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Pentangle is NKU's student-run journal featuring essays pertaining to public writing and all areas of literary studies, including film and other media.

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Writing After: Frank X Walker's Use of Emulation in *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting Of Medgar Evers*

Mackenzie Basl

While nonfiction applies the most restraint in its necessary adherence to facts, and even fiction requires a sense of plot and character arc, poetry exists beyond the bounds of convention. Poetry, as a genre, allows more freedom of expression than any other medium. There are certain norms and traditional styles that poets have been following for centuries, but the very nature of poetic expression often gives way to innovative and transgressive works that push the boundaries of the genre. An elucidating example of this is Frank X Walker's book, *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*. This 2013 poetry collection explores the main players involved in the political activist Medgar Evers's assassination 60 years prior on June 12, 1963. Through his use of the persona poem, a poetic form in which the poet writes from the perspective of another person, Walker interrogates biases and outrage surrounding this historical tragedy, leaning into the authenticity of voices in that time as opposed to factual testimonials.

Walker also uses another poetic move: emulation. To emulate a poem is to write a poem inspired by or in response to it. This is sometimes called "writing after" that poet, and these poems are often referred to as after-poems. This can manifest in different ways, such as a continued conversation between poets, a direct retaliation to a disagreed-upon point, or a similar following of a previously established structure or format. Some

after-poems are easy to notice because they visually share a similar unique structure, but others are more tangential, only responding to or borrowing from the content of another poem. Due to previous plagiarism scandals, it is necessary to note that emulation is all about paying homage or respect to the previous poet. An after-poem that is not clearly marked as such or lists lines directly with no credit is not truly an after-poem at all. Frank X Walker understands this distinction well as he utilizes this technique three separate times in *Turn Me Loose*. He leans more into voice while using source poems as creative guides, resulting in strong poems that flow well in the whole collection and build upon the work of previous Black poets who paved the way for Walker in the literary canon. Walker's three after-poems from *Turn Me Loose* are perfect examples of respectful, creative, and progressive emulation in the poetry genre.

The first after-poem in *Turn Me Loose* is "White of Way" written after A. Van Jordan. Though Jordan has used this distinct dictionary format in more than one of his poems, a good example to look at for comparison is his poem "from" included in his 2005 collection *M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A: Poems*. Immediately, the similarities are apparent. Both poems utilize a type of dictionary format; the text is justified (meaning it is aligned on both sides of the page rather than just the left), and the word being identified is in bold, with the various definitions delineated by numbers below for easier comprehension. But aside from some minor formatting differences such as Walker's use of separating brackets and Jordan's use of emphasizing italics, Walker's poem contains some deliberate changes in key structural elements.

The most visible difference is the amount of words and definitions given. While Jordan focuses on the various definitions of the single word "from," Walker instead uses the single word "White" as a jumping-off point to define three different phrases: White Pride, White Power, and White Privilege. The effect of this decision is twofold. Firstly, separating the three phrases into three different sections resembles a page torn from a dictionary, implying that it's a selected part of a larger whole. With this poem being written from the perspective of Byron De La Beckwith, it almost feels as if these were the terms that he found important enough to share and remember. Secondly, this choice allows Walker to broaden his scope of vocabulary. He explores the differences between these phrases rather than the specificities of only one.

Another major difference is the content itself. In his poem, Jordan briefly gives a definition using only a few words taken straight from a dictionary. His voice comes in the form of the example sentences that follow each definition. He switches from clinical identification to personal description to freely explore what these definitions mean in relation to a person. For example, Jordan writes, "his hair smelled like coconut; his breath, like

mint and bourbon; his hands felt like they were *from* slave times when he touched me—hungry, stealthy, trembling" (Jordan 27). This story-driven perspective gives the definition a grounded relationship to the speaker that a reader can connect with. Rather than use example sentences, Walker breaks from Jordan's form and injects De La Beckwith's voice into the definitions themselves. Instead of giving an objective definition for White Power, Walker writes, "belief in the fact that all white people have the God given and constitutionally guaranteed right to exercise, encourage, promote, celebrate, and defend the privilege of being born superior to other races" (Walker 18), which is what De La Beckwith would believe as truth. Although Walker's deviations offer a more narrowed perspective into De La Beckwith's mind, both Jordan and Walker explore similar themes in these two poems. On the topic of women, Jordan writes, "As being other or another than: He couldn't tell me *from* his mother; he couldn't tell me *from* his sister; he couldn't tell me *from* the last women he had before me, and why should he—we're all the same woman" (Jordan 27), and Walker shares a similar sentiment when he writes, "They're the only n–words a white man could ever trust with his daughters" (Walker 18). This line leans more specifically into De La Beckwith's fear of Black people rather than just a general superiority.

Another deviation from Jordan's format that works more evocatively as part of a persona poem is the last section, where Walker gives synonyms for White Privilege instead of another definition. Making direct comparisons to a "Staunch Segregationist" and an "active Klansmen' while simultaneously referring to someone like this as a "Patriot" and a "proud American" (Walker 18) shows the oxymoronic and two-sided nature of these people who laud themselves as supporters of a free country but turn around and condemn anyone who isn't like them. Walker uses this dictionary definition format in "White of Way" to interrogate personal relationships with these words so often used in conversations surrounding race and prejudice while using different methods to lean into De La Beckwith's psyche.

The next after-poem in *Turn Me Loose* is "After Dinner in Money, Mississippi" written after Tyehimba Jess. It's written as a hinge poem, which is a poem written in a shifted style where some words are left-aligned, some words are right-aligned, and some are centered on the page. These words in the center often work as part of either side. This ultimately gives the poem three possible readings: the left side and middle words on their own, the right side and middle words on their own, or all lines of the poem read completely straight through. Though difficult to describe in words, the visual format of the hinge poem inherently deepens the meaning by adding layers to any messages either implicit or explicit

in the poem. For example, the first few lines of "After Dinner in Money, Mississippi" have different meanings depending on how you read them. The left reads, "*pick up* / a tool and beat / white eggs / white sugar" (Walker 29) and the right reads "*pick up* / any n-word looking at / white women / or anything white but cotton." One reading is a simple list of instructions for baking pie, and the other is the start of a clearly racist imperative. But when read straight through together, the poem reads, "*pick up* / a tool and beat / any n-word looking at / white eggs / white women / white sugar / or anything white but cotton" (Jordan 29). This takes a more nuanced approach by highlighting how even baking or looking at a woman was considered crimes because any attempt at domesticity was seen as a threat to white people's way of life. Just like with Jordan, Jess writes in this hinge format repeatedly in his work, but "lomax v. leadbelly: dreams" from his 2005 book *Leadbelly* contains the most direct similarities in structure.

Both Jess and Walker utilize the functionality of the hinge poem to juxtapose two different realities, one for Black people and one for white people. Although Jess draws parallels between the privilege of white people vs. the unattainability of the American Dream for Black people, Walker focuses on the differences between these people's everyday lives. The poems emphasize the same disparities between the oppressed and the oppressor, just through different lenses. Even the endings work the same way to finish the poems with a bang. "Wantin' our shine: yeah– / *was only* / white folks' fantasy, / a / fake / *dream*" (Jess 91) is highly effective, but "*let things cool* / *ready when brown and puffy*" (Walker 29) is much more intense and evocative.

Walker borrows other stylistic choices from Jess while molding them to better fit his purposes. Jess italicizes almost all of the middle words and every single left-aligned word, furthering the visual contrast, but Walker only italicizes the middle words, emphasizing the tether between both sides and one side's forced reliance on the other. Both poets make allusions to real, historical people: Walker refers to Emmet Till when he name-drops the Tallahatchie River, and Jess's whole poem is presented as a back-and-forth between John Lomax and Huddie "Ledbelly" Ledbetter. In fact, "leadbelly v. lomax: dreams" can be read with the left side being Lomax's dream, the right side being Leadbelly's dream, and the entire poem being a more objective critique of how at odds these dreams are. But Walker takes a different approach. To fit with his persona poems, he writes this hinge poem in the voice of a Greek chorus. This deviation allows the majority bias to come through more clearly. Because the Greek chorus is impartial, the three different readings of the poem can also be taken as objective reflections of different beliefs at the time. When two out of the three readings condemn Black people, it shows how rampant and ingrained in Southern culture racial bias was. The hinged nature of "After Dinner in

Money, Mississippi" combined with its Greek chorus narrator strengthens Walker's theme of an assumed Black vs white mentality at this time in history.

