fiction, taking someone else's characters and running with them. However, it is fan fiction that millions of people have seen. It cannot be dismissed because it has authority through sheer volume. Warner Bros. has rather large platforms to promote its interpretation, and it has more authorial support than the average story posted on *fanfiction.net*. Their adaptations, extensions, and new ideas matter because they affect the interpretations of every fan that watches the movies. Even if they aren't writing canon content, they are affecting our interpretations with their decisions, since the visual adaptations have such permanence and prestige.

Authorial control also comes into question because of the overlapping timelines of writing the novels and watching the movies. Traditionally, as we envision the book-to-movie adaptation, the book is a finished product that is then followed by a film. With *Harry Potter* and *ASOIAF*, this is not the case. In 2001, when the movie of *Sorcerer's Stone* was released, only four of the books had been published. J. K. Rowling then wrote the remaining volumes knowing that they would soon be made into films. When asked if that influenced her writing at all, she denied it. However, she does admit that she often thought of the films during the writing process, saying that when she wrote Luna Lovegood, she imagined Ivanka Lynch's voice in her mind (Misshef). This would suggest that even in the mind of the author, the film adaptations have influence on the text because the embodiment of Luna by the actress affected Rowling's perceptions of the character. With *ASOIAF*, a similar situation is taking place. The HBO show has surpassed the books, producing a sixth season before the sixth book is released. Season seven has already been filmed as well, prompting many fans to ask, will there ever be more books? Martin has given sparse updates on the progress of *book six*, saying it might be finished by the end of 2017. Regardless of when it is released, many of the fans will have viewed the film adaptation first, at which point, it is not a film adaptation at all—it is the original. Martin is writing a book from an existing show. This completely erases the lines between author and adaptor. The collaboration between the two has been very close and the showrunners are currently producing content before the book's author. Since this is a situation that has yet to be resolved, it is unclear how literary history will look back on it, but presently, it appears to many

fans that Martin has completely sacrificed his authorial control to Benioff and Weiss, allowing them to be the authors once and for all.

For the first case study, we return to the most obvious effect of film adaptation: actor portrayal and physical embodiment. Fans often become enraged if they feel that the wrong actor has been cast for their favorite character. There are a number of threads on *Potterforum.com* dedicated to condemning Daniel Radcliffe's performance as Harry Potter. This isn't necessarily his fault, since he can't possibly compete with the Harry that they had conjured up in their own head. Regardless, fans take a lot of stock in actor portrayals, because the portrayal becomes intricately linked with the character. Marvin Carlson talks about this issue in the realm of theater, referring to this phenomenon as ghosting: "the recycled body of an actor, already a complex bearer of semiotic messages, will almost inevitably in a new role evoke the ghost or ghosts of previous roles" (8). The actors in the *Potter* films carry with them all of the roles they held before. Perhaps we are primed to believe in Snape as a villain because we previously knew him as Hans Gruber. With the actors playing Harry, Ron and Hermione, it is difficult to apply this theory, because their acting careers had been very limited prior to their roles in the *Potter* films. Very few would have seen them before. However, this ghosting effect can also involve the "audience's knowledge of or assumptions about the actor's life outside the theatre" (Carlson 85). We know this to be true from the casting of the *Fantastic Beasts* movie. Fans were furious that Johnny Depp was cast for the film because of his recent domestic abuse allegations (Simpson). They felt that the ghost of this abuse would be present on the film.

I want to focus here on the character/casting of Hermione Granger. Hermione is a fan favorite. She plays an essential role in the *Potter* books, serving as an endless encyclopedia of magical knowledge. She helps Harry fulfill the prophecy, sticking with him through thick and thin, to the very end. When we first meet Hermione, she is described as having "a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth" (Rowling 105). This is a fairly simple description, that, if anything, makes her sound unattractive, both to the eyes and the ears. During book four, Hermione has Madame Pomfrey shrink her teeth to a smaller size, and soon after, she attends the Yule Ball with quidditch star Victor Krum. From these events, we can assume that Hermione has become more attractive. In spite of this, Harry never notices. Since he is our point-of-view character, we don't get to see her another way.

