

nomad²⁰²⁰

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

“Blood” is a resonant word, its sound is both plangent and dull, its meaning – familiar and striking. When I think “blood,” I can’t help but remember a toast once heard in Georgia, a small country in the Caucasus, proud of its fragrant wine and an ancestry that leads back to the Argonauts. In my rough English translation, it sounds like this: “Wine is the blood of the world, and the world is a blood-sucker that feeds on us – how can we not drink the blood of our blood enemy?” Apart from the roaring alliteration of the original, the power of this saying lay in its ability to bring home so many connotations of the word: the circulation, the intoxication, the nourishment, the heritage, the violence... English, too, is rich in “bloody” idioms: we say “blood is thicker than water” or “it is in my blood” to emphasize the importance of kinship or the privilege of the hereditary; we make each other’s blood “boil” or “run cold” in fits of temperament. We find “blood on the hands” of the responsible, even if they kill with signatures or words of command. Blood is what connects us across borders when papers are destroyed or made obsolete, and family names are distorted, forgotten, erased. Blood is what sustains us and what signals death. The contemporary scientific knowledge about blood as a source of genetic information and a system responsible for respiration, nutrition, excretion, immunity, and regulation of the internal environment – all seems to have been anticipated in artistic imagination across languages and cultures. Over the last school year our authors have been trying to peel the layers of this complex and emblematic word-image in their writing on literature, film, and art.

We were finishing the journal under the circumstances of the pandemic, during the stress of the University’s transition online, followed by the wave of protests against racial injustice. Normally, Spring is the most important period in *Nomad’s* lifecycle: at the end of the school year our students present their projects at the Nomad Conference, an event that brings COLT together and celebrates the authors’ achievement. The Spring Term of 2020 was important for different reasons. It made all of us consider this year’s theme with greater intensity; it is in these months that the word “blood” and its connection to breath, death, and kinship was on the minds and lips of people everywhere in the country and the world. The questions and texts our students chose to engage with proved their relevance when we all found ourselves in the situation that nobody could have predicted. This term demonstrated the dedication of our students who, despite all the relocating and

restructuring, attended workshops online and kept working on their pieces. I also would like to commend the work of the students who had to prioritize differently in this difficult time and could not continue with *Nomad*. I hope their wonderful projects find other venues. Many words of gratitude and admiration to our mentors for the unwavering commitment to their volunteer roles, to our mentorship coordinators, Laurel Sturgis O'Coynne, Marena Lear, Jean-Baptiste Simonnet and Matthew Fellows – for their unfailing will to improve and develop the program, and, of course, to our project coordinator, Cynthia Stockwell, who was the beating heart steadily pumping the blood through the veins of this program and keeping it all together. I extend thanks to Dr. Katy Brundan and to Robin Okumu for presenting at our Nomad Speaker Event with their fascinating talks on *Dracula's* bloodline and bleeding sirens in Dante's *La Divina Commedia*. Cheers to all COLT community that warmly welcomes our *Nomad* authors and their ideas!

With best wishes,

DARIA S. SMIRNOVA

AISHA GHORASHIAN

BLOOD LUST AND MALE DEVIANCY IN BRAM STOKER'S *DRACULA*, ANNE RICE'S *INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE*, AND STEPHENIE MEYER'S *TWILIGHT SAGA*

Aisha Ghorashian is a junior majoring in Psychology and Political Science with a minor in Global Health. Even though her career isn't related to literature, she loves to read. She has been an avid reader since she was a kid. She says, being able to connect to literature at an academic level has been a pleasure. She chose to study gender, sexuality, and cultural representation in literature because she is a firm believer that books influence people's thoughts, actions, and identities. If her friends were to describe her in one word, that would be "loud."

Mentor: **Dr. Katherine Brundan**

MALE CHARACTERS DEPICTED IN THE FANTASY GENRE HAVE TAKEN ON VARIOUS FORMS INSTRUCTING THE READER ON WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN. Critics have become more invested in the concept of deviant masculinity in recent years. Over time, certain cultural shifts have changed how society perceives masculinity and male deviancy. In this study I explore how male deviancy has shifted in fantastical creature's behavior throughout the genre. Vampires are some of the most prominent characters that serve as archetypes for male sexuality. Monsters (vampires) are created in society's imagination at a "metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (Cohen 4). Fantastical creatures in literature can reflect a culture's current, "fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy, giving them life" (4). Vampires became popularized in literature during the 1890s when Bram Stoker published his novel *Dracula*, a Gothic tale that follows Count Dracula's story and his relationship with other characters. Bram Stoker is often seen as the father of the vampire fantasy genre and his work heavily influenced other vampire stories. Through Jonathan Harker's journal entries, the reader gets a specific perspective of who Count Dracula is and how masculinity is displayed. Bram Stoker set the standard for how vampire masculinity has been written; Dracula's deviance is epitomized by his need to draw blood from his victims, which makes them into vampires in turn. Drawing on this standard, subsequent vampires demonstrate different variations of masculine deviancy,

as their blood lust represents fears or anxieties related to the norms of masculinity specific to the cultural moments in time.

Dracula is a story that follows a vampire and his quest to find blood. This journey involves a man named Jonathan Harker who Dracula becomes oddly attracted to. Dracula begins with a description by another male, Jonathan Harker. Jonathan is the most important character for understanding of Dracula's masculinity because he vividly describes his experience with the count and Dracula's personality in his journal entries. Jonathan first encounters the count in the disguise of a coachman who drives Jonathan to Dracula's Transylvanian castle. Jonathan notices how strong Dracula is, he writes of the "hand which caught [his] arm in a grip of steel" noting, "his strength must have been prodigious" (Stoker 11). The choice of words *steel* and *grip* emphasize the power that Dracula is holding, obvious even at the initial interaction. Elsewhere Jonathan writes: "when the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demonic fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat. I drew away and his hand touched the string of beads which led to the crucifix. It made an instant change in him [...]" (31). In this scene, Jonathan is in his room and starts to sense that something is off about the count. Jonathan cuts himself shaving, when he catches sight of Dracula and notices that his demeanor has changed drastically. We must examine the word choice in this passage describing Count Dracula. Words such as *blazed* and *demonic fury* are crucial when analyzing Dracula's masculinity. The word *blazed* is a charged word that radiates dominance. Similarly, *demonic fury* insinuates anger when it comes to Dracula's personality. Dracula attacks Jonathan as he is instinctively drawn to the blood, as an animal might be. Specifically, Dracula's deviant masculinity goes beyond anger and fury by involving and, more importantly, targeting another man. These traits allow for Dracula to take power over Jonathan Harker, as he imprisons and carries him to bed when he is unconscious. This renders Jonathan impotent. Since Dracula was the first popularized vampire character, Stoker's story was internalized by the masses and set a precedent for the male vampire archetype. Ever since Stoker's archetype of a male vampire, the traits of anger and dominance are present in subsequent male vampire characters.

While anger and dominance are key for vampire masculinity and human masculinity, other characteristics are needed; specifically, the lust for blood, which is tied to the vampire's dominance and arousal. Blood has various connotations: in some contexts, such as hunting, blood is seen as masculine, while in other con-

texts it can be associated with femininity by its association with mensuration, for example. The depiction of Dracula engorged with blood has revolting and even sexualized undertones:

There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half renewed, for the white hair and mustache were changed to dark iron grey; the cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath; the mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran over the chin and neck. Even the deep burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated. It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood. (58)

In this scene, Jonathan encounters Dracula lying in his own coffin, sated with blood. Count Dracula is lying down when Jonathan approaches him and sees Dracula rejuvenated from the blood. Dracula's need for blood and his satisfaction when he receives blood is key in this passage. Again, word choice is crucial because it creates an underlying sexual tone for Dracula's masculinity. The terms *fresh blood* and *simply gorged with blood* link Dracula's deviance with the need to consume blood because of their sexual connotation. The sound of *gorged*, with the soft 'g' and hard 'd' letters can be related to devouring another person, specifically in an intimate context. While Dracula represents an animalistic, demonic creature who uncontrollably lusts for blood, he also exhibits traits of deviant femininity. Along with that, the tone of the story creates a standard for how vampire masculinity must be demonstrated. Dracula must be someone who is a vile creature that preys on others' blood to remain strong. However, Dracula's real deviancy in his case is the yearning for a young man's blood, which might imply attraction. Within Dracula, the deviancy is that all the attention and blood desire is targeted towards a man. Since this story is what future authors use for inspiration all these characteristics set the stage for how vampires will be constructed later in literature.

The last aspect that is important to explore in order to understand the representation of masculinity in Count Dracula's figure is the relationship he has with women. In Jonathan's journal entry he writes about the relationship between the Count and his victims. He scribbles:

I saw his strong hand grasp the slender neck of the fair woman and with giants' power draw it back, the blue eyes transformed with fury, the white

teeth champing with rage, and the fair cheeks blazing red with passion. But the Count! Never did I imagine such wrath and fury, even to the demons of the pit. His eyes were positively blazing. The red light in them was lurid as if the flames of hell-fire blazed behind them. His face was deathly pale and the lines of it were hard drawn wires; the thick eyebrows that met over the nose now seemed like a heaving bar of white-hot metal. With the fierce sweep of his arms, he hurled the woman from him, and then motioned to the others, as though he were beating them back; it was the same imperious gesture that I had seen used to the wolves. (44)

Jonathan notes that Dracula seems angry, frustrated, and then becomes aggressive towards the young woman. More importantly, Dracula is channeling his anger at the women to protect Jonathan. Protection and possession over Jonathan are what makes Dracula's masculinity seem deviant for its time. Again, Stoker uses the words *fury*, *rage*, and *blazing* once more to emphasize dominance emanating from Dracula's persona. Stoker then goes on to describe Dracula's physical interaction with the females, specifically in the lines when he is described to "hurl[ed] the woman from him" or to throw the woman away from himself. Physically throwing the girl demonstrates Dracula's views on the young women he has captive: they are objects that can be tossed around without a thought. Violence against women at the time was not a part of deviant masculinity, but as the vampire monster takes on different forms in the course of time, Dracula's interaction with the females in the story becomes a sign of deviancy. Dracula's masculinity has various layers to it. One part is the sexual deviancy that is directed towards Jonathan Harker. Another part is the violent acts towards women, this trait becomes more deviant within society as time progresses because of the desire to protect and abuse another person.

In sum, this means Stoker crosses the line between normative and non-normative masculinities. Dracula is a monster who has all the hallmarks of what is expected of a proverbial man of his time. He is aggressive, possessive, blood-hungry, and animalistic. However, the part that makes Dracula deviant is where his masculinity is in question. Some of his possession and obsession are geared towards another man, Jonathan Harker. There is an underlying tone throughout the novel that Dracula may be attracted to both men and women. Considering the implications of Bram Stoker's biographers and the culture of homophobia during the late 1800s, being gay was construed as "monstrous". Overall, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker sets the tone for the male vampire archetype and the question of deviant male mas-

culinity. Over time, deviant masculinity in vampire tales began to describe a man who is overtly possessive over women, as homosexuality was played down. Later novels, such as *Interview with a Vampire* published in 1976 and the *Twilight* series of 2005 to 2008 both have male vampires that reflect a transition into a “modern” form of “deviant masculinity,” that is deviant in contemporary sense. In these texts, male vampire demonstrates deviant masculinity which manifests in the response of the female characters and the tone used throughout the narrative.

Since the creation of Dracula, there have been other famous vampire males in literature. Such iconic characters include Louis de Pointe du Lac and Lestat created in 1971 by Anne Rice, who is known for reviving the vampire genre and introducing a clear sexual component that was only an underlying tone in previous vampire literature. In Rice’s story, readers follow Louis as he recounts his story to an interviewer. Throughout the novel, the classic stereotypes of vampire masculinity, set by Stoker’s *Dracula*, are not only present but highlighted. Rice’s text demonstrates masculinity blended with blood in phrases like: “He drained me almost to the point of death, which was for him sufficient” (Rice 11). The term *drained* creates a descriptive image of the vampire sucking the blood of the female until she was almost dead, rendering the vampire sexually exhausted. Here Rice is playing into the characteristics that vampires must consume blood to feel “sufficient” or manly. In *Dracula*, there was an implicit link between sex and blood, but in Anne Rice’s novel, it is explicit. It is evident, for instance, in comments stating that “[f]or vampires, physical love culminates and is satisfied with one thing, the kill” that illustrate the need for violence and desire (Rice 252). While violence signified Dracula’s masculinity, not much has changed nearly a hundred years later. However, Rice’s vampire exemplifies how monsters change because of cultural fears and anxieties. Rice’s text, instead of alluding to suppressed homosexuality, deals with violence and possession forced upon women. This type of deviance in male vampires could have manifested because of the second-wave feminism. Since the book was written in 1976, the women’s liberation movement and the discourse around it can provide a strong framework as to why the male vampires in this novel are deviant.

Literary scholars have also examined the interconnection of violence, blood, and masculinity. In “Masculinity, Visibility, and the Vampire Literary Tradition in *What We Do in the Shadow*” Ildikó Limpár discusses vampires in the context of blood. Limpár states:

...he [the main male vampire character] compares women to sandwiches, highlighting unknowingly that female victim characters in most vampire romances are there only to be consumed by male vampires, and then continues by collapsing the vampirism-as-sex metaphor into literality: if you are going to eat a sandwich, you would just enjoy it more if you knew no one had fucked it. (1)

Limpár equates consuming a sandwich to how vampires consume women. One eats a sandwich without consent, just like male vampires bite women without their consent. A vampire's desire to "consume" women, specifically without their consent, is the deviant aspect of masculinity in the context of Anne Rice's novel. The thirst for power and its demonstration through violence, especially violence against women, is a trait of deviant masculinity during the 1970s, because the second-wave feminism brought about the notion of equality and consent in sex. Such blatant objectification of female characters would be considered aberrant now, because a domineering vampire is now seen as more monstrous than in Victorian times.

Fast-forwarding to the early twenty-first century, I want to discuss how Stephenie Meyer made a big splash in the vampire literature with her creation of *Twilight* series featuring the notorious pale-skinned Edward Cullen. Edward Cullen is another literary vampire who falls in love with a non-vampire named Bella Swan. The *Twilight Saga* dominated popular culture for the better part of the 2000s and was consumed by many adolescent girls who yearned for their own Edward Cullen. However, Edward's character throughout the series reflected the similar archetypal traits of deviant vampire masculinity that were seen in his predecessors. Edward's deviant masculinity comes in a different form, specifically, as the series continues and his jealousy and possessiveness over Bella progresses, in more subtle ways. When Bella talks with other males (Jacob the werewolf, for example), Edward becomes angry and frustrated at her, showing signs of jealousy. Along with that, a specific quote demonstrates Edwards hunger for Bella's blood that she recognizes: "[T]here was a part of him-and I didn't know how potent that part might be-that thirsted for my blood. [...] I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him" (Meyer 195). The term used in this passage is *thirsted* which emphasizes the sexual need for Edward to have Bella's blood but also the unhealthy lust that Bella had for Edward. Along with that, the tone of the passage shows lust, manipulation, and infatuation, which is how Edward lures Bella into their relationship.

In “How to Domesticate a Vampire: Gender, Blood Relations, and Sexuality in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight*” Pramod Nayar analyzes how gender and sexuality work in conjunction to create this familiar vampire archetype. Nayar writes, “Meyer seeks to retreat into safer ‘molds’ and stereotypes, almost in reactionary masculinity where men are big and strong, play protector roles and are always in control. [...] *Twilight* is a nostalgia-inducing visit to older forms of the masculine” (1-2). Specifically, he notes that Edward must always be in control, especially with his lover, Bella. As seen throughout the entire series, Edward’s deviancy involves taking away Bella’s autonomy by being extremely possessive of her, which is highlighted by his desire to drink her blood. In essence, Meyer’s structure of Edward’s masculinity is based on his need to be in control and take away Bella’s power. Since *Twilight* was written in a postfeminist culture, Edward’s masculinity doesn’t always fly with the contemporary audience. Meyer did not make any effort to create a healthy model of masculinity in her male vampire but rather reverted to the retro forms of masculinity.

In conclusion, a closer look at male vampire representations, shows that the notion of deviancy changes over time. As mentioned before and according to monster theory by Jeffrey Cohen, monsters are created by the imagination of a society and are representative of cultural fears. Dracula represents a fear of homosexuality as supposedly deviant male behavior, while Louis and Lestat manifest the fear of violence, and, finally, Edward demonstrates possession and obsession as deviant in relation to the modern norms of masculinity. Each of these vampires represents fears and anxieties that have transformed over time depending on societal movements and trends. Understanding deviant masculinity in fantastical creatures is one piece of the puzzle that helps deconstruct gender representation in literature. All vampire characters mentioned presented the need to consume and take power over another being. Vampires’ need to be powerful and “consume” women offers us one way to understand how deviant masculinity functions in literature. Moving forward, society can break down these stereotypes about male behavior to create a better platform of gender representation. Also, writers who choose to go down the path of fantastical creatures and romance can sculpt a new archetype of masculinity in their characters, making them less violent and possessive of women, which would reflect a healthier model of masculinity and relationships.