The final after-poem in *Turn Me Loose* is "One Mississippi, Two Mississippis" written after Thomas Sayers Ellis. Unlike Jordan and Jess's tendency to write in the dictionary and hinge formats often, it is clear to see that this poem is specifically written after Ellis's poem "All Their Stanzas Look Alike" from his 2005 book *The Maverick Room: Poems*. Both poems follow the exact same format of connected couplets with the second line indented after the first, Ellis with 56 lines forming 28 couplets and Walker with 24 lines forming 12 couplets. One mannerism from Ellis's poem that Walker borrows is his sound. Ellis pays close attention to matching sounds like the rhyme in the line, "All their Selected Collecteds" and the alliteration in the lines, "All their hollow haloed causes / All their tone-deaf tercets" (Ellis 115). Walker plays with these sounds in the short length of his phrases and his alliteration in the lines, "We got juke joints" and "We got homemade hooch" (Walker 57).

Aside from the sound, Walker also utilizes repetition, though with an interesting divergence in word choice for the line pattern; Ellis starts every line, until it breaks in the last four couplets, with the words "All their" followed by a noun. This puts the emphasis on all of the things that white people have, and how uniform and identical they are. Walker, meanwhile, starts the first line of each couplet with "You got" followed by a noun, and the second line with "We got" followed by a noun. Ellis highlights the lack of diversity in white culture by distancing the poem's speaker from everything they are describing, but Walker's choice of alternating words directly juxtaposes the two cultures by bringing them both into the spotlight and showing the differences. For example, he contrasts the beauty and grandeur of white people's property with the scant nature of Black people's possessions when he writes, "You got sprawling verandas / We got a piece of front porch / You got beautiful gardens / We got cotton fields" (Walker 57).

Similar to Ellis, Walker also breaks form at the end of his poem. He switches on the lines, "You see a proud history / We see a racist past" (Walker 57) to change directions from evoking cultural connotations through imagery and objects to confronting the reader head-on about the underlying issue. Also told from the perspective of the Greek chorus, "One Mississippi, Two Mississippis" follows Ellis's distinct structure with strategic word pattern deviations to attack the divide between races in a more subtextual way that feels like an omniscient voice from the Black minority.

Out of the forty-nine poems in this collection, three of them are after-poems, each written after a poem from a Black poet's 2004/2005 book, possibly right around the time that Walker first started getting inspired to write *Turn Me Loose*. Both historical and persona poems require authenticity in order to be effective, and it feels symbolic that Walker stepped into the shoes of other poets the same way he stepped into Byron's. Whether it is carrying on the conversation or imitating structure, he clearly paid homage to A. Van Jordan, Tyehimba Jess, and Thomas Sayers Ellis with these poems. In a collection all about perspective and voice, Walker really emulated these evocative works and put his own spin on them, following and borrowing with reverence while adjusting to better fit his intentions.

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Potential for Collaboration in Rhetoric and Economics

Brady Hall

Friedrich Hayek, winner of the 1974 Nobel Prize in Economic Science, advocated for extending the study of economics beyond its narrow framework. This recommendation to incorporate diverse areas of study and alternative methodologies into economic analysis is expressed in the following statement from Hayek: "Nobody can be a great economist who is only an economist — and I am even tempted to add that the economist who is only an economist is likely to become a nuisance if not a positive danger" (21).

The new age of economics is humanistic; further, it increasingly benefits from rhetorical analysis of its phenomena. From Deirdre McCloskey's 1983 seminal article on the subject titled "Rhetoric of Economics," to Nobel Prize winning economist Robert Shiller's *Narrative Economics*, these benefits are becoming apparent. The study of rhetoric and of economics is growing in the same direction and converging. In this convergence, there is opportunity for both fields to gain insight from the other.

With a prudently positivist approach, economists have neglected their imperative: to improve the living conditions of *people* in their everyday lives. Similarly, practitioners of rhetoric have been disengaged from the pragmatic applications of their work. As the cardiologist must remain perpetually aware of their patient to provide treatment, so must the economist and rhetorician be aware of, and attentive to, the people behind the theories.

With a rhetorical approach to economics, rhetoricians stand to offer their expertise to significant and influential discussions; economists stand to expand their toolkit for analysis and prediction of economic trends, which are instrumental in shaping policy decisions.

Economists often hail Adam Smith as the father of economics, cemented by his work *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Though influential in economics, he was trained, primarily, in the field of moral philosophy. Smith's lesser known *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* undergirded much of his later, more popular work. Taken together, and within the context of his scholarship, Smith advocates a humanistically conscious view of people and their virtues in relation to their economic pursuits. Smith's classical economics, with emphasis on the importance of free markets and gross domestic product (GDP), form the foundation of modern economics. How then, can we advance modern economics without interrogating and reshaping the ground on which it's built? Integrating the ideas set forth in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is a start; recognizing the relevance of humanism will take us further. This work is already being done and has garnered significant respect. With the rising popularity of fields like behavioral economics, where Richard Thaler won the Nobel Prize in economics in 2017 for his contributions, the economic turn is humanistic. Now, in line with Robert Shiller's *Narrative Economics*, narratives are not exogenous to economics. Rather, they are instrumental to the behavior of producers and consumers. It is time to pay attention to the stories we tell.

Rhetoricians have long paid attention to personal narratives as a genre incorporating a story-like telling of a personally influential event with critical reflection on its significance; it's a staple assignment in the college composition classroom. In reviewing personal narratives, teachers of English have grown intimately acquainted with the impact of identity on writing characteristics, situations that influence people's reflections on events, and the broader themes and narratives that emerge in texts. This makes for an invaluable resource in the study of economic narratives. The extensive literature of rhetoric vis-à-vis public memory, persuasive structures, metaphor, theories of argumentation, etc., offers explanations of why some narratives have such strong and "perennial" economic impacts, while others are short lived or have little economic impact. Evaluating these narratives—their context, how they are told, and why they are effective—is a joint goal and exercise in consilience for both the fields of rhetoric and of economics.

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The Perspective of Irene: Is She a Lesbian?

Finnegan Huff

Throughout the novel *Passing* by Nella Larsen, the main protagonist, Irene, has numerous thoughts that the reader can know due to the unreliable third-person omniscient point of view that Larsen provides. The narration style Larsen uses makes it clear that Irene is delusional about her motives, from class to race, but Irene's biggest delusion is her feelings for Clare. Being preoccupied with appearance, responsibilities, security, and social respectability, Irene tries her best to suppress her feelings since lesbianism was frowned upon during the 1920s, the setting of the story. Though Larsen dramatizes the repression of Irene's sexuality through the imagery of concealment, that does not inherently imply concealment shoots down the possibility of homosexuality. So, let's dive into Larsen's descriptions of Clare through Irene's lens.

Irene's descriptions of Clare never falter compared to Brian's, especially regarding her physical attributes. No matter how much Irene tries to push Clare away, she is compelled back and struck by her beauty. Irene describes Clare as "exquisite, golden, fragrant, flaunting" with "glistening hair" and "eyes sparkling like dark jewels," without taking into account that Brian, Irene's own husband, is there too (53). Irene's attention is all on Clare and Clare's "deliberate courting of attention" that only she seemed to be enticed by. According to Irene, Brian believed Clare's appearance to be "annoying or displeasing" (135). Out of all the characters, Clare is the only one that

Irene declares to have "a lovely laugh" that is like "ringing of a delicate bell fashioned of a precious metal, a tinkling" (12). Besides the countless times Irene is engrossed by Clare's looks, Clare's voice is another feature Irene takes particular notice of. "What was it about Clare's voice that was so appealing, so very seductive?" Irene ponders (23). Once again, the narrator reveals Irene "fancied that [Clare's] husky voice held a slight edge" (25). Even upon Clare's death, Irene mourns "the soft white face, the bright hair, the disturbing scarlet mouth, the dreaming eyes, the caressing smile, the whole torturing loveliness that had been Clare Kendry. That beauty that had torn at Irene's placid life. Gone! The mocking daring, the gallantry of her pose, the ringing bells of her laughter" (80). In her text analysis "Black Female Sexuality in *Passing*," Deborah E. McDowell describes "Irene's description of the death, all of the erotic images used to describe Clare throughout the novel converge" (376). However, before Clare's death, Irene continues to state she no longer wishes to have Clare in her life to the point of not writing Clare a letter back and thinking of snarky and rude comments in her head, longing for her "peaceful" life back. Clare remains someone "a little mysterious and strange, someone to wonder about and to admire and to pity" (58). Irene pities Clare and even protects her from her husband, John Bellew, though she does not know why. She goes back and forth on whether or not to tell anyone about her encounter with Bellew, questioning what would happen if she were to tell Clare and what is the "right" thing to do. While in her spiral, Irene came across the thought of Clare dying, which was "vile! To think, yes, to wish that!" and made her feel "faint and sick" by the simple thought of Clare dying (72). Irene's constant back-and-forth beliefs, a sick feeling about Clare dying, and her immediate pull toward Clare indicate a potential flood of homosexual feelings and sexual desires. Although the narrator shows Irene's attraction, Judith Butler makes a point in her psychoanalytic challenge, "Passing Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge," concerning Irene's imagination of an affair between Brain and Clare– this imagination of the affair reveals how Irene feels about Clare through convoluted psychoanalysis on how homosexuality is thought of during the 1920s.