In the movies, she is often viewed differently because of her casting as Emma Watson, as well as certain screenwriting choices. Movie Hermione is explicitly attractive, and we can assess it for ourselves instead of having to view her through Harry. In addition to her physical person, her actions are often different in the films, making her a slightly different version of the character. The result of the casting choice, as well as the decisions of the screenwriters, is that there are two different Hermiones operating in the *Potter* universe. The character development aspect of this is discussed at length in a PotterCast episode, in which the speakers analyze her character in both mediums:

> A trio is a balancing act, right? They're equalizers of each other. Harry's like the action, Hermione's the brains, Ron's the heart. Hermione has been assassinated in these movies, and I mean that genuinely—by giving her every single positive character trait that Ron has, they have assassinated her character in the movies. She's been harmed by being made to be less human, because everything good Ron has, she's been given. So, for instance: "If you want to kill Harry, you're going to have to kill me too"—Ron, leg is broken, he's in pain, gets up and stands in front of Harry and says this. Who gets that line in the movie? Hermione . . . So, Hermione—all her flaws were shaved away in the films. And that sounds like you're making a kick-ass, amazing character, and what you're doing is dehumanizing her. (Anelli)

Anelli's viewpoint is that the film version of Hermione does not have flaws, and that makes her less human. She has become a superwoman, a standard no one can achieve. I agree with this assessment. To say that a character is feminist is not to say that they are perfect. It is to say that they are whole, complete with weaknesses that they strive to overcome. Hermione Granger in the books is whole, a woman who can bring a unique skill set to the table, succeeds with the help of a team, and overcomes her fears. Hermione Granger in the movies is a little too whole, to the point of overflowing. She has no flaws that she needs to overcome; the flaws in her life are Ron and Harry, slowing her down. Movie Hermione could have defeated Voldemort by herself since she didn't need Ron and Harry to balance her.

When examining discussions of Hermione on fan forums, it is often obvious whether the writer is talking about book or movie Hermione. Some references to her character involve examples that were not in the films, and furthermore, film discussions often include comments about her physical appearance that are not otherwise relevant. Taken from the thread "How Intelligent is Hermione Granger?" the following discussion plays out:

> LibrarianInTraining: It depends on the view of intelligence.
> Hermione is very book smart, but not so much on street smart. She can learn from books and take something from it yes. She does not seem street smart such as knowing about wizarding culture and what not.
> Grrarrggh: Hermione's intellect is very rigid. She thinks in black and white and has a very hard time deviating from that or thinking out of the box.
> GellertGPhoenix: To be fair, she's very capable of figuring out solutions, and in some cases, thinking outside the box, or deviating from the norm; Knitting hats for house elves, for instance. Still, thinking outside the box isn't her usual style of doing things. Simply put, she works with what she has . . . Not to mention that, through and through, she has a rather annoying habit of believing that she is always right. (LibrarianInTraining; Grrarrggh;
> GellertGPhoenix)

These fans discuss her advantages and disadvantages relatively equally, presenting her attributes and faults. We know that they have the books in mind because an example is cited—hats for house elves—that wasn't included in the movies. Taken from the same thread, in these comments, it is rather obvious that this fan had Emma Watson in mind: "DanPot: Hermione is the mostest, bestest, amazingestest, and fantabulousestest, smartestestest girl, witch, and person in the whole wide worldest!!! She's kinda cute too" (DanPot). From the quotations we have about Hermione's appearance in the novels, we never get the impression that she is "cute." The paradox of saying a literary character is attractive is obvious: we are attributing visual qualities of attractiveness to a character that we can not see. In spite of this, the theme of Hermione's attractiveness is reoccurring on fan forums. In a thread about favorite characters started by user CalvinE, they answer their own question with the following: "my favorite character is hermione because shes hawt." This fan is stating that Hermione's best quality as a character is her physical appearance. Gone are the praises about her intelligence, her political activism, or her academic prowess. From some fans' viewpoints, her physique is more important than her bravery or her accomplishments. They only see her as a female body, a subject of the male gaze. The film adaptation has opened up a new realm of anti-feminist interpretation for her character—one in which her appearance is her most important feature.

Hermione and feminism are two ideas that are attached at the hip. Carlson's theory of ghosting can explain this close connection: the actor's private life merges with the character's. Emma Watson has an Ivy League education. She is a UN Goodwill Ambassador who has advocated for gender equality all over the globe (Selby). Many have remarked that Watson is

similar to her character because of her intelligence and activism. Following her career is like watching Hermione's life continue past the *Potter* books. There is a Buzzfeed article that jokingly chronicles an account of *Harry Potter* as if Hermione were the main character, fighting the dark forces of the patriarchy. It ends with references to Emma Watson's actual feminist accomplishments "in the muggle world" (Dalton). This article is doing exactly what Carlson discussed. It ghosts Emma Watson's life onto Hermione Granger, the fictional character. We perceive Hermione as a feminist character partly because of the actress' dedication to the cause. At the same time, we ghost Hermione onto Emma Watson, imagining her to be the living embodiment of the character.