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TERESA DAVID

CASH IS ALWAYS GREEN, EVEN
WHEN IT'S COVERED IN BLOOD:
THE CONSEQUENCES AND
METAPHORS OF LATE CAPITALISM
IN BOOTS RILEY'S *SORRY TO
BOTHER YOU*

Teresa David is a second-year English major. Her academic interests include, but aren't limited to works concerning anti-capitalist sentiments, Existentialism, and the Oxford comma. She would also like to thank her mentor, family, friends, and Thersaurus.com for the constant support during this project.

Mentor: **Dr. Leah Middlebrook**

This is the conception of mass culture as sheer manipulation, sheer commercial brainwashing and empty distraction by the multinational corporations who obviously control every feature of the production and distribution of mass culture today.

“Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” Fredric Jameson

FOR MOST AMERICANS, THE AMERICAN DREAM WILL CONTINUE TO STAY A DREAM. From a young age, Americans are taught that they have equal political and economic freedom and agency. However, in most cases, prosperity is not a feasible result. The concept of an individual who begins with nothing and works to attain the resources necessary to be successful has always been flawed, given the system it functions in. The exhausted mantra of the American Dream “blood, sweat, and tears” is rendered almost futile. This slogan promotes an implausible ideal that requires the working-class individual to invest their entire body and livelihood, ultimately reinforcing an ideological hegemony that only benefits the upper class.

In this paper I aim to analyze Boots Riley's film, *Sorry to Bother You* (2018), and how it situates the current capitalistic system and its continuous efforts to dis-

enfranchise the working class. As exhibited in Cassius “Cash” Green’s experience at his telemarketing job, the active pursuit of success within the corporate ladder is, at best, dysfunctional, and at worst – dangerous. The decadence and chaos that ensue in the plot are not an exaggeration, rather they are a direct reflection of how corporate America preys on its employees. Not only do the corporations continue to oppress the working class, but they also alienate the individuals from each other. Cash’s efforts are weaponized against him. Therefore, his compliance with his corporate job and his superiors signifies much more than just a wage: it indicates an invasion of his identity and body.

The film follows a struggling African American man as he navigates his position at a telemarketing company, RegalView. Once hired, Cash finds it difficult to be successful, since many customers hang up the telephone when they hear him speak. It is only when a nearby coworker suggests to “enhance” his voice and adopt a “white voice,” that he is able to carry out the transaction. In doing so, it is revealed that this “white voice” makes a customer, presumably a white bourgeois customer, visibly more comfortable. It instantly enables Cash to achieve lucrative transactions, which permits him to become a top performer among his colleagues. This form of code-switching becomes imperative for his advancement within the corporate ladder. Subsequent scenes exhibit that the “white voice” begins to bleed into his personal life, which furthers Cash’s allegiance to the corporate machine.

Soon Cash is placed in a conflicting position. Despite his newfound success, Cash is invited to participate in the local union to protest RegalView and the insufficient wages they pay their workers. He and his co-workers then collectively go on strike where they demand a better wage. Afterwards, when asked to speak to his managers, Cash is promoted to an elite position as a Power Caller, which entails selling products to large companies. Instead of being reprimanded, Cash is rewarded and must now deal with the fact he has chosen his career over his coworkers, friends, and loved ones. Amidst his success and influx of money, Cash is also obligated to manage RegalView’s relations with their largest client, WorryFree, a company whose entire enterprise is based on slave labor. In doing so, Cash must grapple with the consequences of abandoning his coworkers during their protests and continuing to earn money for a business that profits off the bodies of the working class. The many moments where Cash is attempting to reconcile the disparities between his peers and the corporate elite showcase the unequal power dynamics that are essential to upholding the American capitalistic structure.

Cash Is Always Green, Even When It's Covered in Blood

It can be argued that *Sorry to Bother You* is a tale about reification. “Reification” is a concept developed by the Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson. Jameson argues that in mass culture, otherwise known as popular culture, everything from aesthetics to labor power has been exploited by large corporations, “in which, under capitalism, the older traditional forms of human activity are instrumentality reorganized and ‘taylorized,’ analytically fragmented and reconstructed according to various rational models of efficiency, and essentially restructured along the lines of a differentiation between means and ends” (Jameson 130). In essence, Jameson is saying that traditional forms of human activities, such as mining labor or farming labor, were not substitutes for each other. The workers, along with the value of their work, were unique and unparalleled. However, capitalism targets these groups and their labor, separating the distinctive qualities of their work from the individuals that perform it. Consequently, these groups are forced to conform to the universality of commodification – the value of monetary exchange. Under capitalism, the unique ends of their work have been disregarded and only deemed as valued when they contribute to feeding into the system. In other words, capitalism has the ability to divide the working class, which makes them more vulnerable and easier to control by corporations and the upper-class. The lack of unity between the working class people continues to preserve the power of the bourgeoisie. Through reification, the concept of the ‘original’ or originality - specifically applied to an individual – becomes impossible to achieve because people are forced to function under the structure that values efficiency and repetition over uniqueness. Individuality has been ignored in order to accommodate the process of reification.

The film points out the phenomenon of reification in the workspace that Cash occupies, yet it is also interested in capturing the intersection between the boundaries of race within the corporate ladder. Film scholar Leshu Torchin elaborates on this intersection in her work “Alienated Labor’s Hybrid Subjects: *Sorry to Bother You* and the Tradition of the Economic Rights Film,” pointing out how the film also addresses the corporeal aspect of the capitalistic structure. Torchin is concerned with the dehumanizing nature of capitalism, and how it becomes more than a financial and labor venture as it factors in the physical body of the working class. Torchin specifically addresses the way in which Cash’s race is vital in addressing how capitalism is more than just a political and economic ideology, “[it’s] a horrific reminder of capitalism’s capacity to intrude into the home and the body” (36). Torchin’s argument centers on how the capitalist system encroaches

on an individual, not only as an employee, but as an autonomous human being. She emphasizes the idea that corporations like RegalView and WorryFree gain power from the lack of mobility within the capitalistic hierarchy. For example, when Cash's manager tells him, "You do real good, eventually you might even be able to be a Power Caller. If you stick to the script" – it demonstrates a moment when Cash' superior expresses a possibility of promotion, but only if he abides by their rules (9:27-9:48). So, their power is masked by producing a false feeling of freedom to move up in the company. In order for a working-class individual to advance their career, they must over-perform and over-exceed the expectations at the workplace. In addition, they are often encouraged to socialize and "network" to create higher connections within the corporate world and have a better chance of gaining success. Since there are specific mannerisms that are expected during these "networking" interactions with the upper-class, the individual must learn how to act within a certain environment, and consequently, sacrifice a part of themselves. Reflecting Torchin's sentiments, Cash must act "white," as in talking with a "Caucasian accent," in order to fit in with his superiors. This is a direct manipulation of the body because Cash must discard any indication of blackness within his voice. This harkens back to the notion of the harm that the system inflicts on the working class, especially people of color, because it suggests the broken system is working as it is intended to.

The concept of the broken system is further represented when Cash reaches the PowerCaller office and is approached by his superior, Mr. Blank. Outside the building Cash's old coworkers are participating in a strike; he is forced to witness the collision between the system and those who are against the system, and the unsightly consequences that occur when there is an altercation between both forces. Thereupon, he also is physically injured by a protester throwing a soda can at his head, which causes him to bleed profusely. This moment captures a unique juncture in Cash's life. He has not only physically crossed the picket line that represented solidarity with his old colleagues, but also willingly entered into a space that propels him to ignore and neglect the efforts of the working class fighting against the system. Cash entered a liminal state, where he severed his loyalties to his friends and old colleagues, yet is still vulnerable to the power of corporate governance and their demands. During this scene, Mr. Blank is tentatively watching Cash talk on the phone with a client, where he seemingly makes a fair amount of progress with them. He says, "You, my friend, are the best decision I've made

Cash Is Always Green, Even When It's Covered in Blood

in quite a long time,” to which Cash replies, “Thank you, Mr. Blank. Feels good to be appreciated.” Then Mr. Blank responds with: “Don’t call me Mr. Blank. Call me Blank” (59:22-59:37). This minute interaction between Cash and his supervisor recalls Jameson’s idea of a specific model of manipulation employed by superiors within the capitalist hierarchy. Cash has now set himself against and outside of the working-class community. His status as a PowerCaller automatically impedes him from experiencing the same problems as his previous co-workers. Cash accepts the compliment from his boss, thus aligning himself with the corporation against his community. Mr. Blank appears to establish parity between himself and Cash through his invitation to abandon his honorific. It creates the perception of an equal playing field. In reality, Mr. Blank is exploiting Cash’s vulnerability in order to manipulate him even further. This provides insight into how methods of diversion, manipulation, and degradation are embedded into the very fiber of the capitalist structure:

Both modernism and mass culture entertain relations of repression with the fundamental social anxieties and concerns, hopes and blind spots, ideological antinomies, and fantasies of disaster, which are their raw material; only where modernism tends to handle this material by producing compensatory structures of various kinds, mass culture represses them by the narrative construction of imaginary resolution and by the projection of an optical illusion of social harmony. (Jameson 141)

That is to say that Mr. Blank is exhibiting this very method of manipulation when speaking to Cash. Mr. Blank’s particular word choice is pivotal. He refers to Cash as a ‘friend,’ which connotes a more intimate interaction, suggesting that their relationship transcends boss-worker dynamics. However, this fails to be viable because Mr. Blank proceeds to regard Cash as the ‘best decision he has ever made.’ It involuntarily negates Mr. Blank’s previous sentiments because now he has specified that he sees Cash’s work as a transaction. Cash is considered purely as an asset for the company, rather than a human who puts in the hard work. It cannot be ignored that during the entire scene, Mr. Blank is standing up, looking over at Cash, while Cash is sitting down in his office chair. The various camera angles minimize Cash’ small figure, while also emphasizing Mr. Blank’s looming form. From the initiation of the interaction, Cash is depicted as a subordinate that must look up to his superior. Then when Cash gratefully accepts the compliment, he perceives that Mr. Blank is able to recognize and invest in his work ethic. This

exhibits how corporate figures appeal to the pathos of the working class, stimulating the illusion of social harmony in which the superiors are portrayed to be less of a boss and more of an equal. More specifically, the technique of preying on a worker and temporarily addressing their anxieties – like the protestors that surround RegalView’s office who demand better wages – without actually creating any long-term solutions, is exactly how these corporations remain in power.

Their power dynamic becomes exponentially more imbalanced as the scene focuses on Cash’s obligation to network with those higher in the corporate hierarchy. Mr. Blank proceeds to invite Cash to WorryFree’s CEO Steve Lift’s exclusive yearly party, with a casual “What are you doing tonight?” Cash weakly responds about his ex-girlfriend’s art exhibit that he plans to go to, and Blank responds with “Fudge all that. Steve Lift is throwing his yearly party” – all while taking a small cloth out of his blazer and wiping the dripping blood off Cash’s face (59:41-1:00:01). Blank expects Cash to abandon all personal engagements in order to go to a work function, where he will be able to network and further develop his career. His request forces Cash to choose between work and his life on the spot. Blank is utilizing the idea of an exclusive invitation, declaring that Beyoncé and Jay-Z could not even obtain an invite, to manipulate Cash into thinking that his presence is paralleled to some of the most famous millionaires, which causes him to further his interest in advancing his career in the company. Now, Cash must continue to feign the business persona after business hours and, consequently, upkeep his “white voice.” This alludes to the latent influence that the system ingrains into the working class. Not only does Cash have to prioritize work over his social life, but he must also prioritize his “white” character, disregarding any indication of his individual identity.

The wrap Cash wears to bandage his wound also becomes part of everyday attire, as he maintains it for the remainder of the story, which perpetuates the image that he, and his physical body, is part of the system and continues to be affected by it. The scene proceeds with the camera panning to a magazine with Steve Lift on the cover, then to Cash. Reminding the audience of Lifts’ overwhelming presence, even when he is not physically there. Also, it is noteworthy that Cash still continues to bleed from his forehead, and the place on his face where Blank had supposedly wiped the blood was just smeared. In other words, Blank has not fixed the problem, rather supplemented a temporary remedy that actually made the problem worse. Although tender in appearance, Blank’s gesture wiping the blood

off of Cash's face differs from that of a mother wiping something off of her child's face. Here, it alludes to the fact that Blank, embodying the corporate structure, has ownership over Cash. The wrap Cash wears perpetuates the idea that he is a part of the system now and continues to be affected by it. Therefore, it could be argued that Cash's decision to attend the party had been finalized before Cash could verbalize his agreement because he had already agreed to partake in the business arena. Cash has unconsciously prioritized his job over his friends, so much that it becomes a perpetual accessory of his outfit, in the hopes that socializing with elite figures will be advantageous for his personal and professional life. At this point, he has literally and figuratively given himself to the company, including himself in the simplest and essential form, his blood.

For Cash, the consequences of betraying the working class and himself become clear when he attends Lift's party. At one point, he finds Lift, the center of attention, in the midst of telling an exaggerated story, while all the party-goers are thoroughly engaged. He then asks Cash to tell him a crazy story, "You ever had a bust a cap in anybody's ass? [...] I want to hear about some of that Oakland gangster shit" (1:08:20-1:08:34). Cash is asked to perform for his superiors because he is perceived distinctly different from everyone else: he is dressed the least luxuriously, donned with his bloody bandage around his head, and, most importantly, he is the only black person attending the party. He is expected to narrate a story that is compelling, but also fits into a stereotype regarding black people who live in Oakland. Lift is not only pressuring him to comply with his orders because of his control as the CEO, he is also projecting racialized traits onto Cash, which are not otherwise present. Cash slowly realizes the stark differences between himself and the corporate businessmen.

The underlying tokenism is further highlighted when Cash is forced to entertain his superiors, which adds a new level of oppression. Cash's continuation of employing his "white voice" at the party acts as a continuation of his work persona in a social setting. However, Lift orders him to stop using it, "These boring cunts are at every single one of my parties. You're different, man. [...] At least take off the white voice" (1:08:56-1:09:01). Lift is hyper-aware of the facade that is Cash is putting up. Torchin addresses the overarching racialization of this interaction: "the white perception of blackness as performed for whites by the black party guest who is always already performing, always already laboring, forced to do so by a pseudoagency that masks deeper servitude" (36). Aside from physically

performing and entertaining corporate figures for the sake of his job, Cash must now execute a performance by putting his racial identity on display. Even though Cash does not have to inhabit a white persona anymore, he must now assume a stereotyped version of a black man. Now, Lift has penetrated beneath the white voice and he is manipulating the very essence of Cash. He is enacting a form of concealed violence against Cash, when he is at his most vulnerable state, for his own personal pleasure. Cash has no capacity to refuse these identity traits because he is constantly under the pressure of performing well. He must comply in order to advance his relations within the corporate arena, so now he not only forfeits his social life, but he is also sacrificing his character.

This is underlined in the subsequent scene where Lift asks Cash to rap. Cash is hesitant and claims he does not know how to rap, but Lift is adamant about having Cash perform. It escalates to the point where the party-goers repeatedly chant the word 'rap' in order to pressure Cash to perform (1:09:06-1:09:34). This portrays the hive-mind mentality that plagues the capitalistic structure, where capitalism thrives on the destruction of individuality within the working class and constructs a collective consciousness that does not allow for original thought to occur. Cash is standing at the top of the stairs, where a bright spotlight is hitting him, which contrasts with the remainder of the party-goers, who appear in low light. This technique brings a focus to Cash, yet it is undermined because Lift is also standing at the opposite end of the house, where he is under natural light. That is to say that while Cash is the supposed center of attention, his superior, Lift, will always be present and inescapable. The capitalistic machine only permits a select few to maintain their individuality, but there will always be an underlying presence of inequality. As a result, Lift as the most powerful figure in the room has broken down the individuality of the guests through his authority, money, and influence, compelling them to follow his requests, as if they are their own desires. Lift manipulates Cash because he is aware of the upper hand he holds above him. As he forces himself to start poorly rapping, Cash attempts to please his superiors because he is aware of the repercussions that would ensue, if he were to refuse.