McDowell also points out that Irene imagines a relationship between Brian and Clare; this accusation coincides with the intensification of Irene's desire for Clare. Irene presses her desire for Clare onto and through Brian to consummate her passion while also deflecting from the reality of her feelings. With this in mind, Irene's jealousy can be understood as more than only a rivalry between herself and Brian but also as the consequence of sacrificing her passion repeatedly. Butler brings up a kind of jealousy Sigmund Freud writes about that first appears as the desire to have a partner whose attention has wandered to mask hidden homosexual feelings. Freud

labels this as a "delusional jealousy" that takes the form of classic paranoia. "As an attempt at defense against an unduly strong homosexual impulse, it may, in a man, be described in the formula: 'I do not love him, she loves him!'" (430). For a woman, as shown in *Passing*, the following formula might apply: 'I, Irene, do not love her, Clare: he, Brian, does!'" Larsen demonstrates this jealousy when Irene asks Brian if Clare is "extraordinarily beautiful," and Brian denies, to Irene's surprise. Irene then reassures herself that Brian would find Clare "annoying or displeasing" (135). On multiple accounts, Brian denies Clare's beauty or any attraction to her. Irene even notes "all their married life she had no slightest cause to suspect her husband of any infidelity, of any serious flirtation even" (68). Irene pushes her imagination further by declaring: "...all because Clare had a trick of sliding down ivory lids over astonishing black eyes and then lifting them suddenly and turning on a caressing smile. Men like Dave Freeland fell for it. And Brian," though Irene has no proof of Brian falling for Clare as Dave Freeland, an author and friend of Irene's, did (66). Though Irene is drawn to Clare, Irene thinks, "few women, she imagined, wept as attractively as Clare," despite never acknowledging any records of attractiveness to other women, ending up being caught in Clare's seduction (121). Clare's seduction is notably compelling to Irene, stronger than that of Brian. Larsen then reveals that Irene and Brian sleep in separate beds, an obvious indication of a sexless and less intimate relationship. With the loss of intimacy in her marriage, the assumption of an affair between Clare and Brian thickens while Irene's sexual desire for Clare does as well. Irene's feelings for Clare are obvious after Clare kisses Irene's "dark curls," which causes a "sudden inexplicable onrush of affectionate feeling" as she reaches out to Clare and cries out: "Dear God! But aren't you lovely, Clare!" (45-46). Irene never experiences outbursts of desire toward Brian, her own, her own husband, but rather Clare – a memorable scene Larsen implicitly suggests further Irene's desire for Clare and lack of desire for Brian. The push to hide her true feelings stems from the desire for security and safety, which are words of Irene that the narrator repeats and betrays Irene to the readers. Admitting to herself that she has feelings for Clare will disrupt her entire safety net of a "loving" and "fulfilling" marriage, family, and social status since divorce was unheard of and social status during the 1920s, especially for white women, was an essential role to hold onto with the rise of the Great Depression. The safety of Irene's life and how other women would view her was more important to her rather than accepting her feelings for Clare.

As stated before, security/safety is vital to Irene. McDowell defines Irene's security as "which she equates with marriage to a man in a prestigious profession, the accouterments of middle-class existence– children, material comfort, and social respectability" (373). In addition to

McDowell's sentiments, the narrator of *Passing* makes it clear security is vital to Irene, stating, "…in spite of her searchings and feeling of frustration, she was aware that, to her, security was the most important and desired thing in life" (76). Since the narrator reveals Irene is aware that security is essential and desires to achieve it, this shows that Irene will do anything to get what she craves, including resorting to crafty tactics similar to those of Clare. Irene's security lies in Harlem, so when Brian discusses his dream to leave for Brazil, Irene persuades him to abandon that dream despite his understandable reasons. Irene believes she is doing the right thing by thinking, "Couldn't [Brian] see, even now, that it had been best? Not for her, oh no, not for her– she had never really considered herself– but for him and the boys" (40). Although Irene claims to have never considered herself in her refusal to let Brian move to Brazil, she contradicts herself by dismissing him immediately and cannot rationalize his point of view, instead thinking of only her happiness and security. However, Irene cannot fully comprehend what security is to her, despite knowing it is what she desires most, "Security. Was it just a word? If not, then was it only by the sacrifice of other things, happiness, love, or some wild ecstasy that [Irene] had never known, that it could be obtained?" (76). Here, the narrator reveals that Irene does not have a solid personal understanding of security or if security is something she has ever known before. Irene lies to herself about the security she has worked on and pulls whatever excuse she can to keep it, since, though it is a lie, that lie keeps her safe. Irene continues her path of spiraling with, "Strange, that she couldn't now be sure that she had ever truly known love. Not even for Brian. He was her husband and the father of her sons. But was he anything more? Has she ever wanted or tried for more? In that hour, she thought not" (76-77). As her security starts crumbling in front of her, or so she thinks, Irene incidentally reveals that Brian is only necessary to maintain her desired level of security. Since her security with Brian is essential no matter her homosexual feelings for Clare, she believes it is "better, far better to share him than to lose him completely" (77). Larsen shows how far Irene will push to keep her dream security but is often overlooked and shunned by Irene, which makes the narrator untrustworthy to the reader and Irene.

In conclusion, Larsen and the other theorists provide clear evidence of Irene's lesbianism. Irene lives in a world where her security matters most, and she will do anything to keep that. As a result, the narrator betrays Irene and reveals both her true and hidden intentions: the proof of her sexual desire and homosexual feelings for Clare. Larsen provides evidence of Irene being a lesbian through the imagery of concealment that includes the descriptions Irene uses to characterize Clare. After investigating Freud's theory on repressed homosexual feelings and their links to paranoia, it is further reinforced that Irene is a lesbian but is unable to come out due to her

desired security and disdain for homosexual relations during the 1920s.

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The Human Soul of Sci-Fi: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Bailey Key

Part of what makes science fiction so appealing to readers is, however nonsensical or impossible, the realist nature of the situation. These are worlds that could exist just as much as they couldn't. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* follows this philosophy to its extreme. Within this novel is both a compelling Sci-Fi world and an engaging narrative that blooms from the simplest things. While the scope may be limited in some areas, the core narrative is incredibly compelling from both a storytelling and thematic perspective. The far-out, insane, unimaginable locale of 20th century Great Britian serves as the backdrop for a messy, emotional, beautiful story about the journey to adulthood and the human experience.

Never Let Me Go takes the reader through the memories of the main character and narrator, Kathy. Her unique narration weaves together three distinct parts of her life that she navigated together with her friends Ruth and Tommy. Kathy recalls their experiences together from their childhood boarding school of Hailsham up to when she last saw her two friends, showing the reader her adolescence, teenage years, and early adulthood. As early as the first chapter in Hailsham, it is clear something is amiss. Kathy herself admits that, "There have been times over the years when I've tried to leave Hailsham behind, when I've told myself I shouldn't look back so much. But then there came a point when I just stopped resisting" (Ishiguro 3). She has actively avoided her own memories of her early life, despite the reader witnessing relatively mundane activities through Kathy's narration.

The first two parts are filled with everyday discussions and quarrels, playing games, and sharing secrets with Ruth and Tommy. It wouldn't raise an eyebrow if not for the occasional slip of something being strange. The children are taught by "guardians" instead of teachers and frequently are encouraged to create and write as much as possible, only for their work to be taken away by the headmistress. Everything the students of Hailsham do is noted, yet the guardians in general don't seem attached to these kids at all. All the while, there is this subtle knowledge between the children about what they will do as adults, and a lingering question of what the "donations" they occasionally mention really are. Why the characters are even at Hailsham to begin with is a mystery, as nothing is said of their parents or what they remember before the school. Unraveling the mystery of who these characters are is just as important to the plot as the journey itself, even

after the main twist of the novel is revealed. Through this steady stream of snippets of the true nature of the world, Ishiguro has made the average day to day of Kathy and her friends just as interesting as the characters themselves.