As Shacklock demonstrated with memes and Carlson demonstrated with the stage, our impressions of a character are married to the actor's image. The actor becomes the visual representation of the character, bringing along associations about the actor's appearance and outside life to the realm of character development. Fans have now developed an association between Hermione and Emma Watson so strong that they are willing to state Hermione, the character, is attractive like Emma Watson. Because of the film adaptation, we now have not two Hermiones, but three. The first is book Hermione, who is intelligent, but often loses her composure under pressure. The second is movie Hermione, who is beautiful, fierce, and flawless. The third is Emma Watson, whose life is ever connected to the wizarding world through her embodiment of the character. This brings us back to the concept of authorship and ownership. Who wrote the new Hermione? It certainly wasn't J. K. Rowling. As stated, Emma Watson had quite the effect on the character, and she single-handedly gave Hermione the dimension of physicality for fans to discuss, even if this was not her intention. The more likely author of her new character is the screenwriter of the films. Steve Kloves admits that Hermione was his favorite character when he read the novels (Misshef). It seems inevitable that he should be biased when creating his own interpretations of characters in a new medium. It is possible for other biases and opinions to come through as well in the scripts. In a discussion with J.K. Rowling, Kloves says that he never liked Dobby and didn't want to include him in *Goblet of Fire*. One man's opinion changed the arc of the story, so that Dobby's roles in the fourth book had to be distributed to other characters or eliminated entirely. The changed version of Hermione reflects Kloves' love of the character. It is only natural that when given the opportunity to retell the story,

we remake the characters in our own image, molding them into what we always wanted to see. Hermione is a fan favorite, and Kloves is a fan. Thus, she becomes tougher, stronger, and braver in the films.

For a case study of *ASOIAF*, I'd like to examine the Red Wedding as it translates from page to screen in order to discuss questions attached to the representation of violence in film and television. The Red Wedding is infamous in the series, as it serves as a major turning point in the plot and is one of the bloodiest events of the series. At this point in *A Storm of Swords*, a wedding feast turns into a bloodbath when the Frey family unexpectedly turns on the Stark family. They have sided with the opposing force in the series, the Lannisters, and wish to end the war quickly by killing Robb Stark, the leader of the resistance. The scene in the book starts to shift when Catelyn Stark, Robb's mother, notices that something is wrong. It then quickly escalates when Robb is unexpectedly hit with an arrow: "Robb gave Edwyn an angry look and moved to block his way…and staggered suddenly as a quarrel sprouted from his side, just beneath his shoulder" (Martin 701). This is the first act of violence we see, and it comes out of nowhere. In the next few minutes, Catelyn watches the horror unfold:

> Ser Wendel Manderly rose ponderously to his feet, holding his leg of lamb. A quarrel went in his open mouth and came out the back of his neck . . . The Smalljon bludgeoned Ser Raymond Frey across the face with a leg of mutton. But when he reached for his sword belt a crossbow bolt drove him to his knees . . . Ser Ryman buried the head of his axe in Dacey's stomach. (702)

The author tends to use very artful descriptions of the violence, using words like "buried" to smooth out the horror of the act. There are not a lot of graphic descriptions of blood. Perhaps the most graphic moment is when Catelyn kills Aegon Frey after a failed attempt to bargain for Robb's life: "She tugged hard on Aegon's hair and sawed at his neck until the blade grated on bone. Blood ran hot over her fingers" (704). This is extremely vivid, but it plays on touch instead of on sight. We feel the heat of the blood instead of seeing it pour. The quantity is left to the imagination.

The show performed the scene faithfully, with a few character changes. Talisa, Robb's wife in the show, attends the wedding and is the first to die in this scene, along with her unborn child. The other major alteration is that Catelyn Stark murders Walder Frey's wife instead of his disabled son. The changes made the scene shocking to book-readers as well as show-watchers.