Cash then ends up standing on the staircase and quickly realizes that saying the n-word is the only way to appease the audience. When he repeatedly 'raps' the n-word, the all-white audience joins in with Cash, resulting in a crowd of white people shouting a racial slur over Cash (1:10:15-1:10:52). After the excitement dies down, Cash is able to see the absurdity of the situation. He witnessed the

Cash Is Always Green, Even When It's Covered in Blood

corporate elite use oppressive language against him in a situation that is already tyrannical in nature. Thus, Lift's abuse of power over Cash alludes to something greater than the ability of his status. Cash has perpetuated the very notion of submitting to an uncomfortable situation in order to feel like he has advanced in the corporate ladder. The visible peak and the sharp decline in his demeanor indicates Cash's slow realization of the severity of the situation. In short, Lift has invaded Cash's integrity as an employee, but also assaulted the foundation of his existence. Cash has become a puppet for these white corporate figures, and he has embodied the trait they seek for in a person of color: submissiveness.

Cash mirrors the struggles of the working class in intersection with race. Throughout the film, he symbolizes how common laborers, especially people of color, are simultaneously fetishized and degraded. We witness how Cash is forced to carry out an extreme range of selfhood, and as a result, he loses any sense of identity and uniqueness to accommodate a homogeneous mentality that only benefits the system. This is mirrored in Jameson's idea of how ethnic groups are regarded: "In the United States ethnic groups are not only the object of prejudice, they are also the object of envy; and these two impulses are deeply intertwined and reinforce each other mutually" (146). Due to the incessant exploitation, black people have endured throughout the United States' history, it comes as no surprise that the oppression of people of color is fundamentally embedded within its economic and political structure. It all culminates in the following image: Cash is standing in a spotlight with the same bloody bandage from earlier that day as a reminder that he will always be exploited, no matter the circumstances.

Much in accord with Torchin's previous sentiments, Cash is realizing that his job has become more than just the workplace. It affected his physical being, from his voice to his forehead, and barred him from the community of fellow workers. Each step he has taken in order to generate a seemingly better future for himself has also stripped a part of his identity. Cash is unable to see this manipulation because, like every person, he was subjected to an influx of pro-capitalist propaganda throughout his life, spread out with the intention of constructing a society that is built on exploited labor. The abuse of the working class has a deep-seated history through the constant indoctrination in concepts like the American Dream.

The capitalist hierarchy that Cash and the rest of the population contribute to creates a never-ending cycle that increasingly becomes harder to break as one

progresses within it. Riley points to the idea that a worker is merely a tool the boss is more than willing to take advantage of. Within the American capitalist structure, there is also propaganda and other techniques to indoctrinate the working class. It convinces them that this is the only structure that is beneficial for them, even though Cash's case is typical: the "success" was reached at his own expense and the loss of his own integrity as a black man. Through Lift's manipulation, Cash is forced to become an entirely different person and compromise his morals because he was conditioned to comply in order to survive. We are positioned at the intersection of the capitalist structure in an attempt to comprehend how difficult it is to succeed in a system that is designed to prevent the working-class from reaching their fullest potential. Ultimately, the utter chaos that occurs within the film is further brought forth by the decadent visual qualities and assertive plot. The palpable extravagance of the differing characters' personalities, appearances, and motives does not infer a subtle satirical film: rather, it establishes a provocative caricature that would be erroneous to ignore.

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GABE GRAVILLE

Gabe Graville is a Geography major with a focus on human geography. He is active on the NPDA debate team here at the University of Oregon finishing last season with a third-place finish at the national tournament. It was through debate that Gabe found his interest in Marxist and settler colonial theorists, including Eve Tuck, who is cited multiple times in his paper.

Mentor: **Laurel Sturgi O’Coyne**

BLOOD ON THE FRONTIER: HOW NEW MODES OF VIOLENCE IN THE WESTERN GENRE REPRODUCE AFFECTIVE SETTLER RELATIONS TO THE LAND

WHILE THE WESTERN GENRE HAS BEEN MOST RECOGNIZABLE FOR STAGING NUMEROUS ARCHETYPAL ‘COWBOY VS. INDIAN’ STORIES THROUGHOUT THE PAST, THE COEN BROTHERS ATTEMPTED TO MAKE SOMETHING NEW WITH THEIR 2007 DECONSTRUCTION OF THE GENRE, *NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN*. This adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s novel brings the Western genre into the twenty-first century with a new frontier and a new villain as well as a handful of stylistic and thematic modifications to the genre-defining tropes. This repackaging of an old genre is not, however, able to escape the problematic representations of the frontier so characteristic of the genre. Through both the portrayal of the frontier as a place with no natives and the introduction of Anton Chigurh, the story’s villain, and his modern form of violence, *No Country for Old Men* restages these problematic representations in a way that continues to reproduce both settler futurity and affective settler relations to the land.

The movie begins with Anton Chigurh, the central antagonist and the vector through which violence is inflicted onto the main characters, being taken to a

police station. Chigurh sits behind the deputy who detained him, who is talking on the phone. After successfully maneuvering his cuffed hands to his front, Chigurh approaches the officer unnoticed. From there the detainee wraps his handcuffs around the deputy's neck, picking him up and dropping him to the ground from behind. The two roll on the ground for a while, the deputy attempting to escape Chigurh's grasp, while Chigurh continues to strangle him. We are shown multiple close up shots of the pair's feet as they wrestle for control and of the metal chain of the handcuffs digging into the officer's neck. Chigurh, unrelenting, digs the metal chain tighter until numerous spurts of blood stain the linoleum floor next to the rubber streaks left by the pair's shoes evidencing their struggle. The blood appears suddenly forming a dark splatter and staining the deputy's shirt. Chigurh reacts to the blood by turning his face away from the splatter but does not let up the attack. Shortly after the deputy begins to struggle less and less until he dies on the floor of the police station. This opening sequence introduces Chigurh as an unrelenting and merciless force, guided only by his desire to complete the task he has set out to accomplish as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The violence enacted upon the West Texas residents throughout the film is fundamentally different than the way that violence towards settlers on the frontier has been conventionally portrayed in Westerns. The spilling of the deputy's blood in this opening scene presents a microcosm of the violence that is to ensue throughout the rest of the film. Chigurh's execution of the deputy both provides an impetus for the rest of the plot and introduces Chigurh as an exceptionally ruthless and violent antagonist. Chigurh is not portrayed as filled with savagery and emotion, and the death of the deputy is not a crime of passion or fear but a methodical execution. The audience is not shown Chigurh's face until over halfway through the scene and when it is revealed Chigurh is shown to be calm in the moment. Contrasted to the panicked expression of the deputy taking his last breaths, what makes Chigurh terrifying is his lack of emotion. Chigurh's disposition in the first scene, as described by Scott Covell in his essay "Devil with a Bad Haircut: Postmodern Villainy Rides the Range in *No Country for Old Men*," is "at once so ponderous, so deadly, but yet so ordinary" (97). This tone of violence as ordinary is maintained throughout the rest of the film. Chigurh is not the archetypal "savage native" whose faceless violence plagues Euro-American settlers in the typical Westerns that portray the frontier as a land full of native people whose savage nature is the justification for Manifest Destiny but whose very real extermination was made

possible only through systematic dispossession. Instead, Chigurh, whose accent and origins are “unplaceable,” introduces into the frontier a new form of violence, unrelenting and methodical, which replaces the expected “primitive violence” of a native with that of a modern, civilized villain (Covell 97). This ultimately signifies a new style of Western set in a changed frontier

The film *Red River* (1948) exemplifies the archetypal Western film that *No Country for Old Men* pays homage to and its portrayal of indigenous peoples in relation to American settlers. At the beginning of the film Thomas Dunson, the film’s white settler protagonist played by John Wayne, discovers that his love interest has been killed in an “Indian attack.” This serves as the impetus for the plot, creating an emotional backstory that drives Dunson in later scenes. Later in the film there is another “Indian attack” which again furthers the plot as it results in Dunson saving a woman who would become his new love interest. In *Red River*, it is apparent that the Native characters serve as a backdrop to the plot centered on the white settler protagonist. The violence of the indigenous villains that Dunson has to fend off serves only as mechanisms for advancing the plot, with no backstory or character development given to the villains. While this archetype of “cowboy versus Indian” has been modified and altered across the genre, at the heart of these stories stands a white settler protagonist set on his righteous goals, not willing to let anything, not even those indigenous to the land he walks on, stop him. The protagonist is portrayed so righteous in his actions that a Native can only object out of an equally formidable dogmatic rejection of the settler in order to secure their own pre-modern existence. The conflict is then extended beyond a Native as an individual to the whole of their way of life.

The archetypal Western film, by centering the perspective of the settler, ultimately dehumanizes Native peoples and justifies the act of settling. On describing the perspective of the settler, postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon writes: “The settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning: ‘This land was created by us’; he is the unceasing cause” (Fanon 51). This perspective refers to the supremacy the settler feels towards the Native and, thus, the supremacy of the settler’s way of life over that of the Natives’. This settler perspective materializes itself most blatantly within the Western genre leading to the proliferation of harmful representations of Native people. In *Colonialism, Racism, and Representation* (1983) Robert Stam and Louise Spence summarize the effect of the Western genre’s representations stating that the Westerns “turned history on its

head by making the Native Americans appear to be intruders on what was originally their land” (Stam & Spence 6). The Western genre, through these representations, is thus able to naturalize and enact these assumptions about indigeneity and land. This archetype is however, abandoned in *No Country for Old Men*.

While *No Country for Old Men* replicates many tropes found in classic Western films, Anton Chigurh’s role as the villain modernizes the archetypal relationship between the settler and the Native. In the classic American Western an archetypal initial infraction, such as the “Indian attack” that killed Dunson’s love interest, is committed in order to propel the plot. The violence of the native villain and the portrayal of the settlers as victims is then used as a thematic justification for the actions of the settler, which typically involve homesteading and some form of revenge. This infraction is most commonly performed by a native individual for seemingly senseless or savage reasoning. Indigenous scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. describes the image of the Native in white popular culture as having “nothing to do with Indians,” arguing that the real living contemporary Native is “a pale imitation of the real Indians of the American imagination” (xiii). In *No Country for Old Men*, the structure of this archetype is preserved, but Chigurh is the one committing the initial violence instead of a stereotypical native character. Chigurh spills the deputy’s blood on the floor of the police station kickstarting the sheriff’s manhunt and the plot progresses towards an encounter between the protagonists and him. Chigurh is made to be unplaceable in regard to any ethnic or national identity and his backstory is intentionally unknown. This estranges the archetypal identity categories of Native, settler, and immigrant. Where the native villains of past Westerns similarly lacked meaningful backstory or character development, the reasons for the disparities between the types of villains differ. The Natives were underdeveloped characters because everything the audience needed to know about them was assumed based on stereotype. Chigurh, on the other hand, is left without a backstory intentionally, which creates a new form of villain and a new form of violence that terrorizes settlers on the frontier.

Chigurh represents a new metric of violence within the Western genre. To call him a substitute for the racialized indigenous archetypal villain would minimize the unique aspects of his character. Instead, Chigurh is a progression away from the indigenous conflicts of old towards a new type of violence. This violence is not noble or passionate, it is machinic and deliberate as overtly signified by Chigurh’s weapon of choice – a CO2 powered piston traditionally used to kill live-

stock. This departure from the primitive violence of the Native, as well as the fact that Chigurh is an outsider to these settlers seemingly established in their ways, positions the settlers as victims of Chigurh. This positioning of settler-as-victim seeks to justify their existence upon stolen land through the shared trauma of the settler characters. The blood spilt by the settlers in this film is no longer in the name of conquest of the frontier but of continued survival upon it. The blood spilt by Chigurh therefore represents a pain shared by the settlers in the film. It is used to signify a form of oppression or duress supposedly experienced by the settler characters as a community. Pain is described by two scholars of settler colonialism, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, in their essay “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” as “the token for oppression” (16). The logical conclusion of the shared pain is thus the idea of innocence of the settlers in the film as their “claims to pain [...] equate to claims of being an innocent non-oppressor” (Tuck & Yang 16). Through this progression Chigurh’s character plays a role in absolving the settlers at the center of the plot of their continued presence on the stolen land. The frontier has already been settled, and those who fall victim to Chigurh in their victimization are further naturalized upon the frontier as its rightful occupants.

In *No Country for Old Men* it is evident that the desire of the settler has transitioned from expansion in an occupied frontier into a defense of the existing frontier, free of any indigenous peoples to begin with. This is seen in the multiple monologues the sheriff shares with the audience. He recalls old-timer sheriffs who came before him and ponders how they would react and adapt to the current times. He describes the current times parallel to the analysis that Chigurh is a progression away from the violence of old towards something more machinic and sinister. At the very beginning of the film the sheriff describes a man who “knew he was going to hell” and had been “planning to kill someone for as long as he could remember” (00:01:30-00:01:55). This reference to the past serves to solidify the legitimacy of the settler’s presence on stolen land by describing a lineage and connectedness to the location they occupy. This nostalgic monologue also serves to position Chigurh among the forms of violence symptomatic of the contemporary time period the sheriff is discussing. This supercharges the position of the settlers in contrast to Chigurh and his new form of violence. The sheriff’s monologue is clearly foreshadowing the actions taken by Chigurh, framing him not only as a material threat to the settler characters but also as a metaphorical threat to the homesteaded way of life of these West Texans.

Chigurh's replacement of the stereotypical native antagonist is part of the new frontier *No Country for Old Men* presents for its setting. This frontier is marked by a telling absence. Where the Western genre has typically explored themes of settlement, Manifest Destiny, and fighting off the violent indigenous, *No Country for Old Men's* frontier is already empty. The only characters the film shows in this vast and unchanging landscape are hunters and drug traffickers. As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo points out in "NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEXICANS," "in the film the Indian has been reduced to a mere trace, a historical anachronism recalled at the end of the film as a parable about the white sheriff's isolation" (77). This erasure, while not necessarily an intention by the Coen brothers, does still hold multiple implications for our understanding of the frontier through representation. While *No Country for Old Men* positions itself as a contemporary Western film, it still comfortably settles itself in the Western genre. Particularly, the film's setting is the American frontier, and while one may argue that this land was likely empty during the time period of the film, it is important to acknowledge that this land is not as empty as it may seem, with many indigenous tribes occupying what many settlers consider empty desert in the Southwestern United States. Nonetheless, the setting of this film carries with it assumptions and a lineage of representations of the frontier that attempts to accelerate colonization, placing it into the past. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang explain that the desire for the death of premodern ways of life is a desire "for another kind of resolve to the colonial situation, resolved through the absolute and total destruction or assimilation of original inhabitants" (Tuck & Yang 9). This desire is enacted within *No Country for Old Men* through its representation of the frontier as in fact a post-colonization frontier. Instead of grappling with the Western genre's tropes of colonization, the film seeks a resolution to the colonial problem through omission.

The representations of the American frontier within *No Country for Old Men* replicate a form of futurity that secures the presence of settlers upon the stolen land. It does this by accelerating the seemingly inevitable resolution to the colonial conflict and by positioning the settlers as victims. Eve Tuck and Ruben A. Gatzmbide-Fernandez describe futurity using Andrew Baldwin's analysis of how the future is constructed, as "the ways in which, 'the future is rendered knowable through specific practices (i.e. calculation, imagination, and performance) and, in turn, intervenes upon the present through three anticipatory logics (i.e. pre-caution, pre-emption and preparedness'" (Tuck & Gatzmbide-Fernandez 80). Set-

tlar futurity is then any rendering of the future “that seeks to recuperate and not interrupt settler colonialism” (Tuck & Gatzmbide-Fernandez 80). In representing part of contemporary America, even in a fictitious setting, *No Country for Old Men* uses both imagination and performance to produce assumptions and ideas about the future. It is clear then that Chigurh, who is emblematic of the contemporary moment and its violence, along with the imagination of a frontier absent of indigenous peoples serves to pacify and naturalize the structure of settler colonialism. Producing representations of the frontier as empty and already settled facilitates an intervention into the present by mystifying settler claims to the land and erasing both historical and present forms of colonial violence. It similarly makes decolonization an impossibility where, first, the existence of Natives in the present is erased and thus the ability to repatriate is impossible; and second, settler’s claims to the land are equated to those of the indigenous people.

This futurity also produces and normalizes settler’s affective relationship to the land that is both illegitimate and is weaponized against the indigenous peoples. The claims that settler’s family and lineage have inhabited stolen land for a significant period of time and that this extended occupation somehow absolves them of the violence of settler colonialism or, at the very least, equates to indigenous existence upon the land, furthers the settler colonial project. It produces settlers as self-regulating colonizers who view their position within the structure of settler colonialism as a natural right. By making the settlers themselves feel righteous about their occupation, an explicit method of colonization can be abandoned as the populace can be entrusted with the regulation of their continued existence upon stolen land.