The main character trio of Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy have a fantastic dynamic with each other. Kathy's meditative nature both meshes and conflicts with her friends in different ways, whether that be Tommy's more emotional personality or Ruth's ever-changing moods. The weight of the story is held within these three character's interactions, whether they be children or adults. Ishiguro's ability to represent human nature is shown in even the smallest interactions. Something as simple as a missing CD could be the crux of an argument, but because of Kathy's internal monologue and narration, it never feels like a waste of time or too silly to take seriously. And as they grow older and deal with more serious subjects, the conclusions they draw about the world are not unearned, as the readers can see precisely what led them to that point. Everything that happens in the novel feeds into the next event. Not only does this storytelling method create a cohesive and consistently engaging narrative, but it also further deepens Kathy's character as everything is retold from her perspective. In her own words, "Memories, even your most precious ones, fade surprisingly quickly. But I don't go along with that. The memories I value most, I don't ever see them fading" (Ishiguro 287). She is resolute that her memories are one of the most important things she has and will not be fading away. The plot is contextualized through both the time period in which events actually happened and Kathy's recollection of how people may have felt. The very way the story is told *feels* human.

Never Let Me Go's humanity is its defining feature. But just like with any human, there were bound to be some shortcomings. For one, with all the praise of how well developed and represented the characters were, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are the *only* characters that receive this treatment. There are other characters involved in the story of course, but none of them feel complete in the way the main three do. The most defining traits of the supporting cast are what they are in relation to the main cast. The same goes for the state of the world outside the scope of the characters. There is a developed world of Sci-Fi themes and an intense ethical dilemma Ishiguro molded from his own imagination, but we only see it through Kathy's eyes. The things Kathy doesn't see are told to the readers instead of shown, leaving the world feeling a bit thin for a novel that relies heavily on its context. That said, the main narrative is engaging enough so that these flaws don't often come up while reading, but it was enough to notice.

Never Let Me Go, for better or worse, stakes its narrative on telling a story about how humans live. Thankfully, the novel works incredibly well

and remains consistent in its theme and messaging. Ishiguro's novel is an experience I would recommend to anyone looking for something that evokes powerful emotions with a developed core cast of characters. Fans of more speculative Sci-Fi may be put off by the grounded nature of the novel, but the experience itself strikes at the core of what Sci-Fi is about--people trying to make sense of their life in the crazy world they live in.

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Mothering White Supremacy: The Role of Legacy and White Womanhood in *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting Of Medgar Evers*

Syd Kleinholz

Images of white supremacy throughout history are often deeply entrenched in masculinity, especially during the Civil Rights Movement. Ku Klux Klan rallies were made up entirely of men in white robes, lynchings were generally carried out by white men, and even the victims of racial violence that come to mind tend to be men and boys: Martin Luther King Jr., James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, Emmett Till, and Medgar Evers. But at the heart of white supremacy is the desire to protect the white race, a desire that inherently centers white women and reinforces their image as innocent, passive, and vulnerable housewives. Though men dominated many of the most sensational and visible components of white supremacy, white women were just as active in their own feminized ways. The role of white women was and is oftentimes covert and insidious, as is exemplified in Frank X Walker's *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers* in the form of Willie De La Beckwith. Through poems written from the perspective of Willie and other white women, Walker sheds light on the unique role white women have played in perpetuating white supremacy by weaponizing their femininity, feigning ignorance, and partaking in violence complicitly and passively.

White women's involvement in white supremacist efforts can be traced back generations, most notably during the Antebellum era, as illustrated in the Willie poem "Southern Bells" (Walker 32). In this piece, Willie reflects on the legacy of the white women who came before her and set the white female precedent. White women during slavery often chose to ignore the violent and vile things their husbands did, especially when the victims were enslaved women. It is estimated that over half of all enslaved women and girls, ranging between the ages of 15 and 30, were sexually assaulted by their white owners and other white men, often friends or associates of the owner (Wilson). With this high rate of occurrence, it is unlikely that white women did not know what was taking place. Whether for their safety or because of their own racism, or both, white women who chose willful ignorance chose their race over their sex and proved their loyalty to lie ultimately with white supremacy and shielding themselves from responsibility. Willie acknowledges this legacy, explaining how when the men came back home "from the slave quarters / still unzipped and whiskey-eyed," white women made their choice thus beginning their "great tradition / of not knowing and not wanting to know" ("Southern Bells"). This legacy bleeds into the rest of the poems in Walker's book written from the perspective of white women, all of whom choose complicity and feign ignorance at one point or another. Willie goes on to state that "if you really know a man / you know what he loves / and you know what ignites his lust / whether that be the peal and chime / of a black woman's body / or the silent one of her man" ("Southern Bells"). The poem implies that white women not only knew what their husbands were up to but that they also weren't blamed for it; a sort of "that's just how men are" sensibility.

In the Willie poem "Fire Proof," Willie inherits the legacy of "not knowing" and perpetuates it by actively taking part in the crimes of her husband, Byron De La Beckwith (Walker 15). Being blinded by the affection and love her husband shows her after being riled up at Ku Klux Klan meetings, Willie states that she "just pretended I didn't know / what gunpowder smelled like / or why he kept his rifles so clean" ("Fire Proof"). In this poem, Willie's pretending not to know what her husband has done is only one aspect of her partaking in his crimes. Because her female identity disqualifies her as a true accomplice, she isn't going to go along with her husband to Klan meetings or help carry a body, but she can provide a sort of domestic brand of complicity, one which better suits a housewife. The image of the helpful housewife comes to mind during this piece when Willie says, "If he walked through that door / and said, 'Willie, burn these clothes,' / I'd pile them on the coals and stare / at the fire" (15). Burning the clothes her husband wore implies that they were tainted with the blood of his victims, and it mirrors that of a housewife doing her husband's laundry,

literally cleaning up after him. Though not taking part directly, the white woman's actions are complicit, and her perceived innocence acts as a sort of living alibi vouching for her husband's goodwill. Since white women of Willie's time, and even still today, tend to be the default iconography of a good housewife, it makes sense then that white female supremacy would settle its roots most firmly in the sphere of the home, the husband, and the child.

A core aspect of women's responsibility to white supremacy lies in softening it. Historically, while their husbands and brothers carried out the physical aspects of racial violence such as beatings and lynchings, women had their own less visible sphere. They headed up the front of anti-integration school picket lines, organized Ku Klux Klan picnics, attended all-white church socials, and set up fundraisers for their white male kin when they needed lawyers or bail (Love). But this softening is done most notably in the realm of the home and the child through covert methods of indoctrination, as seen in the Willie poem "Harriet Tubman as Villain: A Ghost Story" (Walker 34). Racial-ethnic socialization or indoctrination into racist ideology happens most notably and impactfully within the home and the school, the two spheres most heavily dominated by women (Benabderrazak). This indoctrination can be done through repeated exposure to a set of racist beliefs which can be delivered through biased lessons, racist stereotypes, and anecdotes, or even something as seemingly innocent as a ghost story. As evidenced by the title, in "Harriet Tubman as Villain: A Ghost Story," Willie is telling a child a ghost story wherein Harriet Tubman is the ghost. Tubman is described as "a scary ol' black woman ghost / that carried a shotgun" who could sing magic songs that made enslaved people invisible while she stole them away (34). Willie is using the format of a ghost story to fearmonger, turning Tubman and other enslaved people into ghostly magical creatures from a child's nightmare thus effectively dehumanizing Black people. Combining dehumanization with fear creates the perfect vehicle of indoctrination, one which ensures the white child listening will fear Black people while also discounting their humanity.

"Harriet Tubman as Villain: A Ghost Story" also ends with a role reversal and a rewriting of history, victimizing the white slave owners while vilifying the enslaved people. Willie's delivery of the end of the ghost story is what seals the deal as it pertains to indoctrinating young white children into racist ideology. Having the "poor old farmer and his wife" die on Christmas day after working all day and night in the fields because their slaves had been freed and using the brutal imagery of them "bent over / and frozen to a cotton bush… / …after working themselves to death" does several things (34). The imagery of slave owners as people who did their own farming and

placing them into the role that enslaved people filled erases the wrongdoing of the white people and the reality of slavery. Willie paints slave owners as sympathetic characters, hard workers who didn't deserve what happened to them. The addition of their bodies being found on Christmas day is also an intentional and noteworthy choice. Using the holiday that would most emotionally and positively connect with white Christian children, one that creates such a stark contrast to the ghostly and violent aspects of the story, Willie makes the enslaved people even more unsympathetic and the story even more upsetting to the white child. This poem places white women as foundational to children's inheritance of white supremacist belief, a role that is covert and done under the cover of white femininity and motherhood. This coverage granted white women a vulnerable identity that they were able to weaponize thus causing more overt and violent racism on their behalf.