The comments below are taken from a thread that was ongoing throughout the airing of the episode on HBO:

> Thelastactionhero: I'm literally at a loss for words. I seriously was almost unaffected when I read it the first time. Something about seeing it visually f****** really ate at me. The belly stabbing at Talisa was f****** awful.
> Mappy: The Red Wedding was very intense in the book but seeing it on screen had a much bigger impact for me. My heart was pounding as soon as the song started and when the stabbing on Talisa started I did gasp.
> Nymphetamine: I thought that having read it and knowing it was coming would make it easier to watch...I was wrong. That was by far the craziest s*** to ever happen on tv and It was amazingly well done. I can't even imagine how I would feel if I hadn't read the books.
> DragonsHungry: Reading that in the book was disturbing, but seeing it on TV, the real faces, the real tragedy of the moment, just way more powerful. Reading about a terrible traffic accident in a newspaper is never as powerful and horrible as having to witness it. (Thelastactionhero; Mappy; Nymphetamine; DragonsHungry)

All of these fans knew what was about to happen, but admit that the show was horrifying to watch nonetheless. Some even state that the visualization of the violence was worse than when they read it in the books. Unlike in the novels, you can see the blood pour and spurt when it is on screen. The violence can't hide behind Martin's language. The scene was made extra horrifying by the added death of Talisa. This addition makes the TV version of the Red Wedding bloodier and more brutal than the book version. They specifically added a plot line that involved harming an unarmed, pregnant woman. This is a go-to way to tug on an audience's heartstrings, since we perceive women to be more vulnerable and frequently in need of saving. Sarah Hagelin discusses this at length in her work on the female body in film:

> Our culture, politics, and academic criticism remain troublingly invested in a story of female fragility, a story based on a few key assumptions: women, children, and non-masculine men are the victims of male violence, female injury demands society's retribution, and pain renders the victim of violence helpless . . . This traditional model asks us as viewers to reserve our greatest sympathy for the suffering female body. (3)

This idea of traditional vulnerability is used during the Red Wedding scene. They intentionally increased the shock factor with an act of violence against a young, beautiful woman. We feel that Talisa is more fragile than Robb because of her femininity as well as her pregnant state. This dynamic is used with Walder Frey's wife as well. The murder of a young woman instead of a

grown man is more shocking, more horrifying. Both deaths strike an emotional chord that the book never attempted to hit. When we return to the book's account, it almost seems docile. We don't have to literally watch the blood pour out of anyone's neck when we read the book. More importantly, we don't have to watch Talisa die, since she doesn't exist in the literary version. Talisa's death becomes the most memorable and impactful moment of the scene. It gets more discussion than Robb's murder, which, from a plot perspective, was significantly and undoubtedly more important. He represented the North and his death causes the collapse of an army, but it is Talisa that we cry for, despite the fact that she isn't any more or less dead than Robb. Through this reinterpretation of the scene, we now have a new version of events that eclipses the old. We can't return to *A Storm of Swords* without thinking about these changes, making comparisons, seeing the actor's terrified faces and bloody hands.

Who is the author of the Red Wedding scene? The episode, "The Rains of Castamere," was directed by David Nutter. Actors Richard Madden and Michelle Fairley were both praised for their performances as Robb and Catelyn. It was written by co-creators David Benioff and D.B. Weiss. They stated in an interview that the Red Wedding was one of the primary reasons they wanted to make the show. They were determined to make the scene as painful as it was in the novel. D.B Weiss said "It doesn't end quickly. It's not all over in a hail of crossbow quarrels. It actually lingers. What we hoped for is an uncomfortably long period of time . . . you're kind of hoping for a cut to black. You just want it to be over" (GameofThrones). It's unclear why they decided to substitute Walder Frey's son for his wife in the final moments. It is likely the same issue that we saw with Kloves' writing of Hermione's character. The fans write what they want to see. In the case of the Red Wedding, they wanted to see absolute horror, and the writers executed this in the easiest way possible—violence against women.

In both of these case studies, we see the transfer of a character or event to a different medium. Both present certain changes. One alters a character slightly and the other alters small plot points in a scene. The original authors have created the content of the characters and plots, and they then endorsed the film adaptations, keeping close contact with the adaptors. Through the existence of the adaptation, certain authorial claims have been surrendered. The movie and show of these texts bring in new interpretations, new plots, and character changes that were not from the minds of the authors, as well as adding visualization and embodiment that didn't exist

in the novels. These changes, regardless of endorsement or influence from Rowling and Martin, have greatly influenced our perceptions of their novels. Without meaning to, we will always picture Emma Watson as Hermione, blurring the lines between actress and character, reality and fiction. We will always think of Talisa's terrible end when we reread *A Storm of Swords,* eclipsing the rest of the event with its intended shock value. The adaptors have had a permanent effect on the series, making them, in some sense, authors themselves. For this reason, the films are not only an alternate canon, but part of the metacanon as well. They add to the existing text, overlapping and merging with it to create one combined story.

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