The affective investment in the land that many settlers hold shows itself most clearly within the logic espoused by many settlers: since colonialism has already occurred, the repatriation of lands and increase in tribal sovereignty is illogical. This logic is, first of all, flawed in its assumption that the violence of colonialism is a static event from the past rather than an ongoing process, but it also serves to temporalize settler colonialism, relegating its violence to the past. This produces a desire among the settlers to embrace the future as it is and to distance from the sins of the past towards the future. The staticization of colonialism as an event proposes that “the future is the terrain upon or through which white racism will get resolved” (Tuck & Gatzmbide-Fernandez 80). Settler futurity produces and controls an array of affects that replicate settler violence within settlers. Affect can

be understood as the result of communication or interaction between subjects. In the case of *No Country for Old Men* and the settler futurity it produces, affect arises from the subject's interaction with this future through either calculation, imagination or performance. Affect, as described by Patricia T. Clough in *The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedica, and Bodies*, can be conceptualized based on the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson, "as pre-individual bodily forces augmenting or diminishing a body's capacity to act" (Clough 207). This capacity to act refers to the ways affect controls action particularly in how our emotional and subjective responses to stimuli alter, depending on whether or not we view said stimuli as favorable or unfavorable. For example, by representing the future as an escape from the sins of settler colonialism, the settler begins to view the future favorably in turn making actions in line with settler futurity more desirable. In producing a particular affective orientation to the frontier *No Country for Old Men* shapes the way that settlers understand and are willing to act towards the issues of settler colonialism.

The representations of settlers and their position on the frontier in *No Country for Old Men* and the affective orientation towards the land that it creates has tangible effects on the material conditions of the native people within the status quo. The assumption that settler colonialism is over and that any indigenous peoples are absent from it justifies environmental policy that uses lands important to these tribes as dumping grounds for instance. When looking for a place to dispose of harmful materials the most common strategy is to find land that is not viable for economic development or future settlement. This is the same logic that was used for the creation of the reservation system in the United States as settlers did not want to foreclose the possibility of future developments. This has led to increased dumping near indigenous lands with "an estimated 1,200 hazardous waste sites [...] located on or adjacent to reservations" in 1990 (Lewis 433). The assumptions that the land is empty only serve to fuel this form of pollution as it reinforces the logic that the land is empty and ultimately disposable.

A more explicit example of how the representations in *No Country for Old Men* can create material violence is seen in the recent controversy with the construction of the border wall in the southern part of Arizona. The burial sites sacred to the Tohono O'odham Nation were blown up in order to make way for the border wall to be built (Romero & Zehbrauskas). In this act we see the culmination of a settler affective investment in the land, and the idea that this land is empty. The

border wall, with its intention to secure the southern border of the United States, is a reflection of the settler fight to survive upon the frontier. Just as Chigurh represents this existential threat to the characters of the film, those who immigrate from south of the United States are portrayed as a threat to the settler way of life. When the classical frontier is perceived as already colonized and the project of Manifest Destiny is seen as complete, the ideological location of the frontier shifts from the western part of the United States to the area along the southern border. This shift can be seen in the parallels between the threat Chigurh poses to the West Texan settlers in *No Country for Old Men* and the threat that is constructed around the idea of immigrants crossing the southern border. This ideological shift does not however entail any form of alleviation of the violence of settler colonialism. Instead it seeks to erase entirely the possibility of indigenous people existing in the United States as evidenced by the fact that the Tohono O'odham Nation were never consulted regarding this construction. To secure the border is to secure the perpetual existence of white settlers on stolen land. The fact that indigenous burial sites and sacred locations have become collateral in the securitization of the new ideological frontier is evidence of the harm that perceiving the frontier as empty can have.

By positioning itself as a modern deconstruction of the problematic Western genre, *No Country for Old Men* replicates harmful representations that forward a settler futurity and affective connection to the land. The character of Chigurh, with his unplaceable appearance and modern style of violence, serves to naturalize the settler's presence on stolen land as the archetypal fight for survival is translated into a fight to survive on the frontier. This is further reinforced through the physical portrayal of the frontier as empty, presenting any colonial history as solely a product of the past and producing a settler futurity in which time will absolve the settlers of their wrong doings. These portrayals produce assumptions and understandings that support a settler relationship to the land. This relationship is ignorant of the land's status as stolen and frames decolonization as an illogical solution to a problem of the past.

No Country for Old Men is a film that pays homage to the Western genre through the modern retelling of many popular tropes. This retelling is, however, not able to avoid the same problematic representations common to the genre it imitates. The portrayal of Chigurh as a modern form of violence and the representation of the frontier as an empty, already colonized place are part of an attempt to create a more modern Western film, which ends up modernizing and replicat-

ing the problematic assumptions of the classic Western genre. These assumptions as they are proliferated by films like *No Country for Old Men* impact the material conditions of the Native people by changing how settlers think about their own position in the structure of settler colonialism and how they think about the land, so important to the original inhabitants of the United States.

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NICK ROSENBERGER

Originally from Portland, Nick Rosenberger is a senior majoring in Journalism and International Studies with a minor in Arabic. He is a writing coach at the School of Journalism's Writing Central and a catalyst reporter for Eastern Oregon Media Group. In his spare time, he likes to run and eat good food.

Mentor: **Pearl Lee**

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE: AN EXAMINATION OF SELF- DETERMINATION AND MORALITY

Introduction

THROUGH THE BLOODY PAGES OF *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE* (1962) READERS ARE SUBJECTED TO EXTREME VIOLENCE, DISTURBING SCENES, AND A STORY THAT CAN LEAVE ONE FEELING NAUSEOUS. Anthony Burgess' most famous book is terribly savage and lurid. It seems to relish in the blood and hatred that disgusts society. From beating the elderly to graphically raping women, it describes violence in excruciating detail. For many critics and casual observers, the book seems to argue for the use of violence and finding delight in the vicious. Yet, upon closer reading, it could be argued that this was not Burgess' intention. He never argued for using violence, in fact he even created an intricate rhyming slang for his characters to create distance from it. Instead, Burgess argued for the necessity of choice in being good. We may sway one way or another during certain periods of our lives, yet it is still an inherently human choice to uphold the values of goodness. *A Clockwork Orange* is not a book about violence, nor is it a celebration of the bloodthirsty. Instead, it is a book about the sanctity of free will, our humanity, and

how unimpeded choice is a fundamental aspect to both concepts. To examine this argument fully, I will be looking at free choice and morality through various lenses including its importance to the self, growth, our humanity, and political systems.

Published in England in 1962, *A Clockwork Orange* made little impact upon its release, but slowly gained traction among critics and the mass public. It eventually became Burgess' best-known work. The political structures of the time, amidst the battle between authoritarianism and democracy, played heavily into the world that Burgess built in *A Clockwork Orange*. The discussion of state power is a constant theme as the fight between totalitarianism and individualistic self-determination comes to life through these brutal pages. This is where Burgess' philosophical battle comes to life. Is it, he questions, better to be forced into goodness through an all-encompassing state for the sake of building a more peaceful society? Or, is it better to independently choose to be good, even though this freedom allows for violence?

The World of Alex

The book is divided into three parts, with each part building upon this concept of choice. The book begins with the main protagonist, Alex, and his gang-members (called "droogs" in Nadsat, the Russian-English rhyming slang that Burgess developed) enthusiastically brutalizing the moonlit streets of an unnamed city and its inhabitants. The world we are presented is a dark and twisted image of our own. Teenagers roam the streets at night, fueled by drugs and anger, taking whatever they desire and destroying anything else. Gang rivalries are everywhere, and regular people are caught between the sides, killed and raped for fun. Alex and his droogs are some of the most notorious and pursue acts of "ultraviolence" with wild abandon. This is understood most clearly when the gang finds an old drunkard in the streets and brutally attacks him:

So we cracked into him lovely, grinning all over our listos [faces], but he still went on singing. Then we tripped him so he laid down flat and heavy and a bucketload of beer-vomit came whooshing out. That was disgusting so we gave him the boot, one go each, and then it was blood, not song nor vomit, that came out of his filthy old rot [mouth]. Then we went on our way. (18)

Their pleasure is hard to mask as they brutalize one person after another.

They are harbingers of violence, the vicious children of sadistic pleasure. Yet, even after their night of cruelty, the taste for violence is not gone. As Alex lays in his bed listening to Mozart, he begins to fantasize and sexualize violence:

As I slooshied [listened], my glazzies [eyes] tight shut to shut in the bliss that was better than any synthemesc [drug] Bog [another word for God] or God, I knew such lovely pictures. There were vecks [men] and ptitsas [girls], both young and starry [old], lying on the ground screaming for mercy, and I was smecking [grinning/laughing] all over my rot [mouth] and grinding my boot in their litsos [faces]. And there were devotchkas [young women] ripped and creeching [screaming] against walls and I plunging like a shlaga [club] into them, and indeed, when the music, which was one movement only, rose to the top of its big highest tower, then, lying there on my bed with glazzies [eyes] tight shut and rookers [arms] behind my gulliver [head], I broke and spattered and cried aaaaaaah with the bliss of it. And so the lovely music glided to its glowing close. (38)

It could be argued from this scene that his love of violence transcends the physical. He finds absolute beauty in the violent and it transcends into the echelons of art and religion. Music, love, God, violence -- all rest upon the same plane of divinity for Alex.

This passion for ultraviolence and rejection of goodness is integral to Alex's character and is a constant thread throughout the book. As he talks with P. R. Deltoid (his probation officer) he begins to think about the line between goodness and badness. "If lewdies [people] are good that's because they like it, and I wouldn't ever interfere with their pleasures, and so of the other shop" (44). We can see that through Alex, Burgess illustrates how people choose to act good or bad from the pleasure they receive from their actions. While humans are predisposed to repeatedly do what creates the most dopamine for them -- it is ultimately their choice to act on these urges that makes them good or bad people. This is encapsulated in Alex's recognition that he enjoys being bad: "all right, I do bad, what with crasting [stealing] and tolchocks [hittings] and carves with the britva [razor] and the old in-out-in-out [sexual intercourse], and you can't run a country with every chelloveck [person] comporting himself in my manner of the night." He continues, "What I do I do because I like to do" (44-45). For Alex, acting violent brings the greatest source of pleasure and excitement. His juvenile inability to suppress these urges is

what drives him to brutalize those around him.

That is, until Alex is betrayed by his friends and is sentenced to prison. In an attempt to be released early, however, he agrees to be the test subject for a controversial experiment. Called the Ludovico Technique, the prison officials claim it would make him a model citizen and unable to act violently. Regardless of what they say, Alex has no intention of becoming good and plans to return to his violent ways as soon as he is released. His plans are turned upside down when the doctors drug him with nausea inducing narcotics, strap him into a chair with clasps forcing his eyelids open, and force him to watch exceptionally violent films for hours.

Then we shot into another lomtick [piece] of film, and this time it was of just a human litso [face], a very like pale human face held still and having different nasty veshches [things] done to it. I was sweating a malenky [little] bit with the pain in my guts and a horrible thirst and my gulliver [head] going throb throb throb, and it seemed to me that if I could not viddy [see] this bit of film I would perhaps be not so sick. But I could not shut my glazzies [eyes], and even if I tried to move my glaz-balls [eyeballs] about I still could not get like out of the line of fire of this picture. (Burgess 116)

However, the drugs have a sinister trick to them. While they nauseate him, they simultaneously prevent him from becoming sick, which the doctors abuse to torture him into becoming classically conditioned against violence. Like Pavlov's dogs being trained to drool at the sound of a bell, he is trained to feel unendurable nausea and pain any time violence occurs. If Alex even so much as thinks violent thoughts, the pain doubles him over:

Then I raised my two fisties to tolchock [hit] him on the neck nasty, and then, I swear, as I sort of viddied [saw] him in advance lying moaning or out out out and felt the like joy rise in my guts, it was then that this sickness rose in me as it might be a wave and I felt a horrible fear as if I was really going to die. (135)

Although his inability to be violent may initially be seen as beneficial, it has dire consequences for both Alex and society. By taking away his ability to choose violence or goodness, the doctors remove his ability to make moral decisions. He is stripped of the fundamental human right of free will. It becomes clear that just like there would be no light without darkness, there can be no morality without a

choice between good and evil. In this regard, being good must be a personal choice -- an endeavor to improve the lives of those around you and society as a whole

Choice

Upon the completion of the experiment, Alex is forced to beg and lick the boot of someone who abuses him to show his harmlessness to officials. In response, the prison chaplain ponders the necessity of choice out loud:

[Alex] has no real choice, has he? Self-interest, fear of physical pain, drove him to that grotesque act of self-abasement. Its insincerity was clearly to be seen. He ceases to be a wrongdoer. He ceases also to be a creature capable of moral choice. (140-141)

The chaplain illustrates that if we are not able to decide for ourselves what is good or bad and make the decision to act, then we are nothing but organic machines. In Burgess' words, we are nothing but "clockwork oranges."

This choice between good and evil is one of the most fundamental aspects of morality. In Burgess' introduction to the 1986 republication of *A Clockwork Orange*, he explained the meaning behind the term: "I meant it to stand for the application of a mechanistic morality to a living organism oozing with juice and sweetness" (xv). A clockwork orange, then, is one who lives with a mechanistic morality where the choice between good and evil is nonexistent, unable to move from a moral conveyor belt. Being good must therefore be a personal choice and not come from above. Without self-determination, self-reflection and the liberty to pursue goodness, we are no better than caged birds. Our fates are sealed, our destinies predetermined and chosen for us. This is brought up again by Burgess in his introduction:

By definition, a human being is endowed with free will. He can use this to choose between good and evil. If he can only perform good or only perform evil, then he is a clockwork orange -- meaning that he has the appearance of an organism lovely with colour and juice but is in fact only a clockwork toy to be wound up by God or the Devil or (since this is increasingly replacing both) the Almighty State. It is as inhuman to be totally good as it is to be

totally evil. The important thing is moral choice. Evil has to exist along with good, in order that moral choice may operate. Life is sustained by the grinding opposition of moral entities. (xiii)

This again brings up Alex's thoughts during his conversation with P.R. Deltoïd. He enjoys being bad and actively chooses to live a life of villainy and destruction, just as others choose to live a life of goodness. Choosing which to follow is a part of Alex's human right to free will and taking this away would therefore be a violation of his basic human rights.

As Alex is released from prison upon the conclusion of the experiment, this idea that free will and choice is integral to our humanity turns from philosophical musings into reality. Alex is humiliated by his family, assaulted by his old gang-members and others from his past. Unable to make a choice to even defend himself, his humanity is crushed into dust as he is taken advantage of and used as a pawn in political games. This most blatantly comes in the hands of the author F. Alexander, who, with his cronies, attempted to use what happened to Alex for political gain. He tells F. Alexander that "There's only one veshch [thing] I require... and that's to be normal and healthy as I was in the starry [old] days, having my malenky [little] bit of fun with *real* droogs [friends]... Can you do that, eh? Can any vecky [person] restore me to what I was? That's what I want and that's what I want to know" (183). Through this exchange we can see that Alex is not actually a reformed person. Even though his choice to be violent was removed, he still would have chosen to be evil had the conditioning not been present. He has not taken responsibility for his actions and his sense of empathy towards others has not changed.

This is compounded by the fact that, as he is subjected to immense pain, Alex attempts to kill himself. This ultimately removes his conditioning and he immediately returns to his euphoric fantasies of violence. As he lays in his hospital bed recovering, doctors run him through a set of experiments to check his conditioning:

There were like pictures of real horrorshow [wonderful] devotchkas [young women], and I said I would like to give them the old in-out in-out [sexual intercourse] with lots of ultra-violence. There were like pictures of chellovecks [men] being given the boot straight in the litso [face] and all red red krovvy [blood] everywhere and I said I would like to be in on that. And there was a picture of the old nagoy [naked] droog [friend] of the prison charlie's

[chaplain's] carrying his cross up a hill, and I said I would like to have the old hammer and nails. (196)

Through this, we can see that Alex was never really "good." Deep down, his desire for violence remained. It could be argued that this was, in part, because he never gave up violence through his own accord. Alex never committed to becoming good or to grow out of his violent ways -- it was forced upon him by the doctors and officials. There was no goodness within him because there was no choice but to be "good." The pain and suffering endured by Alex at the hands of the prison officials and doctors is pointless, their state-sponsored mission a failed attempt to create a good man out of an evil one.

Growth

If what is good or bad is chosen for us, then there is no opportunity for growth, to push and change the world around us. People grow and mature through making and realizing their mistakes. We are not static beings. In the final chapter of the book, Alex realizes this, sees the error in his violent ways, and decides to finally become good. Despite the importance of this change, the final chapter was infamously removed against Burgess' wishes when the novel was published in America. The publishers in the United States thought the last chapter was a sell-out. They believed showing that people could grow and change was unappealing to an American audience. Yet, even if this was true, this final chapter was the most important part of the novel. The true meaning of the book comes into clear focus in this final chapter and was captured best in Geoffrey Aggeler's introduction to his 1986 collection of essays on Anthony Burgess: "The message of this chapter appears to be that if there is any hope for man, it is in the capacity of individuals to grow and learn by suffering and error. Suffering, fallen human beings, not behavioral technology or the revolutionary schemes of idealists, bring 'goodness' into the world" (8). Alex begins to notice a change in what brings him pleasure. Ransacking shops and assaulting others have less and less appeal to him and he grows bored. The rush and release of dopamine from violence fades, as he begins to dream of a new and productive life. In the end, it is not the restriction of violence that makes Alex good -- it is his decision to act on these positive self-images of the future. It is a realization that violence will not bring him long-term contentment, happiness and wellbeing.