Despite not being the ones to pull the trigger, tie the noose, or dump the body, the lynchings that claimed the lives of so many innocent Black men and boys happened because white women made them happen. Walker's poem "After Dinner in Money, Mississippi," attests to the way that white women were able to partake in racialized violence while keeping their hands clean and their image untainted (Walker 29). Since male white supremacists often centered white female fragility and vulnerability as the motivation behind violent racial acts, white women were able to maintain and strengthen this image through false accusations against Black men of sexual assault or harassment, often leading to lynchings (North). "After Dinner in Money, Mississippi" is based on the case of Emmett Till, who was the victim of just such a white woman. Though unnamed in the poem, the left-hand side of the piece which mirrors a dessert recipe, can be interpreted as the white woman who falsely accused Till of sexual assault and harassment. This woman is Carolyn Bryant Donham,[1] baking while he is being lynched, as depicted in the right-hand side of the poem.

While the left side reads as any normal recipe, the addition of the right side alters it. Read all together the poem reads as: "*pick up* / a tool and beat any n-word looking at / white eggs white women / white sugar / or anything white but cotton." When the "recipe" says to "bake / with a 75-lb / cotton gin fan / *let things cool* / *ready when brown and puffy*," Walker is making a direct and explicit reference to Till, whose body was dumped in a river and weighed down with a cotton gin fan ("After Dinner in Money, Mississippi;" Associated Press). Donham's role in Till's murder required very little of her. She had only to tell her husband that Till whistled at her and he was killed within hours. During the trying of the case, Donham sat in the courtroom with her hair and makeup done perfectly, her children perched in her lap, sitting beside her husband and her head leaning on his shoulder,

ever the housewife, ever the perfect victim. She exemplifies every aspect of feminized white supremacy; the complicity, passivity, and feigned ignorance are all there and the result is deadly. "After Dinner in Money, Mississippi" has two endings; Till, dead at the bottom of a river, and Donham, finishing her recipe, waiting for her husband to come home. When the woman in the poem's husband does come home, she will likely continue her white wifely duties, fixing his dinner, getting their stories straight, and cleaning the blood out of his clothes, pretending all the while not to know where it came from.

While men will likely always be the first people to come to mind when one thinks of the Civil Rights Era and white supremacy, white women have a role that is distinctly their own. It hinges on the image of white women as inherently innocent, vulnerable, and motherly. As seen through Frank X Walker's poetry in *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*, white women relied on this public image to cloak themselves in plausible deniability, all the while partaking in upholding white supremacy through methods of complicity, docility, passivity, and pretense. The complexity of their involvement, often covert and cloaked in traditional gender roles, underscores the need for an understanding of white supremacy that goes beyond the overt stereotypical avenues of racism. Understanding the distinct role that white women play in the legacy and perpetuation of racist ideology and behavior is the integral first step in working toward a more equitable and just society and reckoning with the violence of our collective past.

[1] An arrest warrant from the time of Till's death that named Carolyn Bryant Donham was unearthed 70 years after the fact. When it was originally publicized in 1955 the sheriff told reporters that "he did not want to 'bother' the woman since she had two young children to care for." Later in life, Donham ended up admitting that she had completely fabricated her story and that Till was innocent, an admission that even when combined with the arrest warrant, was still not enough to convict her of anything. Photographs from inside the courtroom show Donham leaning her head against her husband's shoulder, her children perched in her lap, ever the housewife, ever the victim (Associated Press). Her identity as a white woman and, more specifically, as a white mother protected her untilher dying day.

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Ariel: Sylvia's Version

Benjamin Lloyd

On what I imagine was a cold evening in February of 1963, the extraordinarily talented poet and novelist Sylvia Plath committed suicide by inserting her head into an oven and inhaling the gas until she lost consciousness (Cordova and Young). Plath is probably best known for her novel, *The Bell Jar*, though the posthumously published collection *Ariel* contains several poems which have gone on to receive their own respective fame since her untimely death, and the collection as a whole, won a Pulitzer Prize. Her decision to take her own life, as can be extrapolated from reading the poems published in *Ariel*, was likely heavily influenced by Plath's failed marriage with fellow poet Ted Hughes.

In 2004, Plath's and Hughes's daughter Frieda Hughes played a critical role in the release of *Ariel: The Restored Edition (A:RE)*. This version of the collection not only restores the selection and arrangements of the original manuscript but also contains a facsimile of the manuscript and handwritten drafts of the poems included; several of the poems incorporated into *Ariel: The Restored Edition* were neglected from the original collection, published by Ted Hughes. While it may not be immediately apparent to those who delve, or re-delve, into Plath's poetry, there is an important connection to be made from the stifling of Plath's artistic vision and the industry debacle in which singer, songwriter Taylor Swift has found herself in recent years.

Ariel: The Restored Edition does contain the poems of *Ariel* as they were edited and published in 1965 by Ted Hughes, Plath's husband, after her suicide. But, the first poem in the collection that was excluded from Ted's published version of *Ariel* is "The Rabbit Catcher." On first read, it may not be entirely certain why Plath's husband would want to exclude this beautiful narrative poem, but it becomes a bit clearer when one considers that her poems were often viewed as personal confessions and this poem puts the speaker into "a place of force" where she is "gagged" and "tortur[ed]." This piece *does* not explicitly paint Hughes as the titular hunter, but it does explicitly describe the effects of a relationship based on one creature dominating another relatively passive creature. Considering traditional heterosexual relationships (such as Christian marriages) emulate dominance hierarchies with the male at the top and the rest of the family falling beneath him, it is easy to believe that this metaphor might have hit close to home for Plath. Thus, if Hughes felt this poem was about him being a constricting force, it makes sense why he would try to keep it hidden.

It is no secret to me and my fellow Swifties why Taylor Swift decided to re-record her older albums. There are delicate intricacies involved in who owns one's artistic work in the music industry, but the quick run-down of the situation is this: these albums are older works that Swift made when she was younger but did not own the legal rights to – that financial blessing fell into the hands of one Scooter Braun. Instead of being given the rights to the music that she wrote and recorded, Swift was forced to either engage in a legal battle that would likely take decades to reach its uncertain conclusion, or to re-record the songs with her own equipment and studio. This is, unfortunately, an extremely common problem in the music industry.

In her song "the lakes" Swift hints at the conflict caused by her desire to own her music with the line "I've come too far to watch some namedropping sleaze/tell me what are my words worth" (Swift). Though Swift was never married to or, to my knowledge, never engaged in a romantic relationship with the individual who did own her music, the situation still provides an interesting parallel with Plath's. Plath was already a celebrated writer by the time of her suicide and to claim that she, or any writer for that matter, didn't depend on others for proofreading, editing, workshopping, etc. would be a misrepresentation of the writing process. That said, Hughes' decision to completely omit pieces and totally alter the order of the collection was a complete misrepresentation of Plath's artistic vision.

Ted Hughes was in the position to judge which of Plath's words were worth publishing, and because she was dead, Plath was not in the

position to fight back. Fortunately for us, Taylor Swift is still alive and willing to re-record the albums that she could not obtain the rights to when she was younger. Just as the original recordings of Swift's older albums are not themselves bad works of art, Ted Hughes' version of *Ariel* is a collection of beautiful poems that gives a glimpse into Plath's mind. As time has passed, however, and the unethical practices involved in their publishing has come to the light, it has become clear that the early original works by Plath and Swift are not entirely authentic works of the artists whose names they claim, rather they are by-products of traditional male dominance hierarchies.

Ariel: The Restored Edition has a plethora of such poems which indicate Plath's unhappiness with her relationship. Ted Hughes' decision to omit certain poems and rearrange the ordering of his version of *Ariel* is one that causes many students of the 21st century, myself included, to look upon him with disdain. Thankfully, Plath's daughter, Frieda, has given us the restored version, a project much more faithful to her mother's artistic vision. Still today, however, it is much too easy for males with any semblance of power to take advantage of female creators and artists. Even outside of pop stars and famous poets, the female artist stifled by traditional male hierarchies is a trope much too commonly seen – we see it in "The Lady" who disappoints her family when she refuses to marry and bear children; also in "The Wife" whose main priority is subservience to her male companion; as well as in "The Mother" who ignores her creative interests to rear children.

It is tempting to make the claim that Plath's life would not have ended so tragically, so early if she had not engaged in a traditional marriage – it might even be true. It might, however, be true that she would've taken her life sooner without the companionship Hughes provided her. All such claims are speculative. What's clear, though, is that Plath's marriage to Ted Hughes came at extreme costs to her mental health and overall well-being. Although Plath's *Ariel* was not restored by herself or in her lifetime, as is the case with Swift's works, these artists are but two examples of a pattern of the visibly constricting influence of the dominant traditional male and we ought to be grateful for the efforts of Frieda Hughes, Taylor Swift, and all female artists worldwide who diligently defend their right and ability to create.