When the definition of what is good and bad is hammered into stone, then the reflection upon morality becomes a useless pursuit. Growth and change is defunct in a forced benevolence, controlled by those in power. If the politicians and business owners and prison wardens are able to take away people's ability to choose their own destinies, then people are essentially unable to grow or embrace moral progress. They are unable to achieve an inner change of the self or *metanoia* as the Greeks called it (Clarkson 224-234). This *metanoia* has been intertwined with thousands of years of religious thought and serves as a basis for the Catholic belief of repentance and salvation -- of turning away from sin and becoming worthy of heaven. Burgess' history as a Catholic shines through here, despite his decision to eventually leave the Church.

In order to dive deeper into this, however, we must examine the teachings of one of the most famous Greek philosophers – Aristotle. More specifically, we must look at how *A Clockwork Orange* ties into Aristotelian concepts of virtue ethics and his ideas of a good life. Aristotle believed in a concept of *eudaimonia* -- or striving for fulfillment, flourishing and excellence (Widdows). In a good life then, the goal should not only be health and well-being but also virtuosity and creation. In *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex was void of any and all concepts that are part of *eudaimonia*. He cared little about his own health, the well-being of others, and clearly glorified destruction. In part one, he relished in the destruction of innocent people. In part two, he prayed for the deaths of other prisoners, officials, and doctors. In part three, he begged for his own death. It is in this final chapter, however, that he began to dream of a life of *eudaimonia*. He began to compare himself to the artists he revered:

Perhaps I was getting too old for this sort of jeezny [life] I had been leading, brothers. I was eighteen now, just gone. Eighteen was not a young age. At eighteen old Wolfgang Amadeus [Mozart] had written concertos and symphonies and operas and oratorios and all that cal [crap], no, not cal, heavenly music. (Burgess 210)

Through Aristotle's lens, we can see that Alex started to realize the aspects of a good life. He desired to be like his idols of Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach. To produce beautiful works of art. This desire to create goes so far that he began to dream about finding a wife and having a son. This is hinted at in the beginning of the final chapter, when a picture of a baby falls out of Alex's wallet in front of his new gang

members. This is later confirmed right before the conclusion of the book:

I Kept viddying [seeing] like visions, like these cartoons in the gazettas [newspapers]. There was Your Humble Narrator Alex coming home from work to a good hot plate of dinner, and there was this ptitsa [girl] all welcoming and greeting like loving. But I could not viddy her all that horror-show [well], brothers, I could not think who it might be. But I had this sudden very strong idea that if I walked into the room next to this room where the fire was burning away and my hot dinner laid on the table, there I should find what I really wanted, and now it all tied up, that picture scissored out of the gazetta and meeting old Pete like that. For in that other room in a cot was laying gurgling goo goo goo my son. Yes yes yes, brothers, my son. And now I felt this bolshy [great] big hollow inside my plott [body], feeling very surprised too at myself. I knew what was happening, O my brothers. I was like growing up. (210-211)

In Alex's own words, he was growing up. He finally found a productive purpose, a reason to live aside from causing pain for others. This kind of transformative change of heart is only truly possible through his own decision to change and act upon it, not through the external, brutal techniques of the State.

The State

As an external actor, the State itself cannot force someone to be internally motivated to live a good life. The importance of being free from external influence in choice is a foundational aspect of our humanity. You cannot force a drug addict to stop using drugs unless they are committed to it themselves. You cannot force a kleptomaniac to stop stealing unless they have an internal motivation to stop. Contemporary studies show that intrinsic motivation (motivation that is driven from within an individual) is a stronger conduit of change than extrinsic motivation (motivation that is driven by others outside themselves). When extrinsic motivation is forced upon someone such as with Alex, it can even have disastrous negative consequences. Roland Bénabou and Jean Tirole, researchers at Princeton University and Université de Toulouse, published the following findings in the *Review of Economic Studies*:

Rewards [e.g. extrinsic motivation] may be only weak reinforcers in the short

term and that, as stressed by psychologists, they may have hidden costs, in that they become negative reinforcers once they are withdrawn... [They] have a limited impact on current performance, and reduce the agent's motivation to undertake similar tasks in the future. (Benabou and Tirole 492)

We can see this reflected in Alex's psychology. He has no internal motivation to be good, it is forced upon him by the State. This eventually backfires when his conditioned response towards violence is removed and he instantly reverts back to his violent tendencies. He goes in the opposite direction. Being good, for Alex, has become a negative reinforcer and he is more motivated than ever to be violent. That is, until he acquires an internal motivation to be a father and productive member of society.

This ties in directly with conditioning theory. In 1897, Ivan Pavlov noticed that animals could be trained to respond to certain stimuli, such as making dogs drool to the sound of a bell when it is associated with food. Similarly, Alex felt sick when witnessing violence because of the nausea associated with the films he was forced to watch. On top of this, Alex was also conditioned partially through operant conditioning -- a technique that the psychologist B. F. Skinner theorized in 1938. This process requires a system of rewards (reinforcers) and punishments that train the subject to have certain responses (such as acting good). However, Alex never received positive rewards for being good. He never saw the benefits of being good and still rejected goodness. He only ever acted "good" (in that he never hurt or took advantage of others while conditioned) because he was avoiding punishments (extreme nausea and pain). While it is possible to train someone to act a certain way through only negative reinforcement, it is unlikely that the person will have an internal motivation to do so aside from avoiding punishment from external forces. For someone to achieve *metanoia* or reach *eudaimonia*, the motivation must come from within. These concepts must be achieved of one's own accord.

The removal of someone's ability to attain these ideals through state-sponsored methods such as the Ludovico Technique are simply a gross violation of human rights. In doing so, the State denies not only the freedom to live healthy and happy, but also the right to decide our own fates. In an attempt to control good and evil, the State in *A Clockwork Orange* has shown its totalitarian hand where individuality falls at the feet of a so-called "greater good." Burgess reflects this fear in the words of F. Alexander when he asks,

“Will not the Government itself now decide what is and what is not crime and pump out the life and guts and will of whoever sees fit to displease the Government?” (180).

Continuing our examination into the role of the state in individual morality, however, we come upon an interesting global institution: the United Nations. Now, it may seem like the UN is unrelated to our conversation of *A Clockwork Orange*, however, it presents a real-world example of the State and external forces interfering in free choice. This can be used to examine the novel in greater detail. The United Nations, as the world’s so-called police force, often faces a difficult problem when deciding what is right or wrong in the form of autonomy and self-determination. The United Nations is often unable to effectively police or enforce universal rights, these universal ideals of what is right or wrong, because doing so would directly interfere with a country’s right to exist and determine its own future (Makinda 155-156). Forcing countries to abide by a universal sense of morality would interfere with each state’s right to decide their own policies and futures. Unless there was a loss of the basic human right of self-determination, it would be impossible for organizations or governments to force people to follow an absolute morality system. With this in mind, it can be argued that just as autonomy must remain in the hands of each individual country, self-determination must remain in the hands of each individual. This, however, means that for a productive and successful society to exist, individuals must have a responsibility towards society through their free, moral choice (as Alex acknowledges in his conversation with P. R. Deltoid).

Through the lens of political power structures, the State in *A Clockwork Orange* appears to have failed to manufacture a sense of social responsibility or empathy in Alex. The topic of social responsibility was covered in-depth by Liu Hong, a researcher at Lanzhou Jiaotong University in China. However, I will look at this concept in relation to the necessity of free choice (void of external forces) in regards to goodness. Liu Hong extolled Jean-Paul Sartre stating:

Like a coin having two sides, freedom entails responsibility, according to Sartre’s standpoints. One’s freedom includes the freedom to choose who he/she is, the freedom to choose the values one lives by, and the freedom to interpret as one may, to the extent that it would be overwhelming to confront and accept the full responsibility entailed by it... Sartre believed that once a

choice is made, the responsibility must be shouldered (the responsibility of being free to choose), and one has to be responsible for others as well as for oneself. (31)

According to his interpretation of the problem, we must carry the burden of our own choices. Whether we do good or bad, we are ultimately the ones responsible for our own free decisions. Recognition of this responsibility is meaningless if one is forced into it by an unfeeling, all-encompassing State. The only way for a true sense of responsibility to manifest in an individual without external factors is if there is a sense of duty or empathy towards others and society (and through this, a responsibility towards the state itself). Alex completely lacked this. Everything that he did after leaving the prison was for his own self-interest to avoid negative reinforcement, not because of a sense of responsibility. As the prison chaplain said in part two of the book, “Goodness comes from within... Goodness is something chosen. When a man cannot choose, he ceases to be a man” (Burgess 93).

Sanctity of Choice

For Burgess, this choice between good and evil is raised to a sacred level. We see this theme recur throughout the novel, but most notably in the reflections of one of Burgess’ favorite muses: the prison chaplain. When the chaplain sees Alex before the beginning of the experiment, he grapples with this theme:

It may not be nice to be good, little 6655321 [Alex’s prison number]. It may be horrible to be good [...] Does God want goodness or the choice of goodness? Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps in some way better than a man who has the good imposed upon him? (106).

It is a difficult and muddled question, yet it is also an important distinction. If God gave us free will and the choice to choose between good and evil, then, it seems Burgess asks, is not this deciding moment the most sacred of all? This again reflects Burgess’ own past as a Catholic, who grew up in the mainly catholic English province of Lancashire. Despite leaving the Church later in life, the chaplain’s words hint that Burgess inherited a sense that salvation is possible through our choices. *Metanoia* is possible through learning from our past mistakes and choosing to change. In line with this thought, man is free to choose his destiny, whether that be in sin or in goodness

From the beginning of the book it is clear that Alex is a horrific character who commits atrocious crimes. His bloodlust is incomprehensible. His passion for violence – sickening. His choices – reprehensible. And yet, there was humanity buried deep down. The State tried to make him more human by taking away his violent tendencies and his self-determination. But they failed. They inadvertently took away the very aspect that made him human: free will. For Burgess, it is our God-given right to choose the avenues of our existence. Whether it be filled with blood or filled with love, the fundamental aspect of our shared humanity is the ability to freely choose our fates, unrestrained by the forces of science, the State, or even God.

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CLARA DEBRUN-SITTLER

Clara Debrun-Sittler is double-majoring in Public Relations and Chinese. She enjoys writing and studying various languages, including French, English, Chinese, and Spanish. Clara also does a lot of art, and she attempts to reflect this artistry in her writing.

BLOOD CELLS, TRAUMA, AND TEMPORAL HYBRIDITY IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*: HOW THE *SMALL THINGS* IN OUR LIVES CHANGE US

Mentor: **Nadège Lejeune**

AT ANY GIVEN TIME, WE HAVE ABOUT TWENTY TRILLION BLOOD CELLS IN OUR BODIES. They are essential for our survival and well-being. Blood cells carry oxygen from our lungs to our body tissues, including our heart. They also dispose of the toxic carbon dioxide in our systems (Cunningham). White blood cells fight off infections. But as humans, our health is ever so fragile. We depend heavily on the small things that allow us to function: bacteria, blood cells, oxygen particles, and so on. The slightest mishap or breakdown in each of these processes can make us sick, or even kill us. For instance, sickle cell anemia is caused by a lack of healthy red blood cells. These irregular blood cells are shaped like crescent moons, and they can get stuck in small blood vessels and impair blood and oxygen flow throughout the body (“Sickle Cell Anemia”). Similarly, often deadly leukemia is a “blood cancer in which blood cells multiply inside your body’s bone marrow” (Macon, et al.). In other words, the *small things* that keep us alive and make up our bodies can also turn fatal. This serves as a metaphor for the trillions of *small things* in our lives that make us who we are and who we’ll become. Our lives are constantly evolving depending on the choices we make and what happens to us.

This dependence on the *small things* in our lives goes beyond physical processes, which is exemplified in Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997). The novel suggests that the past is essentially inescapable as it tells the story of dizygotic twins, Rahel and Estha, their mother Ammu, and the complex Ipe family. The twins have a "telepathic" bond that can only be explained by their special blood connection as dizygotic twins. The story mostly takes place in Ayemenem, India. The time frame changes throughout the novel as the reader explores different periods of the characters' lives. Roy recounts all the seemingly small, yet often significant life events that change the twins and shape them into who they eventually become. Near the end of the novel, the twins are filled with sadness, emptiness, and silence. Trauma serves as a guiding principle in the novel. The characters all experience separate and intertwined traumas that change their lives drastically. Although a lot of these traumatic life events are described in a child-like and relatively nonchalant manner, they stay with the characters throughout the story and throughout their lives. Thus, their entire lives are inevitably affected by the scarring moments of their past. Sometimes, what appears to be *small* is in fact the biggest, most important part of your life. Relatively speaking, blood cells are tiny, but they are so significant that we couldn't live without them. Blood takes on two properties within the novel: the composition of blood mirrors how the *small things* in the twins' lives change them, and blood is what forever ties the twins together genetically and emotionally. By exploring trauma in relation to time and bloodlines, Roy demonstrates how the various characters deal with it. She employs unique stylistic writing choices, such as symbolism, repetition, and non-linear narratives to draw these connections.

In her essay "Trauma and Temporal Hybridity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" (2011), Elizabeth Outka explores a concept she calls 'temporal hybridity.' She notes that there is an interesting temporal blend of present moments, flashbacks, and flashes forward in time throughout the novel. She argues that temporal hybridity reflects the way in which trauma is experienced by the characters. This helps reinforce Roy's idea that the past, and thus trauma, is inescapable. In this paper, I take it a step further by demonstrating how temporal hybridity serves as a mechanism to show the twins' and Ammu's desire to freeze or alter time as an escape from the traumatic pasts that haunt them. Furthermore, in line with Outka's argument, I entertain the idea that temporal hybridity and Roy's stylistic narrative choices allow the reader to experience trauma as the characters do. These

stories are the focal point of Roy's novel. Throughout the novel, these stories are recounted in a non-linear manner, genuinely mirroring the confusing way in which trauma is often processed. Using the main traumatic experiences in each of their lives, I unpack their relationship to temporal hybridity and the freezing of time as a coping mechanism for their inescapable pasts.

How Trauma Bleeds through Time

Trauma affects every single character in this novel and is the principal way in which Roy shows that life experiences, no matter how big or small, shape the person you become, just as the trillions of blood cells make up our bodies. The reason why I'm focusing on Estha, Rahel, and Ammu's stories is because their traumas are all intertwined in significant ways. They impact and build upon each other; it's impossible to truly grasp one without the other.

Ammu, the twins' mother, is the epitome of transgenerational trauma. The biological processes that blood cells perform aren't perceptible from the outside. Likewise, transgenerational trauma doesn't present itself as a visible scar would. Nonetheless, both play a huge role in terms of health of mind and body. Ammu bears the trauma that her father, Pappachi, caused her, which then carries over to her children. When Ammu was a child, her father was emotionally and physically abusive towards her and her mother. When Ammu was nine, she hid as her father destroyed their home in rage and guilt after having beaten his wife and daughter. An hour later, she tried to creep back into the house unnoticed, holding her favorite new pair of gumboots. Pappachi caught her, turned the lights on, flogged her, and then shredded her favorite gumboots as she watched. Ammu didn't cry, but retained this experience deep inside:

As she grew older, [she] learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty. She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big (Roy 173).

This affected Ammu throughout her adult life. She felt the extreme need to move away from home, so she moved to Calcutta and got married, but her husband became an abusive alcoholic. She gave birth to her twins, divorced him, and moved back to Ayemenem to live in her multi-generational home. She was then

condemned by her family for being a divorcée which went against societal laws in India at the time. She was still a part of the family, but she was constantly mistreated and looked down upon. Of course, all of this trickled down to her twins. They were also belittled by family and society for something completely out of their control. Furthermore, their mother didn't know how to love them properly because she had never experienced love herself. Her father's lack of love towards her led her to choose a husband incapable of ever loving her in the first place. And without knowing how to love, she didn't experience a healthy motherly connection to her kids. Ammu ended up dying alone, only thirty-three years old, leaving the twins with unresolved issues. Although this is only the beginning of their own trauma, it already demonstrates the jarring effects of transgenerational trauma. Just as genetic traits are hereditary, trauma and other psychological aspects are also passed on through bloodlines.