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The Wrong Antagonist; The Story of Namor

Aja Love

We are all familiar with storytelling roles—the protagonist, antagonist, confidant, foil, love interest, and more. While they might not all be main characters with full storylines, they each play a crucial role in moving a story forward. Two cinematic stories that have intrigued me since their release are *Black Panther* (2018) and its sequel, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022). Both Marvel films follow a linear storyline with a beginning, middle, and end, featuring the standard protagonist, T'Challa, and antagonist, (Erik) Killmonger. However, in my opinion, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* introduces us to a character whose perspective can be seen as that of a protagonist despite not being written as one.

Before diving into the second film, let's recap the first one to provide context. *Black Panther* (2018), directed by Ryan Coogler, is an American superhero film based on the Marvel comics of the same name. The story picks up after the events of *Captain America: Civil War* with Prince T'Challa returning home to the hidden, technologically advanced African nation of Wakanda to serve as the new king after his father's death in a terrorist attack. T'Challa soon discovers factions challenging the throne. When two foes conspire to destroy Wakanda, the hero known as *Black Panther* must team up with C.I.A. agent Everett K. Ross and members of the Dora Milaje, Wakandan special forces, to prevent

Wakanda from being dragged into a world war. This standard storyline is crafted into an extraordinary film, beloved by millions for its role in Black culture and significance in cinema.

The passing of Chadwick Boseman in 2020 profoundly impacted the ongoing story of the Black Panther franchise. Without his presence, his character, T'Challa, is still included in the sequel. However, T'Challa dies off-screen from an undisclosed illness, mirroring the sudden and tragic death of Chadwick from colon cancer. The movie continues by following T'Challa's family, especially his sister Shuri. Alongside Shuri, Queen Ramonda, Okoye, and the Dora Milaje fight to protect Wakanda from intervening world powers in the wake of King T'Challa's death. The Wakandans strive to band together with the help of war dog Nakia and Everett Ross to forge a new path for their nation.

Shuri is burdened by the loss of her brother and the responsibilities she has taken on. She supports her mother and nation while assuming a leadership role similar to her late brother's. Conflicts arise when Shuri and her mother are confronted by Namor, who praises Wakanda's pristine environment before addressing the issues in his community stemming from T'Challa's decision to reveal Vibranium to the world. Later in the film, Shuri tragically loses her mother, Queen Ramonda, at the hands of Namor. Shuri faces constant internal conflicts as she navigates her roles as Black Panther and Queen of Wakanda. She becomes the protagonist—the character people can relate to, root for, and see as having valid beliefs and actions.

This brings me to a new perspective on the character Namor. Also known as King Ch'ah Toh Almehen, Namor is a Talokanil mutant who rules the underwater kingdom of Talokan. He is portrayed as the antagonist of the film. However, I have never viewed him this way since first seeing the film. Like Shuri and the previous rulers of Wakanda, Namor has something to fight for—his people. The story is set up to highlight the protagonist's actions as right, but by changing the Namor's storyline, it alters the perspective and dynamic of the narrative.

Namor's storyline begins with him interrupting a heart-to-heart moment between mother and daughter during a fit of accusation and demand. Another scene that portrays Namor as a villain is the Talokan people's attack on Shuri, Okoye, and RiRi on the bridge, believing the young scientist is responsible for the Vibranium detector invasion of their community. The audience is led to see Namor as a thoughtless, unempathic leader. But then, Namor shows the kingdom of Talokan, revealing their welcoming nature and sense of community. The audience finally sees the relatability and need for empathy for Namor and his kingdom.

Before the attack, a scene depicts Namor addressing the people of Talokan about what has happened to one of their own and his plans. The scene shows the ruler and his people in a rage, which is understandable, but it gives the impression of them acting without considering the possibility of a misunderstanding. The scene also shows grief, providing a reason for their actions. If the audience feels more empathy for Namor, it offers a new perspective. Namor could be seen as a deuteragonist—a crucial character with the same stakes as Shuri, affected by the United States' meddling. This is demonstrated in the remainder of the movie through the war between the Talokan and Wakandans. The fight between the rulers ends before either of them dies, with Shuri deciding to let Namor live after considering the bigger picture and the true meaning of carrying the Black Panther's responsibility. Namor yields but still expects help from Wakanda.

Both Talokan and Wakanda are led to believe one thing by the U.S. government, leading to their conflict. This is established when Everett Ross, a U.S. government member, goes against his principles to help Wakanda, the people who saved his life in the previous film. Changing the perspective and storyline positions the U.S. government as the antagonist. By including more empathy towards Namor and expanding his storyline, his troubles unfold a new perspective for the audience, and present him as a protagonist, not an antagonist.

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Need, Not Needy: Understanding the True Needs of Women

Kayla Lucas

Throughout my life, I have taken on many identities and names. I am someone's daughter, sister, friend, wife, and now a mother. With each identity came an ensemble of rules, ideas, and expectations that morphed and latched on to every fiber of my being. However, there was one simple unspoken rule that accompanied all these identities, at least according to societal codes, and that was the necessity to tear away my wants, needs, desires, and thoughts in order to be obedient, doting, selfless, and contained.

When I became engaged to my fiancé, many people would speak to him about his hopes for *our* future, our kids, and our relationship as husband and wife. Of course, my husband would always reply that it is "our future not just mine and she is just as involved in the plans and wants for our life as I am." For this, I am beyond thankful to have a husband who supports me and does not make me feel ashamed or bad for having and expressing my needs, wants, and desires. He encourages me to take "me time," express my needs, and stay true to myself instead of shedding my feathers to fit someone else's expectations. This encouragement fueled my mission to redefine a woman's identity and question the constructed idea of our "needs" within the many roles we embody, inviting a more critical and rhetorical discourse on societal expectations.

As an English major I have read many essays, short stories, poems, and novels about women hiding their wants, needs, and desires to conform to their roles as women, wives, and mothers in a male-dominated society. Many famous pieces of literature and essays are written by men who clearly have no idea what it is like, for a woman, to suppress their identity in everyday life. I had never read an honest and raw piece of writing that truly dove into the loss of identity that women experience until I read "The Crane Wife" by CJ Hauser. Finally, here was a thought- provoking and insightful essay that was honest, personal, and was written by a woman, for women. From Hauser's essay, I felt a connection to myself as a mother, wife, and as a woman today. Her metaphor of the Japanese Folktale of "The Crane Wife" put into words and created a vivid image of what women do to follow the societal expectations that have been seemingly encoded into our DNA. Hauser's tone is honest, conversational, and made me feel that I was sitting down over afternoon tea discussing the growing pain that is conformity. When reading "The Crane Wife," I saw myself, I saw my daughter's future, and was left pondering why are these the expectations for women? From Hauser's essay, I also saw a new way to approach rhetoric and style of writing that was effective, personal, and engaging with a conversational tone.

Hauser speaks to her readers as a friend as she explains her internal struggles to shove down her needs and wants within a relationship by saying, "I need you to know: I hated that I needed more than this from him. There is nothing more humiliating to me than my own desires. Nothing that makes me hate myself more than being burdensome and less than self-sufficient. I did not want to feel like the kind of nagging woman who might exist in a sit-com" (Hauser). This expresses raw vulnerability, honesty, and reality. Being able to express the true loss of identity many women feel is hard; exposing yourself to millions of people who can criticize and judge you is brave. Rather than hold her tongue and brush her struggle for identity under the rug, she lifts it up and sweeps out all the dust and particles of her identity that have been long since hidden, unseen. Hauser's cry of hating herself for having her own desires and hating feeling like a nagging woman from a sit-com shows this struggle of being one's authentic self. If Hauser were to be open and honest with her desires, she would be seen as a needy, nagging, cliché of a woman that society has been painted in sit-coms for years. I can attest to this self-hatred as I too have hated having my own needs and not fitting the false image that as a woman, I should always be content, easy going, and grateful. Why do me and other women have to be grateful and easy going? Society has always handed women the

shit-hand during the poker game of life and yet we are supposed to smile and say, "woe is me." How Eve held her tongue and took the blame in the garden, I will never know; however, I sure could take a guess on how she felt.