The moth motif is representative of such transgenerational trauma, illustrating how the seemingly *small things* that affected Pappachi ended up heavily affecting Ammu and, by default, her twins. As an entomologist, Pappachi discovered his own moth, which he wasn't able to name after himself when someone beat him to the punch. This failure made him extremely bitter and spiteful towards himself and the world. He took it out on his wife and daughter. Throughout the novel, each time Rahel felt like love was taken away from her, leading her towards an abyss of emptiness, a cold moth would lay on her heart, freezing part of it away. This transcendence of trauma through generations is once again demonstrated in this image: "She had her grandfather's moth on her heart" (133). One night, Rahel tells Ammu something that is perceived as careless. Ammu responds: "When you hurt people, they begin to love you less. That's what careless words do. They make people love you a little less" (107). This is the first time that Rahel realizes how easily love can be taken away from her, and how fragile her relationship with Ammu is. Rahel loses a bit of faith in life and in the world: "A cold moth with unusually dense dorsal tufts landed lightly on Rahel's heart. Where its icy legs touched her, she got goosebumps. Six goosebumps on her careless heart. A little less Ammu loved her" (107). Rahel is also deeply affected by the death of her cousin Sophie Mol and her father figure, Velutha. She is falsely blamed for both. All of this causes Rahel to withdraw from her family and from the world. She has little ambition in life and she herself doesn't know how to love. She lives life in the most careless, empty, and unfulfilling way possible. Rather than morphing into a colorful butter-

fly, Rahel is as colorless and monotone as a moth. This infamous moth is the source of Pappachi's anger, which he passes on to Ammu through scarring abuse, which then transcends through the generations as it affects the twins.

When faced with incomprehensible traumatic experiences, both Estha and Rahel attempt to cope via their child imagination, which works only as a momentary escape. There is less of an emphasis on transgenerational trauma and love loss in Estha's life, perhaps because he is male in a sexist society, and because Ammu may have favored him. However, he, too, suffers from the death of Sophie Mol and Velutha, and the blame and guilt that comes with it. One day, Ammu, Rahel, and Estha go to the theater to see a film. Before this day, Estha has a very happy, child-like view of the world. However, while his family is watching *The Sound of Music* in the theater room, Estha wanders off into the main theater so that he can sing out loud. This wakes up the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man sitting behind the refreshments counter, and Estha is pressured and guilted into going behind the counter with him. Estha gets molested and is sent back into the theater room, having to pretend that nothing has happened. Estha immediately feels fear and guilt. In the moment, he copes with his trauma by listing his grandmother's different types of homemade jam, attempting to replace his incomprehensible and scary experience with things he knows and understands (99). For example, he compares the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's ejaculate to a quarter-boiled egg white. The man repeatedly tells Estha that he's a lucky, worry-less, rich boy, causing Estha to feel even more confused and ashamed. He internalizes guilt and shame that he shouldn't feel in the first place, just as he does after Sophie Mol and Velutha's deaths. Another way in which he copes with this trauma in the moment is by making sense of it in terms of child-like language. The use of capitalization for his Other Hand holding the 'egg white,' which he figuratively replaces with an imagined orange, emphasizes the sexual assault as a pivotal moment in Estha's life (101). He goes back to the 'Audience' holding his imagined orange, drawing a boundary between his child self, his traumatized, changed self, and the 'pure' Audience. The repetition of the word "clean" to characterize everyone but himself in the following paragraph reinforces this idea of negative transformation and loss of his child self. Estha also questions himself by thinking, "He's just held the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's soo-soo in his hand, but could you love him still?" (101). This trauma completely shatters Estha's life. The twins are connected by their dominating fear of losing love and childhood joy, along with dealing with that reality through their infantile imagination.

Twins Bound by Blood and Trauma

Estha and Rahel share a connection deeper than direct blood relation; they can sense each other's distress and are tied by their similar coping mechanisms. They are dizygotic egg twins, born from simultaneously fertilized eggs, resulting in a special blood connection:

The confusion lay in a deeper, more secret place. In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was Forever, Estha and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities (Roy 5).

When they were children, still 'pure' or untouched by their future traumas, they had a shared identity. Not only are they directly related by blood, but they also have an emotional and mental connection that is incomprehensible to others. These shared memories and connections may seem minute, but their connection extends beyond futile, *small things*, in a mode comparable to telepathy. Blood therefore takes on two properties in this novel. Not only do the properties of blood mirror how life's fragments shape the twins, but both the blood and "telepathic" connection between the twins forever ties them together emotionally.

Therefore, there is also a special connection between their traumatic experiences; to a certain extent, the twins can feel each other's trauma. Although no one but Estha knew of his encounter with the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, Rahel somehow remembers it: "She has other memories too that she has no right to have. She remembers, for instance (though she hadn't been there), what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies" (5). It's as though Rahel can feel the effects of Estha's experience. Of course, this feeling doesn't fully reflect the extreme guilt, sadness, and shame that Estha undergoes. Another instance of "telepathy" is at the beginning of the novel, when Rahel "notice[s] that Sophie Mol [is] awake for her funeral. She show[s] Rahel *Two Things*" (7). This makes a subtle reference to the *Two Thoughts*, or life lessons, that Estha conjures up later on in the novel, after he is molested. These *Two Thoughts* and *Two Things* were completely life-changing epiphanies for the twins, which is demonstrated by the unconventional capitalization and italicization of the words. These literary techniques are commonly used by Roy to emphasize the importance of certain diction

or concepts. These two things are the twins' dark revelations regarding the world. Ultimately, they are the twins' forced escape from childhood – one of the crucial aspects of the novel. The repetition of the twins' traumatic experiences and the dark life lessons they learn from them conveys the idea that the past will inevitably continue to affect them.

Even though the twins experience different traumas, they remain connected throughout their life by blood and the main approach they both choose – coping by retreating from the world. Estha realizes that he can't escape his past and he withdraws from the world as such:

Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha. [...] It rocked him to the rhythm of an ancient, fetal heartbeat. [...] It stripped his thoughts of the words that described them and left them pared and naked. Unspeakable. Numb. And to an observer therefore, perhaps barely there. Slowly, over the years, Estha withdrew from the world. He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquilizer on his past. Gradually the reason for his silence was hidden away, entombed somewhere deep in the soothing folds of the fact of it. (13)

Like a moth sitting on Rahel's chest, the octopus squirting its inky tranquilizer on Estha's past is an image standing for a coping mechanism to cover or escape his past trauma. Eventually, the quietness overcomes him so much that he forgets the past altogether. But this isn't a true escape, because he can't actually move on. Instead, he stops living his life at all. He almost becomes dead inside, like Ammu, who physically dies to escape her own trauma. Rahel similarly retreats by becoming lifeless, as previously illustrated by the moth motif. Just as the twins were inseparable in the womb, "the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lovers' bodies" (21). When Estha adopts *Quietness* to numb away his past trauma, he is alone and separated from Rahel, which mirrors his disconnectedness from the world.¹ However, when they are reunited at thirty-one years old, everything changes. The blood and emotional connection is recovered and enhanced:

1 Again, the reason '*Quietness*' is both capitalized and italicized in this paper is because Roy uses these stylistic writing technique in her novel to emphasize the importance of certain concepts or words. *Quietness* is an immensely important part of Estha's life and his principle coping mechanism to metaphorically and literally escape his trauma.

It had been quiet in Estha's head until Rahel came. But with her she had brought the sound of passing trains, and the light and shade and light and shade that falls on you if you have a window seat. The world, locked out for years, suddenly flooded in, and now Estha couldn't hear himself for the noise. (Roy 16)

Rahel halts Estha's *Quietness* and brings back the trauma that he has numbed away for so long. This is extremely painful for Estha, and he searches for alternative coping mechanisms. When their connection is earlier described as "like familiar lovers' bodies," it foreshadows the pivotal moment during which the twins commit incest. After Rahel brings back the 'noise,' also known as Estha's trauma, Estha must find another way to cope with it. Through this incestuous meeting, the twins metaphorically retreat to the womb, where they were physically inseparable. This last scene shows their attempt to fulfill their ultimate desire to retreat from the world, revert to childhood, or even revert to the womb, and go back to a time where their trauma was nonexistent. This scene powerfully reinforces the connection that the twins exhibit throughout the novel. But of course, the reader knows by now that changing or freezing time is a childish endeavor.

The Motif of the Freezing of Time and Temporal Hybridity

Roy's use of a non-linear narrative and her choice to make Rahel a partial narrator both mimics real life and gives us insight into the twins' perspectives on their traumatic experiences. Rather than following the chronology of events, the narrative constructs a plethora of flashbacks and shifts in time and place. Roy's non-linear storytelling mimics real life and the twins' thinking patterns, both complex and not always perfectly coherent. This also makes for a lot of unique stylistic writing choices. For example, the unconventional use of capitalization, the repetition of seemingly incoherent thoughts, the use of short sentences, and child-like expressions are all indications that Rahel is a partial narrator. Moreover, Roy mentions dozens of miscellaneous symbols, but doesn't explain them at all, thus creating a chaotic and incomprehensible effect of child-like speech. Just as the twins can't comprehend their traumas as they traverse through life, the reader has trouble piecing together their stories. An example of this often confusing child-like narration is when Rahel is at Sophie Mol's funeral. Rahel "noticed that Sophie Mol was awake at her funeral. She showed Rahel *Two Things*" (7). She also sees Sophie

Mol do cartwheels in her coffin and makes up her own story for Sophie Mol's death. Rahel believes "Sophie Mol died because she couldn't breathe. Her funeral killed her" (9). In believing that Sophie Mol was killed by suffocating at her funeral rather than by drowning in the river with the twins, Rahel is evading reality. She goes to a place in her mind that flees the guilt placed on her by her family and society, but this is only a momentary escape. The trauma still affects her throughout her life, but she uses this coping mechanism, among others, to ignore it. For a moment, the reader experiences the funeral through Rahel's eyes and might even give into this imaginary escape.

Another coping mechanism for Ammu, Rahel, and Estha is their desire to freeze time and suspend the twins' childhoods. Ammu attempts to freeze time as a way to escape the past:

Rahel was nearly eleven. It was as though Ammu believed that if she refused to acknowledge the passage of time, if she willed it to stand still in the lives of her twins, it would. As though sheer willpower was enough to suspend her children's childhoods until she could afford to have them living with her (Roy 152).

Ammu's realization that she can't make hers or her twins' trauma go away and can't order time to freeze hurts her immensely, and she doesn't know how to be a mother to her children. Therefore, she isolates herself and moves away from her family. She eventually dies alone. She never got to freeze time when she was alive. The twins kept growing and the trauma never went away, but death ends up being her ultimate escape.

Like Ammu, Rahel attempts to freeze time, return to a happy childhood, and become a victim of her own life rather than a perpetrator of pain, as demonstrated by the motif of her toy wristwatch. She is wrongly blamed for killing Sophie Mol and Velutha. Rahel's toy wristwatch symbolizes Rahel's desire to change or freeze time: "Rahel's toy wristwatch had the time painted on it. Ten to two. One of her ambitions was to own a watch on which she could change the time whenever she wanted to" (37). The time on the toy wristwatch is always frozen at ten to two, meaning that in a perfect 'toy' world, Rahel could control time and erase her trauma. Furthermore, the History House across the river from their family house is where the twins witnessed the beating and murder of Velutha. According to Outka, this History House "literally covers over and erases the twin's personal history"

(23). Rahel's toy watch happens to be buried there,

[...] where time is frozen at ten to two, reflecting the still present trauma that lies beneath. Time here is pictured almost as disrupted archaeological layers, the 'Toy Histories' in the hotel piled on top of the individual and collective traumas represented by Rahel's watch and the hotel's very location. These artifacts become material flashbacks to another time, appearing inappropriately and out of context [...]. (Outka 24)

This suggests that Rahel's trauma will forever be present within her life, as it is buried and 'recorded' in the History House. It is utterly ineliminable.

There is an idea of entrapment in time that comes across in the motif of sealed jam. The Ipe family owns a jam factory, which used to be a blooming business. Just like Rahel's toy wristwatch, the pickled jam symbolizes preservation – the frozen time. On the day Sophie Mol arrives in Ayemenem, Estha is pictured making jam as he ponders his life-changing *Two Thoughts*. The description of the jam as “a red, tender-mango-shaped secret was pickled, sealed and put away,” reinforces the link between sealed jam and frozen time (Roy 183). Once sealed, the jam can be kept for a very long time; unchanged. As Estha makes jam, he wishes he could freeze himself in time and childhood, thus escaping the adult realization that his horrifying past is inescapable. At the end of the novel, the family's jam factory goes out of business as every character's life deteriorates. Ammu, the factory, and the childish hopes for frozen time all perish.

Time and temporal hybridity are essential motifs throughout the novel. The flashbacks provide a backstory for each character, explaining why they are who they've become. The flashes to the future illustrate how the current traumatizing events the characters further in their lives. Without switching between the past, present, and future, the reader wouldn't know the full story, which is essential, since the *small things* are what matters most. Moreover, by using child-like narration and crafting a non-linear plot, Roy allows the readers to experience the lives of the characters with them. In her analysis, Outka states:

temporal hybridity is both sign and symptom of trauma, something that reveals that remembering and forgetting hold similar dangers but little relief. The quest for all these characters is to get the present back, to have something happen, not just to have something that happened, but the past continues its relentless invasion. (20)

The motif of time, and freezing thereof, is one of the characters' principle ways of momentarily coping with their trauma. Unfortunately, none of the characters are provided with an escape, and death seems like the only way out.

Conclusion

Arundhati Roy's unique writing style plays a large role in *The God of Small Things*. The novel's literary structure and elements transcend space and time. Roy writes, "It's true. Things can change in a day" (183). This pivotal sentence is repeated numerous times throughout the novel. That is because it fully encapsulates this simple yet revolutionary message. We have about twenty-five trillion blood cells coursing through our veins. Each microscopic blood cell is vital. Every second of every day, they are working hard to sustain us. How easy would it be for a few blood cells to malfunction? How easy would it be for just a split second to change the course of our lives forever? Along with the twins, we discover the utter significance of every little thing in our lives, no matter how *small* they may seem. It all shapes us into who we'll become, and a large part of our lives is out of our control. We can never genuinely escape our pasts. But the small part of me that's endlessly optimistic hopes that this isn't entirely true. Indeed, the past is in the past and trauma inevitably affects us, but perhaps it isn't a death sentence. Ammu, Estha, and Rahel lacked the support and care needed to work through their trauma, but that doesn't have to be the case for everyone. Hope lies in the nurturing power of love, from others and from ourselves, as well as an improving mental health care system. Ultimately, the future remains in our hands.

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TÉA NED

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA
ANCHORS THE MOTHER-
DAUGHTER BLOODLINES IN
AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY

Téa Ned is a General Science major with a focus in biology and chemistry, minoring in biochemistry. She is on track to be a veterinarian and hopes to attend CSU back in Colorado, focusing mostly on pathology and diseases. She used to be involved in the arts growing up and has a huge love of any form of creative expression. Watching and analyzing films/TV shows is her favorite side hobby to do, which is what brought her to the idea for this paper.

Mentor: **Mushira Habib**

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IS NOT ONLY AN ESTABLISHED TERM IN PSYCHOLOGY BUT IS A POTENT THEME IN MANY WORKS OF LITERATURE. According to attachment theory, this kind of trauma is interpreted as the “transmission of insecure attachment” (Iyengar et al. 2). Mothers and their children are of particular interest due to the direct relationship through the physical process of giving birth and mothers’ traditional role as the caretakers. Closer observation of the mother-daughter bloodline makes more apparent that unresolved trauma gets passed down characteristically from mother to daughter. Generations of daughters inherit trauma through character traits they take over from their mothers. This is a widespread experience that the inherited trauma causes perceptions of relationships and life choices to change. Daughters find themselves questioning why this pain they carry inside seems inevitable and impacts so many choices that they make regarding their future. I first realized the idea of “built in” pain while watching an episode in season two of *Fleabag*, directed by Harry Bradbeer and released in 2019. This idea then sparked my desire to find a film which would exemplify the complications of intergenerational trauma in a mother-daughter bloodline. *August: Osage County*, directed by John Wells (2013) became such work of visual art was. The film is based on the idea of intergenerational trauma through the mother-daughter relationship and expands upon the implications of this anguish. The

daughters are given a choice of either letting the trauma develop their ties to their bloodline or shatter them.

Episode three, season two of *Fleabag* illuminated the idea of inevitable pain women suffer as intergenerational trauma by identifying its source. *Fleabag* describes the life of a nameless woman who lost her mother at a late age and realized the severity of her internal issues as a result of it. She cruises through life as a “flea-bag” and meets individuals along the way who help guide her progress through the issues. This nameless woman gains advice from Belinda Friers (Kristen Scott Thomas), who is much older and more experienced. As Belinda Friers reflects on her own life, she says the main lesson she has learned is that “[w]omen are born with pain built in. It’s our physical destiny [...] We carry it within ourselves throughout our lives” (“Episode 3”). Belinda Friers is referencing a common topic of discussion amongst women in modern day culture – dealing with a questionable source of pain. Blood is often seen as a proof of this pain taking place. In its literal sense, a woman’s pain is represented by the menstrual cycle and the process of producing a child. There is an inherent guilt that women may suffer with the process of carrying a child, as the responsibility to be a caretaker can be overwhelming and full of unknowns. This guilt transitions to physical pain that is suffered when they give birth. The child can feel the pain that the mother feels, and it translates into a connection between mothers and daughters. This pain is thus transferred into physical and emotional pain. The drama *August: Osage County* is a case in point for Belinda Friers’ lesson. In this film, trauma bleeds through the mother-daughter bloodline and alters the attachment patterns of each daughter.

These dysfunctional attachment patterns are prevalent in the family depicted in *August: Osage County* which is based on the play by Tracy Letts. Many reviews describe *August: Osage County* as being “about the world of people connected to them [the Weston family] through blood or otherwise” (Harry 34). Trauma passed down the mother-daughter bloodline is demonstrated through attachment issues and solidified character traits. This can be traced back to the early history of the family, the stagnant character traits speaking of an unresolved trauma. In *August: Osage County*, the matriarch of the family, Violet Weston, is at the core of the intertwined trauma. Violet’s daughters who are suffering under this umbrella of solidified pain face the choice of whether or not to become truly independent from their bloodline-driven trauma. While the outcomes of their choices are not seen, the consequences of trauma that is undealt with impact their relationships and disrupt

the connection they have with their own blood.

Indeed, developmental psychologists find mothers to be a focal point when it comes to impacting the development of a child. The relationship between a mother and a child impacts the child for the rest of their developing and adult life. This concept is referred to as “attachment theory:” it argues that the connection between mother and child at a young age impacts the child for the rest of their life. When the maternal figure undergoes an unresolved trauma, it can affect parenting style and the quality of connections formed. Uditia Iyengar conducted research on this very attachment theory in connection to unresolved trauma mothers themselves have. She discovered that “attachment patterns, which begin as early as infancy, set a basis for the way adults interact, choose romantic partners, fall in love, and perhaps, most importantly, parent their own children” (2). Each daughter of Violet showcases one or all the traits Iyengar’s study reveals. Ivy struggles with the source of attachment to a romantic partner. Barbara struggles with parenting as she is the only daughter who has a child; she lacks feeling of security in relationships with her child and a romantic partner. Karen struggles with choices in romantic partners as well as trust in herself. Each daughter is a segment and extension of Violet Weston’s unresolved trauma.

The movie follows the Weston family, beginning with the patriarch of the family Beverly Weston (Sam Shepard) hiring a Native American woman named Johnna (Misty Upham) to help out with Violet Weston (Meryl Streep) as she deals with mouth cancer and addiction to painkillers. Beverly Weston is later found dead in a lake and his death brings together the three daughters: Karen (Juliette Lewis), Ivy (Julianne Nicholson), and Barbara (Julia Roberts), listed from youngest to oldest. Over the course of the movie, in a family dominated by Violet, secrets are revealed, and Violet’s true nature emerges. The audience is introduced to Violet as the matriarch of the family. In several scenes that erupt in emotional chaos, we see that she believes that her children have not truly gone through bad times. Tensions are high before this pivotal scene begins and Barbara at this point is the only daughter who Violet aspires to connect with.

The setup showing how the three daughters are feeling highlights the contrast between the types of relationships they have with Violet. Describing a flashback from her childhood, Violet characterizes her mother’s poor parenting style. Violet describes the events of her childhood when she had a crush on a boy named Raymond Qualls in middle school. She remembers how she told her mother that

she wanted the female version of Raymond Qualls' cowboy boots. Her mother built up excitement about her receiving the boots, only for Violet to open her Christmas present and see a beaten pair of men's work boots in the box, while her mother laughed hysterically. This condescending way of parenting is what Violet inherits. Each actor's choice on diction coupled with the composition of the scene develops the audience's understanding of how intergenerational trauma is intertwined with the fallout of the mother-daughter bloodline.

In this scene (1:18:43-1:23:46) we discover that the source of Violet and her daughters' trauma stems from Violet's toxic upbringing by her own mother, which she reveals in her monologue. Meryl Streep plays with the word choice of the script in her performance in this scene. The scene in total is five minutes and three seconds long, with three of those minutes consist of Violet's monologue. It begins with Violet chuckling and stating, "My three girls, all together. Hearing you three in there gave me a warm feeling." The scene instantly starts off with Violet's narcissism and her lack of consideration for the subject of conversation or for the fact that her daughters were not communicating well in the previous scene. Psychologically, Violet is insecure in her attachment to her mother after her mother had violated her trust. It is reflected in the manner in which she tells the story, doing onto her children what her mother did to her. Iyengar would reference this moment as a "ghost" of Violet's past, defining this as "emotionally painful memories experienced by the parent, which linger and impede their ability to sensitively respond to their own child, with the process being likely perpetuated across generations" (3). As Violet begins to tell her "ghost" story, Streep's select pauses foil the somber tone with which she tells the tale of Violet's crush on Raymond Qualls. She drags out certain words during the monologue, smiling while she says "beautiful," "all puffed up and cocksure," "girly pair of those boots," or "that's the gal for me!" Each word represents a positive aspect of the attention she would have garnered from Raymond had she received the boots. She conceals the pain of that memory with a faint smile as she retells her story. Meryl Streep chooses to induce a long pause after describing how Violet seems to be intrigued by Raymond possibly noticing her because of the boots. This want for attention and the persistent image become prevalent in one of her daughters – Karen – later in the scene. The purpose of the entire story that Violet is telling is to demonstrate how her mother built up the excitement surrounding these boots that she was going to receive, only to not give them in the end. With periodic pauses that Streep adds to the monologue, she,

too, excitingly builds the story up only to have a disappointing conclusion, reproducing her childhood experience. Violet pushes this memory onto her children by explaining the story in the manner that she felt it as a child. She wants her children to experience the very pain that she experienced because that is the only way she is able to deal with the pain. Violet halts her positive tone and stops speaking after concluding: “My mama laughed about that for days. My mama was a mean, nasty, mean old lady.” She pauses to laugh, then continues: “Maybe that’s where I get it from.” This laughter that Meryl Streep chooses to exploit showcases the lack of care that Violet has for how her words may impact others. Violet’s ghosts translate to her daughters and impact the way in which they conduct their lives. This scene visually solidifies the passing of trauma down the mother-daughter bloodline and foreshadows the events that occur later in the film as well as the characters’ development. Each word that Violet utters acts as a web that interlaces itself into the bloodline, tainting it with trauma.

The relationships and reactions of each of the daughters throughout the movie build up the idea of daughters’ choice in acknowledging their circumstances. This is reflected in the pivotal scene, but bleeds into the rest of the story. Ivy enters the scene first, followed by Karen and trailing behind is Barbara. Each daughter has a different reaction to Violet and each actor makes choices that demonstrate the power of each character. Ivy struggles with the idea of connecting to family in a genuine manner. Jeffrey Simpson and Steven Rholes discuss different psychological attachment styles and their impacts on relationships. According to Simpson and Rholes, Ivy’s attachment would be classified as avoidant, which encourages her to “employ distancing/deactivating coping strategies in which they defensively suppress negative thoughts and emotions to promote independence/autonomy” (2). Ivy leaves before Violet finishes her monologue, which demonstrates a conscious choice not to engage and her avoidant attachment style. Throughout the description of the story, the camera angle cuts randomly to each daughter to show a reaction to the excitement that is being built up. Once Violet gets to the point of her begging her mother for the boots and her mother “leaving hints around about a box,” the camera focuses on each daughter individually, and Ivy is the only one who does not have a slight smile on her face. Nicholson’s choice to demonstrate this character as monotone with an emotionless face implies that Ivy has been around Violet enough that she became desensitized and ready to rebel against conveying emotion towards her immediate family. Ivy refuses to entertain the story

because she has made her decision to become her own individual, separate from what her mother went through. Ivy employs this style of avoidance by running towards another individual she considers her family – her brother. Ivy falls in love with her brother who is perceived to be the outcast of the family as he has some mental disorder. Ivy did not realize or find out that he was her brother until the very end of the film. Throughout the rest of the movie she defends and clings on to this idea of running away with him to New York, even after she finds out that they are related. Violet nonchalantly brings up that they are siblings which abuses the emotional connection she has with Ivy, pushing Ivy even further away. Ivy's connection to her brother stems from her wanting to claim her own bloodline and sever the one she already has. She unknowingly fell in love with her sibling, originally believing him to be her cousin, and she fabricates the idea of a new family even though she is staying within the same bloodline. Her sisters also latch on to their perceptions of non-blood relationships in an attempt to avoid the linkage between them all.

Karen suffers struggling to put her newly involved fiancé above her blood-related family due to her attachment style. Karen reacts to Violet in a very enthusiastic way throughout the entire story. Karen is the daughter who has been around Violet the least, and throughout the beginning of the movie she is not even acknowledged by Violet, except for when she's being lectured. In reference to psychology, Karen has an anxious attachment style, overthinking every aspect of her relationships and striving to get as close as possible. Rholes and Simpson would define such individuals as being “heavily invested in their relationships” as they “yearn to get closer to their partners emotionally to feel more secure;” people like Karen “harbor negative self-views and guarded but hopeful views of their romantic partners” (3). Throughout this scene, she overreacts to Violet's story and imitates her actions. Lewis' choice to mimic Violet in the portion where she is describing wanting a “girly pair of the boots” demonstrates the same want for attention and closeness that Violet herself has for her mother. Violet rubs her hand on her neck as she is talking about the boots. Shortly after this action is seen, Karen, in a more exaggerated manner mirrors Violet in the way she rubs her neck. Karen is also the only one to interact with Violet except for the first and the last thirty seconds of the scene. She asks Violet questions, offers her lotion and compliments her at the end of the scene as she says, “You're not nasty and mean. You're our mother and we love you,” and touches Violet softly. Violet disregards Karen's care for her not

only in this scene but several times throughout the movie. It is also revealed that Karen's spouse tries to violate Barbara's daughter, but Karen finds herself making excuses and saying the relationship is all that she has. She strives to get as close as she can to Violet in various scenes to no avail. Karen inherits the trait of yearning for attention, similar to Violet with how outspoken and narcissistic she is. This trait follows the bloodline from mother to daughter and showcases how Karen has not dealt with the idea that she inherited these characteristics due to her mother's trauma. Karen showcases the passing of a toxic trait, whereas this scene is also a pivotal moment in the character arc that Barbara has.

During the scene, Barbara is the last of the sisters seen entering the main platform where the dialogue takes place. The attachment style seen here is also avoidant which is similar to Ivy's. However, while Ivy has negative self-views, Barbara has "negative views of romantic partners and usually positive, but sometimes brittle, self-views" (Simpson & Rholes 2). Barbara's personality falls in parallel with Violet's and evolves over the course of the movie, changing after the scene with Violet's story. Even though she is the oldest, she is last when it comes to sitting down and listening to Violet. As she enters the scene, she ignores what Violet says and chooses to simply ask if she has had a bath or eaten. Julia Roberts chooses to have Barbara look at Ivy and Karen before Violet begins the story, showing Barbara's care for her sisters only being expressed on the surface level, as the entire family has problems with expressing care for each other further than that. The previous scene involved Ivy telling Karen and Barbara that she had cervical cancer and got a hysterectomy, causing a bicker about how there is a lack of true connection between the three. Barbara has a similar reaction to Violet's story as Karen does: Roberts purses the lips of her character, adding a level of frustration to the scene. By saying, "Please don't tell me that's the end of the story" in a sarcastic tone, Roberts establishes an element of disappointment and anger within her character. The scene ends on a drawn shot of Barbara staring at Violet with no emotion, showcasing the character change in Barbara. Barbara inherits the struggle to express care from Violet. Barbara's face at the end of the scene displays her internal battle with attachment to others. Her failing marriage along with the hatred her daughter develops for her is revealed as she slowly morphs into her mother. As the only daughter with a child herself, she displays the same inherent guilt that Violet carries with her. This concept is shown briefly in a scene where Barbara's own daughter is violated by Karen's fiancé. Barbara identifies with her daughter's aggressor, displaying this

guilt that Violet has passed on to her. The blood that connects her to her mother starves this unhealthy struggle of gaining secure attachment. The longer Barbara spends around Violet, the more she understands her own inherited trauma and the further she gets from the false reality that intergenerational trauma instigates.

Each daughter is presented with a choice throughout the movie. This choice is about how they want to interpret the trauma that was ingrained in their bloodline. By the end of the movie, we see Barbara as the last daughter to leave Violet, bringing the entire story back to the beginning and opening up the lens of loneliness that Violet suffers. Karen left when she was faced with the reality that she is in love with the idea of having a family. Ivy left when she was confronted with the idea of her love story being tainted with direct incest. It was revealed that Violet knew Beverly was going to kill himself, and she decided to take the money instead of choosing to save his life. Violet has made the choice to succumb to her traumas and allow them to define who she is as a person. This heartbreaking fact confessed, Barbara is able to make the choice to leave Violet and continue her path with exploring this trauma. The one thing that is not uncovered however, is what the daughters chose to do with the knowledge that they gained from reuniting as a family. That choice to leave, however, furthered their development as individuals separate from their histories.

The film follows the course of how bloodlines often nurture the idea of family members running away from interdependence, which is a Western ideal commonly shown. Each non-blood related relationship shown is protected and framed as the better relationship. Violet continues a deeper relationship with Johnna throughout the course of the film and Johnna is the only one there for her at the very end of the film. Karen runs away to make amends with the man she is engaged to, even though he violated her blood-related niece. Ivy runs towards the idea of creating a new bloodline with her newly discovered sibling, who was never accepted into the family since the beginning. Barbara runs towards a relationship with the unknown, away from her mother, who directly relates to her persona and choices in life. Throughout the course of this paper, I have been illuminating the possibilities of the daughters running away from this trauma that has been passed down the bloodline. However, it is this very eagerness for independence and autonomy from blood that encourages the furthering of trauma passed down the bloodline. According to Jean Baker Miller, this is a common theme amongst analysis of psychological impacts of trauma or relationships between mothers and

daughters. Western psychology “emphasize[s] almost exclusively increasing separation, individuation and autonomy from others as central to healthy development and ignore[s] or minimize[s] the importance and growing complexity of human relatedness and attachments as at least an equally important part of development” (Shrier et al.102). Each character in the movie runs towards the idea of separating themselves from the trauma that links all of them together. This is why each non-blood related character is held tightly by each blood related character. Development of personality and decision making comes from this trauma itself. Linking together the madness of each individual allows each person to grow, but if each character runs from this interdependence, then tragedy strikes, and no one obtains a happy ending.

Independence with the trauma itself only aggravates the problems of attachment. Ivy and Barbara suffer from the avoidant attachment style, which, to reiterate, means that they “employ distancing/deactivating coping strategies in which they defensively suppress negative thoughts and emotions to promote independence/autonomy” (Simpson & Rholes 2). The natural tendency of these two characters is to flee from the sight of intertwined bloodline trauma. On the flip side, Karen is amongst those with the anxious attachment style, who “question their worth, worry about losing their partners, and remain vigilant to signs their partners might be pulling away from them” (Simpson & Rholes 3). Ivy, Barbara and Karen run away from their bloodline. While blood ties all of them together, it is what drives them apart as well. The need to run away from the trauma stems from the idea that trauma is always going to create negative characteristics. In each study that explores trauma, the emotions are described as “undealt with” and there is a lack of understanding towards why they are undealt with.

Interdependence can also mean incorporating traumas into the development of a persona. It is what the daughters choose to do with their traumas that will ultimately determine how their attachment styles develop over the course of their life. Violet did not understand her own trauma and it developed into a tragedy of familial separation. Violet herself suffered great traumas in her life and passed them down; it also possibly drove her to drug abuse of prescription pills. Throughout the movie, she accounts many times that she was abused by her mother’s partners.

The similar situations of abuse by another father figure causes her daughters to “feel outraged that the mother did not fight harder against this devaluation and subsequently identifies with the aggressor” (Shrier et al. 105). This anger solidified into the transfer of trauma, and elements of blame developed within Violet. Violet developed an inherent guilt from not being able to understand why her mother would subject her to that treatment. Since she did not have a relationship with her mother, she doesn’t know how to have one with her children either. As Belinda Friers in *Fleabag* would reckon, this pain is built in and given to her through the mother-daughter bloodline. Violet’s questionable source of pain became her greatest weakness and caused her to run away from the possibilities of having a relationship with her children. Due to this inability to cope with the anger, guilt, and pain, she ends up alone having severed her bloodlines with the daughters.