When reading Hauser's piece, she describes her suppression of her wants and needs and often describes her experiences that mirrored my own, though there were some, like her identity struggle with her boyfriend/fiancé, that were different from my own relationship. However, this allowed me to see other ways that I have suppressed my identity to conform and please others. Her struggle to express her own identity with her fiancé's mother, for instance, was one I could relate to. Hauser explained her encounter with his mother in a simple three paragraph memory in which she was asked to choose a character from "*Beatrix Potter*" for her Christmas stocking. When she chooses the squirrel, Nutkin, her soon to be mother-in-law, says that the character she chose "was not CJ" but that the mouse in a pink dress and apron was more her. Hauser expresses her confusion and struggles with holding on to her identity by writing, "what she was offering was so nice. She was so nice. I thanked her and felt ungrateful for having wanted a stocking, but not this stocking. Who was I to be choosy? To say that this cordial thing she was offering wasn't a thing I wanted? When I looked at that mouse with her broom, I wondered which one of us was wrong about who I was" (Hauser). This simple situation mirrored my own when at a secret Santa gift exchange with my fiancé's family, I was asked to write down three things I would want for Christmas. When I was given my gift of gloves that were too small and a set of measuring cups and cooking utensils, I just stared at the items. My soon-to-be mother-in-law later said she was my secret Santa and that the items I listed did not seem like items I would need or want, so she chose these that I could put to effective use. Hauser's experience with the mouse stocking mirrored a significant experience of my own.

Hauser connects her own self-erasure to that of the Japanese Folktale, "The Crane Wife" in which every night a female crane plucks all of her feathers out so that the male she loves will love her and not see that she is indeed a crane for she knows he will not love her or want to be with her if he knew. In connection with my own experience, I had never thought of my submission of my values, ideas, and needs as plucking away pieces of myself so others would find me tolerable. Suddenly, while reading Hauser's essay, I saw myself as "The Crane Wife" and saw the scars and marks upon my own flesh from the constant plucking of my own feathers. "The Crane Wife" created a strong visual as well as mirrored metaphor for what I had been experiencing my whole life

and thus I created a stronger connection to her words. Suddenly, I saw many women carrying around their own scars from their own plucking. In a world where I had seen very few actual cranes, suddenly I was surrounded and even saw one in the mirror every day.

Navigating a male-dominated world as a woman is an internal battle that can take a significant toll on mental health. Hauser's essay, though written in 2019, is still relevant today as some of the most well-known women, like Taylor Swift, still struggle with establishing their identity as women and not succumbing to societal pressures and expectations. Somehow, Swift makes men uncomfortable when she is shown on TV during a football game, and society puts pressure on her to be a "good girl," to stay silent and keep her political opinions and views to herself.

Hauser does a fantastic job within her essay to really show the internal struggle to believe in and stand true to oneself. Women are made to believe that when they take on a new role, whether that be a wife or mother, they are to sacrifice parts or all of themselves for others. Women are to put aside their hopes, dreams, needs, desires, and be the support, reason, selfless, obedient person who tends to everyone else's needs above all else. If a woman does chase or express their needs, hopes, desires, or take some "self-care time," they are seen as selfish and made to feel ashamed. Hauser expresses her our shame she felt as a result of admitting that she did in fact have needs, saying: "Even now I hear the words shameful: Thirsty. Needy. The worst things a woman can be. Some days I still tell myself to take what is offered, because if it isn't enough, it is I who wants too much. I am ashamed to be writing about this instead of writing about the whooping cranes, or literal famines, or any of the truer needs of the world" (Hauser).

From this simple honest thought, Hauser allows the reader into her thoughts while also raising an honest question--why are women conditioned to feel shame when taking time for themselves or for admitting they want more? In this case, Hauser's need is the need for companionship, understanding, reassurance, and the need to feel loved and seen. Hauser expresses her guilt for seeing her needs as important, even though she has every right to feel this way and yet she still feels guilt. If men can want more and express their desire for more adventure, money, love, freedom and be called ambitious, why can women not be as well? Hauser also expresses her internal thoughts on this as well. Hauser writes: "I had arrived in my thirties believing that to need things from others made you weak. I think this is true for lots of people, but I think it is especially true for women. When men desire things, they are 'passionate.' When they feel they have not received something they need they are 'deprived,' or even 'emasculated,' and given permission for all

sorts of behavior. But when a woman needs, she is *needy*. She is meant to contain within her own self everything necessary to be happy" (Hauser). Sadly, Hauser shows with her honest opinion, that even today women carry and fall on the double ended sword of destruction and are damned either way.

As women every day we put on our masks and instantly we are *Wonder Women* able to do anything and everything without fear or worry to ourselves. We are the providers, nurturers, mothers, wives, daughters, and emotional support for our children and families. However, this is far from true. Like children, we are great at playing pretend and know that inside we are fighting to free our own emotions, fears, and frustrations of these roles that were imprinted upon us at birth. Rather than suppress these pent-up feelings and expectations, why not openly discuss them? When life is overwhelming and I have reached my breaking point, I sit down with my husband and say, "I am frustrated about this," or "I am upset because of," exposing my innermost thoughts, ripping off my *Wonder Woman* mask and showing my inner identity, that of vulnerability. Some say that vulnerability is a sign of weakness and many men and even my own family would agree with this, but I argue that vulnerability is a strength rather than a weakness. Why does it make someone weak to show their feelings and needs to another? Are we not all human beings who have feelings and needs? When a baby cries because they need the comfort of their mother or father, do we then see the baby as weak? When my daughter cries because she is frustrated that she cannot correctly write the letter "e," am I supposed to see her expression of frustration as weakness? We are all human beings who are born to feel, and those feelings often pour into breathtaking art, music, literature, human rights, and so on. Why then I ask should women be made to feel ashamed of expressing our own feelings to please others? Can women's feelings, ideas, and needs be just as, if not more, breathtaking? For centuries women have taken the backseat and stood as muses for society and men. It is time to let a century's worth of ideas, emotions, and thoughts take center stage.

In Virginia Woolf's essay, *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf expresses the suppression of women's emotions, thoughts, and needs in detail. Woolf states that women did not have a room of their own to be expressive in writing and in general as "women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do…" (Woolf 67). Woolf here acknowledges that women too share the same

feelings and need of expression that men do, however they are not granted the same freedom or opportunity due to the society codes placed on women. Woolf later adds that women: "... suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags" (Woolf 67). It is of no matter for men and society to condemn a woman for wanting to learn and or do more that is deemed necessary for her sex. Ought women not to challenge themselves and express themselves the same as their male counterparts? Woolf was right when she said that women need a "room of one's own" to express themselves, whether that be a physical or emotional space to express themselves, their fears, thoughts, frustrations, and to cast out the weight of expectations that drapes around their shoulders. Woolf emphasizes the need for women to have a space where they can freely express their true selves and embrace who they are and aspire to be. They need a safe space to express themselves freely without guilt, a space where women talk freely about their frustrations, wants, ideas, thoughts and feel seen and heard, not dismissed for being needy and naggy. If a woman does not have a room of her own, she will go mad and kill a part of herself little by little until there is nothing of her true self remaining.

Now I ask, what would a world be like if every woman did have a room of their own and were able to express themselves rather than be suppressed? The fiction piece, "A Few Normal Things That Happen A lot," by Gwen E. Kirby shows that women would be confident, powerful, and entitled to own their feelings and actions. In one section of the fiction piece, Kirby shows a powerful, free woman in the form of a were-wolf woman saying,

> "Werewolf-woman has never before loved being in her body, but now she lets her fur out whenever she is home. She's at her most powerful when she's naked. Sometimes, late at night, she stands in the backyard and howls not because she is sad but because her lungs are strong, and it is a joy to turn air into sound. Her husband sees how happy she is, and he asks her to scratch him, turn him, too. She wants to want to. She tries to explain to him that this is kind of her thing, that she needs this for herself. What she knows but can't find the courage to say is that she needs it to not be for him. He says he understands, and she knows he'll never quite forgive her." (Kirby)

Here, Kirby shows a woman who does not need to suppress her feelings, but rather a woman who can state what she needs without feeling ashamed or belittled in doing so by a man.

As a woman living in 2025, I can say not much has changed since Virginia Woolf wrote her famous book-length essay, *A Room of One's Own*, nor since 2019 when Hauser wrote her essay, "The Crane Wife." But, what I can tell you has changed is me and the way I view myself as a woman. I do not suppress my emotions to fit the demure, obedient, woman that my mother and grandmothers did before me. Rather, I express my frustrations and emotions to my husband and encourage my daughters to do the same.

I also am not afraid to make my needs known. I need to be a loving mother and wife, but to also receive the same love in return. I need to have my voice heard and feelings understood. I need reassurance and equal partnership from my husband. I need to have a quiet couple of hours to myself where I can focus on and check in with myself to make sure I am okay. I need to live my life to my expectations, not those laid out for me. I need to be a woman and be told you are doing a kick-ass job at it. I need to teach my daughters to express themselves without shame or guilt to help and make them strong and liberated women.