Embracing the mother-daughter bloodlines serves a purpose in defining how women continue to function in their day to day lives. Choosing to run away from the pain associated with the bloodline impedes wholesome character development. From the simple passing of menstrual cycles to full-blown trauma, women inherit the pain that came before them. *August: Osage County* is an excellent example of these bloodlines causing an interruption of character development amongst daughters and mothers. The fluid movement of visual tension from scene to scene translates as a metaphorical visual of trauma flowing through the bloodlines. Taking place in one primary location for most of the film, *August: Osage County* draws on the striking cinematographic elements and acting choices to exemplify the idea of intergenerational trauma. Each daughter in the film is faced with a decision to incorporate these experiences into her own development. Barbara, Ivy and Karen each developed different attachment patterns due to the inability to interpret their experiences as ones that can push them forward. In the end of the film, no one wins. This blood pushed them further away from each other, as intergenerational trauma ran its course through the family. Nevertheless, while the blood connection pushed them further away from each other physically, they are tied together emotionally. Each daughter was faced the choice to become truly interdependent in overcoming their interwoven trauma but chose to disperse and let that trauma split them. Ultimately, everyone ends up on their own path, separate from the very thing that united them all: blood.

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JACKSON CLARK

Jackson Clark is a Political Science major with minors in PPM and Legal Studies. His academic interests revolve around health justice and creating sustainable, accessible public transportation options. Jackson says that Comparative Literature offers him a creative outlet that his often bleak and bureaucratic major can't.

Mentor: **Dr. Anna Kovalchuk**

KEEPING THE BOWL INTACT: OPTIMISTIC NIHILISM IN VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S *PNIN*

NOTHING ON THE MOLECULAR LEVEL MAKES BLOOD EXCEPTIONAL. BIOLOGICALLY, BLOOD IS SIMPLY A LIQUID THAT TRANSPORTS NUTRIENTS AND OXYGEN AROUND A BODY. Yet, when the natural world presents its wonders, the breathtaking peaks of Mount Everest and the seemingly impossible structures of the Grand Canyon crafted over eons, they are insignificant next to this simple fluid. Under a microscope, blood is water, proteins, and sugars; yet it is responsible for every breath we take, every novel we read, and every ounce of life that we live. Blood is so important that we often find our deepest meaning in creating new life, knowing that we will one day cease to exist, but our blood will persevere. However, with this significance, come greater implications. Those who rule countries have often done so because of their bloodlines. The warfare, bloodshed, and political chaos that has resulted from this imposed significance of blood is not without reason, but in Vladimir Nabokov's novel, *Pnin* (1957), we see that perhaps significance is not predetermined.

Nabokov lived through war, revolution, exile and emigration throughout his

long and storied life that included his own personal peaks and impossible structures. *Pnin*, his first novel published in the U.S., explores the life of a silly Russian émigré who experiences many hardships – some similar to Nabokov’s own, many different – in his new American life. Yet, a close reading of it suggests that this turmoil and strife does not have to matter in the grand scheme of things. In fact, the story of Timofey Pnin could suggest that nothing has to matter. This rejection of predetermined purpose in the lives we live – also known as one of the premises of nihilism – can inspire panic and terror if one has not yet viewed it through the lenses that *Pnin* creates for the reader. When presented with nihilism, it might be instinctual to become overwhelmed with existential dread, and the text does not want to deny the reader this response to nihilism. However, it does suggest that it is not the only option. In *Pnin*, the events that unfold demonstrate that when you come to terms with the fact that life is meaningless, you are presented with a powerful capability to give meaning to anything you want – to give anything in your life the significance that the world has given to blood.

To understand the treatment of nihilism in *Pnin*, we must first contextualize it within philosophical thought. There are many branches of Nihilism, developed by different thinkers with different intentions. In Russian literature, the term was first popularized in Ivan Turgenev’s novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862). The existential nihilism permeates the writings of French authors Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. This bleak brand of nihilism is associated with hopelessness and dread which is exemplified in the closing paragraph of Camus’ novel *L’Étranger* (1942), where the protagonist witnesses the “the benign indifference of the universe” (154). The crux of these approaches to nihilism is the lack of a moral good, which doesn’t do justice to the power inherent in viewing the world nihilistically. Therefore, I argue that the Nietzschean approach to nihilism is most relevant to *Pnin*. Friedrich Nietzsche, in his controversial *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic* (1887), certainly examines the moral implications of nihilistic thought, going as far as to refer to morality as “the danger of dangers” (5). Nietzsche, however, analyzes morality as the first part of a process in an examination of something much broader. Speaking of humanity’s search for meaning, he found that “an enormous void surrounded man – he did not know how to justify, to explain, to affirm himself; he suffered from the problem of his meaning” (117). It is in the nihilism of meaning-making that we find a nondeterministic meaninglessness that makes possible *Pnin*’s optimistic approach.

The theme of nihilism and its philosophical implications come through on multiple levels throughout the novel. One of the most evident levels is linguistic: it comes through repeated failed usage of English idioms. After describing how Pnin's everlasting love for Liza couldn't be concealed, Nabokov writes, "The cat, as Pnin would say, cannot be hid in a bag" (43). Later, in a discussion between three émigré groups, Pnin says that "[t]here is an old American saying 'He who lives in a glass house should not try to kill two birds with one stone'" (76). These renderings of common English phrases should not maintain their meaning when Pnin misuses them. Nabokov was an expert in linguistic beauty who spoke and wrote in multiple languages with incredible capability and ease. Yet, in this novel, English idioms are butchered, but used by Pnin with confidence. Pnin's incorrectly used idioms still convey his message; they also demonstrate that the lifetime spent by Nabokov perfecting his use of the English language had no inherent value. The nihilism that the text is examining is so universal that even that which is dear to the author is not safe. In order for the nihilistic optimism to go beyond the novel it is presented in, it must encapsulate its author. We know that Nabokov was quite familiar with the inherent meaninglessness found in his life's work. In between writing *Lolita* (1955) and *Pnin*, Nabokov was translating his autobiography into Russian. He documents the absurdity and difficulty of this task in the work's foreword as a "re-Englishing of a Russian re-version of what had been an English re-telling of Russian memories in the first place" (12). Optimistic nihilism didn't compel Nabokov to examine his life's work. Rather, his life's work had an inherent absurdity that he was forced to reckon with, and he found solace in doing so by confronting the lack of definitive meaning optimistically. In doing so, he was able to create his own purpose and meaning by placing importance on telling stories across multiple languages.

As long as humans have existed, the human ego has existed. Inseparable from the human ego, there persists an instinctual drive to justify its existence. This manifests itself in religious views, philosophical arguments, and a lust for a greater purpose or destiny. It was Sigmund Freud who suggested that "originally the ego include[d] everything, later it separate[d] off an external world from itself". The human mind spends existence trying to distinguish itself from the universe from which it came. Going further, Freud examined the adult mature ego and found that it is "only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it" (29). For a human, an all-encompassing connection to the universe is overwhelming and does nothing for meaning making in the relatively

short lifespans we have. Nabokov isn't pretending that this universal connection isn't daunting. His autobiography opens with a description of life as a cradle above an abyss, warning that "our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness" (*Speak, Memory* 1). *Pnin* shows that the intimate bond that Freud saw between the human mind and the universe can be focused anywhere in a way that makes the beauty and insignificance of one's place in the larger scheme palatable and precise.

In *Pnin*, the titular character often has his troubles reduced to silly mishaps or accidents. Timofey Pnin, like his author, is a Russian émigré. He teaches Russian at a New York college and his difficulties with English often make him the subject of jokes and ridicule. He fumbles simple tasks throughout the novel and the first chapter opens with him getting on the wrong train. But when Pnin's life is more thoroughly examined, his hardships appear much more serious. Pnin lost his youthful lover Mira during the Holocaust. In order to keep on living, he had purged her existence from his mind. The narrator is quick to come to Pnin's defense, "If one were quite sincere with oneself, no conscience, and hence no consciousness, could be expected to subsist in a world where such things as Mira's death were possible" (135). If Pnin had let the hopelessness take root in his psyche, there would be no way for him to rationalize the world that existed around him. Nietzsche, in examining nihilism, found that humans are well-equipped to deal with and comprehend suffering, if it has a purpose. He finds that by assigning purpose to one's existence and the suffering within, "man was rescued by it, he had a meaning, he was henceforth no longer like a leaf in the wind, a plaything of nonsense, 'without-sense,' now he could will something – no matter for the moment in what direction, to what end, with what he willed: the will itself was saved" (118). Choosing to be pessimistic about the nihilism and suffering that Pnin marinates in – and it is a choice – doesn't lead anywhere productive. A closer examination of the novel reveals the choices available.

The novel presents its audience with multiple perspectives that suggest an unbiased presentation of the options in facing meaninglessness. Throughout the novel, Pnin's narrator explores the pessimism associated with nihilism. The most prominent exploration of this theme happens early on in the novel, during a description of Pnin's misfortunes. The narrator explains: "Some people – and I am one of them – hate happy ends, we feel cheated. Harm is the norm. Doom should not jam" (25). In a world where nothing matters, yet so many atrocities occur, the

narrator posits that, perhaps, misfortune is the default. Because entropy cannot be reversed, the natural state of everything is constantly moving towards finality. However, the sadness that we feel in the face of great loss or destruction gives us grit and an enduring human spirit. As Nabokov writes, “Is sorrow not, one asks, the only thing in the world people really possess?” (52). When you think about loss as a form of growth, even doom creates positive change.

The bleak nature of this option is underscored by the bleak language that drives it home. When describing the changes Pnin made to personalize his dream office, Nabokov writes, “With the help of the janitor he screwed on to the side of the desk a pencil sharpener - that highly satisfying, highly philosophical implement that goes ticonderoga-ticonderoga, feeding on the yellow finish and sweet wood, and ends up in a kind of soundlessly spinning ethereal void as we all must” (69). The similarities between this and Camus’ benign indifference of the universe are uncanny. After personalizing this office, he finds, after returning from a summer abroad, that his dream office has been given away. The text shows something that we would normally perceive as an insignificant aspect of life and uses it to symbolize greater, more daunting events in our lives. Just as the pencil sharpener grinds the pencil into dust, existence will inevitably grind each and every one of us into nothingness. The dread is present here, but it isn’t the only choice.

The capability to create significance out of perceived meaninglessness is not something that the novel presents as easy, while it certainly acknowledges the more harrowing approaches toward nihilism. The more we discover about ourselves, the less our existence seems to make sense as part of a larger organized plan. To illustrate this confusion, Nabokov equates Pnin’s trouble navigating windy mountain roads on his way to a dinner party, to the struggles of a tiny insignificant ant.

Pnin had now been in that maze of forest roads for about an hour and [...] had by now lost himself too thoroughly to be able to go back to the highway, and since he had little experience in maneuvering on rutty narrow roads, with ditches and even ravines gaping on either side, his various indecisions and gropings took those bizarre visual forms that an observer on the lookout tower might have followed with a compassionate eye; but there was no living creature in that forlorn and listless upper region except for an ant who had his own troubles [...] and was getting all bothered and baffled in the same way as that preposterous toy car progressing below. (115)

Humans tend to place their actions and existence on a scale above that of animals or insects or plants, but Nabokov uses the juxtaposition of Pnin's actions with an ant's actions to show that there is no real variation in struggle among those we cohabitate the earth with. This passage also alludes to a bigger idea of a presupposed guiding of which an image of a lookout tower in the mountains speaks. The lookout tower would serve to steer Pnin towards the correct path, whether that path is on a windy mountain road, or perhaps somewhere more substantial. But the lookout tower is empty, except for the ant, who is just as lost as Pnin, both of whom are ultimately the only arbiters of their fates. Each single step that we discover in human history makes it that much more unbelievable that it all happened in a way that brought us here today. To add to that already complex equation the idea that there is some purpose behind all of it, makes it exponentially harder to believe. The only reasonable conclusion one could arrive at is that we are the result of some cosmic coincidence, and that our place within that coincidence carries no more meaningful weight than any other part of the whole. It is this equal footing that puts everything within reach for anyone to ascribe meaning to, and it is here where optimism ensues.

Nothing about *Pnin* is immediately recognizable as optimistic. To analyze the optimistic approach to nihilism, the reader must be willing to approach the work with an eye for subtlety. This style of reading reveals an inspiring idea weaved throughout the margins – a belief that each individual is capable of choosing how to experience their own ontological condition. There is a conscious effort to assign meaning made by Victor, a character who plays an interesting and estranged role in the plot. Victor is the son of Pnin's ex-wife, Lisa Wind. This is Pnin and Victor's sole connection. Here we see the natural significance of blood disregarded. Victor's parents, the ones that he is related to by blood, are unimportant to Victor. He dislikes them as much as they don't understand him. Lisa's new husband wants to understand and parent Victor, to no avail. Despite an abundance of caring and loving people immediately around him, Victor chooses to find paternal attachment with Pnin, whom he has never known and has no blood connection to. To the audience, their first meeting is clearly awkward. Pnin doesn't know how to talk to children, and Victor had different expectations for who Pnin was. But both go to sleep that night pleased in the aftermath of their introduction, because they've chosen to.

After Pnin and Victor go to bed at the Sheppard house, even the narrator seems to have been influenced by their optimistic nihilism. Every one of the char-

acters is no longer present on the page. No one is awake, yet the narrator draws our attention to the scene taking place outside: “It was a pity nobody saw the display in the empty street, where the auroral breeze wrinkled a large luminous puddle, making of the telephone wires reflected in it illegible lines of black zigzags” (110). The denotative purpose of this novel is to tell a tale about the titular character. Yet, Pnin isn’t here. This scene provides us no additional knowledge about him. It doesn’t set the stage for anything that is about to happen, nor does it have anything to do with the scene that preceded it. This scene is one of many that fall into one of the few symbolic themes that Nabokov scholars like Brian Boyd and Gennadi Barabtarlo agree is a persisting element throughout *Pnin* – that of optical reflection. Throughout the novel, there are many descriptions of a scene reflected through a secondary object. There are reflections stemming from doorknobs, glass, fluorescent lights, and of course, water. Gennadi Barabtarlo suggests that the repeated use of reflection through warped surfaces is to illustrate that “[t]he general distortion of Pnin’s life [...] corresponds to these optical refractions” (21). This interpretation emphasizes how things can be perceived with a focus on the negative energy in Pnin’s life. This clashes with the optimistic nihilism that the novel pushes the reader towards. Instead, I suggest that one can view the reflections as representations of something more hopeful. The captivating night scene outside the Sheppard’s house exists here in all its beauty because the narrator decided to look at it. Despite what his ‘purpose’ was supposed to be, the narrator is choosing to fixate on this rainy evening scene. Nothing matters, and so the narrator is free to choose that these telephone lines reflected in a big puddle in an empty street is what matters for this particular moment. The many different and warped reflections represent the choice presented to the reader. There is no one objective vantage point, but a myriad of options for witnessing Pnin’s life, each with different weighted significance.

The most meaningful scene, in which one can come away with an appreciation for nihilistic sensibility, revolves around a gift given to Pnin by his estranged ‘son’ Victor. Victor’s mother told Pnin that despite their plan for Victor to stay with him for the summer, she was moving him to California. Despite the distance, Victor maintains his relationship with Pnin by mailing him a present that Pnin unwraps shortly before he hosts a celebratory dinner party. The narrator describes the importance of the unveiling:

The bowl that emerged was one of those gifts whose first impact produces in the recipients mind a colored image, a blazoned blur, reflecting with such

emblematic force the sweet nature of the door that the tangible attributes of the thing are dissolved, as it were, in this pure inner blaze, but suddenly and forever leap into brilliant being when praised by an outsider to whom the true glory of the object is unknown. (153)

Suddenly, this bowl takes center stage. The theme of refracted perspective returns, with optimism shining prismatically onto the page. This beautiful bowl, representative of both social status and Victor's acknowledgement of the pseudo-paternal Pnin, is a hit at his dinner party. His guests find the antique a beauty. However, at this same party, Pnin's acquaintance reveals that Pnin will be losing his job at the college. Pnin is distraught but this emotion pales in comparison to what he feels after the party, when he fears he has broken the symbolic bowl and dread and terror enter his head. Pnin's typical apathy is absent when he drops a nut-cracker into the soapy water in which the bowl resides and "an excruciating crack of broken glass followed upon the plunge" (172). Pnin's terrible day pales in comparison to this potential nadir. Pnin – in witnessing Camus' indifferent universe, Nietzsche's enormous void – takes a moment to stare into the existential depths of the "blackness beyond the threshold of the open back door" (172). Finally, upon reaching into the sink, he pulls out a shard of glass, not from the bowl, but from a goblet. It does not matter that Pnin has lost his job at the college. It does not matter that his peers do not find importance in the same things as Pnin. It does not matter that Pnin seems to always misstep just when it matters most. All of it does not matter – because the will itself was saved; or as Nabokov puts it, "The beautiful bowl was intact" (173).

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