I allow my daughters to have a room of their own where they can be their authentic true selves without worry of societal pressures and expectations. A room where they do not have to be *Wonder Woman* just simply Makena and Reagan. A room where their voices are heard, their needs are met, and the chains of societal expectations are in shambles on the ground beneath their feet, while the cool wind of liberation flows through their golden blonde hair. I hope more women find their own rooms where they can be themselves and own their desires and needs and not pluck away the unique feathers that make them original.

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An Analysis of Billie Eilish's Album *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*

Skylar Martin

Billie Eilish's album *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* released in 2019, marks a significant milestone in the artist's career. Even as a debut album, it won prestigious awards such as "Album of The Year" and "Best Selling Album." As of this year, Eilish's freshman album has reached diamond status, with 840,000 units being sold. The album itself is a masterful blend of various genres, showcasing Eilish's versatility as an artist and her unique approach to music production. The album rose to popularity due to its thematic topics such as mental health, identity, and the human experience. Billie Eilish's album When *We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* is a masterpiece that defies categorization. The album is a blend of genres such as pop, R&B, hip hop, and electronica that is blended with Eilish's signature moody sound. *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* is a musical work that defines a period of Eilish's teenage years and therefore is an album of a generation.

One of the most striking aspects of the album is Eilish's lyrical honesty. She sings openly about her struggles with depression, anxiety, and self-harm. In the song "Bury a Friend," she sings about feeling like she's drowning in her own thoughts and fears. In "Ilomilo," she sings about feeling lost and alone, trying to find someone to comfort her. In "Bad Guy," she sings about her desire to be accepted for who she is as a

woman, which does not align with society's idea of femininity.

Billie Eilishs "Bury a Friend" is the 10th track on the album. The song begins with the chorus "What do you want from me? Why don't you run from me? What are you wondering? What do you know? Why aren't you scared of me? Why do you care for me? When we all fall asleep, where do we go?" From the first chorus, it is evident that Eilish is questioning the meaning of her life and what the people around her gain from her presence and fame. When asked about the chorus Billie stated, "'Bury A Friend' is literally from the perspective of the monster under my bed. If you put yourself in that mindset, what is this creature doing or feeling? . . . I also confess that I'm this monster because I'm my own worst enemy. . . . I might be the monster under your bed too."

By comparing herself to a monster, listeners can understand how the singer conceptualizes herself. By saying this, she admits to being her own worst enemy. She repeats throughout the song the lines, "I want to end me." In this line, Eilish is alluding to her own suicide. She is struggling with this internal monster that she has within her. "Bury A Friend" is a vulnerable song because it reveals the internal struggles most artists are too afraid to voice through music.

Another impactful song on the album is track 12 titled "ilomilo". The inspiration behind "ilomilo" comes from a video game Eilish played in her youth. The idea behind the game ilomilo is two characters, ilo and milo, fight obstacles to finally meet each other. When asked about the inspiration Eilish stated, "[ilomilo] It's this sort of anti-gravity world where there's all these little blocks and they start apart from each other. The idea is you just get to each other and when they get to each other they just hug, there's no prize. So the whole idea of the game is just losing the person you love and then finding them again" (StrifeMag). The principle behind "ilomilo" is two people finding each other through a course of life obstacles. The lyrics, "Remember not to get too close to stars, they're never gonna give you love like ours" show homage to the game and its setting in space. Eilish is telling her lover not to get too close to 'shiny' people who live in luxury because they will never love them as deeply as she can. "Ilomilo" is one of the more underrated songs on the album. However, its lyrics show Eilish's talent and artistry in songwriting. "ilomilo" is a relatable song because it deals with love, loss, and loneliness, which many people of the younger generation have experienced. Eilish noted the song was written about a time when she felt lonely and isolated. She felt like she was the only one who understood what she was going through, and she longed for someone to connect with. "ilomilo" offers a message of hope that even when you feel alone, there are always people who can understand and relate to you.

"Bad Guy" is another notable song to consider when discussing the album. "Bad Guy" remains one of Eilish's most popular songs from the album. The song promotes individuality as Billie explores womanhood through her eyes. Since her rise to fame, Eilish has faced criticism for her masculine fashions. "Bad Guy" is Billie's response to the criticism she has faced while in the spotlight. When asked about the hit song she stated, "It's about a lot of things, but I think the actual idea for this song was people that have to tell everybody that they are a certain way all the time, they're not that certain way …It's basically just making fun of everyone and their personas of themselves, and even mine" (Houghton). The main goal of the song "Bad Guy" is to expose the toxicity of the media and to poke fun at people who struggle with authenticity. "Bad Guy" was an instant hit, reaching number one on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in the United States and many other countries. The song has been praised for its catchy melody, dark lyrics, and Eilish's unique but soft vocal delivery. The song promotes individuality as Eilish explores womanhood through her eyes. Eilish has been outspoken about her desire to break down traditional gender roles, and "Bad Guy" is a perfect example of this. In the song, Eilish sings about being a "bad guy," but she does so in a way that is both playful and empowering. She is not afraid to be herself, even if it means defying expectations. This idea is shown through the chorus with the lyrics "So you're a tough guy / Like it really rough guy / Just can't get enough guy / Chest always so puffed guy / I'm that bad type / Make your mama sad type / Make your girlfriend mad type / Might seduce your dad type / I'm the bad guy, duh." Eilish does a wonderful job at capturing her frustration with societal structure while making a joke of the media and its criticism of her masculinity as a woman. "Bad Guy" is a hit pop song that is relatable to many women (and men) who have felt the pressures of society, making it another successful song.

Eilish's lyrics are not only raw and personal, but they are also incredibly relatable. Her songs have struck a chord with listeners of all ages who find comfort in her song writing. In addition to her lyrics, Eilish's production is also innovative and boundary-pushing. She uses a variety of unconventional sounds and instruments in order to create a unique and immersive listening experience. The album is full of unexpected twists and turns that keep listeners immersed. The album is a testament of Eilish's talent and vision and has continued to inspire and resonate with listeners for years to come. Eilish's distinct sound, characterized by whispering vocals, haunting melodies, and dark yet catchy beats, sets her apart in the music industry.

What makes *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* so unique is the album's production, which is primarily handled by Eilish's brother, Finneas O'Connell. The production of the album showcases a minimalist yet sophisticated approach. The use of unique sounds, unconventional beats, and carefully crafted lyrics contributes to the album's distinctiveness.

Lyrically, the album delves into Eilish's struggles with fame, self-discovery, and mental health. Tracks like "Bad Guy" unpack the toxicity of society and the media while "Bury a Friend" explores the dark side of Eilish's psyche. The album serves as an introspective look into the artist's mind, inviting listeners to connect with her vulnerability. The album's title itself prompts reflection on the mysteries of life and the unknown. This overarching theme is reinforced by tracks like "All the Good Girls Go to Hell" and "When the Party's Over," where Eilish grapples with existential questions and the consequences of human actions.

When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go? not only solidified Billie Eilish's position in the music industry but also demonstrated her ability to push creative boundaries. The album's success lies in its ability to resonate with a broad audience while maintaining a sense of authenticity. Eilish's willingness to bring uncomfortable topics to the surface and experiment with her sound makes this album significant in contemporary music. The album is a genre-bending work that defies the rules of the music industry. Eilish's unique sound is truly mesmerizing all on its own.

When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go? is a significant album in contemporary music. It is an album that has resonated with many generations and it has helped to create a new era of pop music. Eilish's unique sound and her willingness to confront topics most musicians wouldn't dare to touch have made her a role model for young people everywhere. She is a true trailblazer in the industry and her music is sure to continue to inspire for years to come. When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go? is an album that will remain prevalent for generations.

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Avatar: The Last Airbender and the Elements of Great Female Characters

Henry Mechlem

Avatar: The Last Airbender is a 2005 Nickelodeon animated series created by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. It has received extensive praise by critics, a dedicated fanbase, and several accolades including a primetime Emmy. The series is lauded for its creative worldbuilding, exploration of adult themes such as war and genocide, and its compelling characters. Despite being a series aimed primarily at children, *Avatar's* characters and their arcs have a degree of nuance that exceeds those of many adult oriented programs.

They also succeed at subverting traditional gender paradigms that have long plagued the media industry; a peer-reviewed study analyzed the behavioral traits of the show's characters and found that it "supports theories of third-wave feminism… through the portrayal of a diverse set of *genderbending* characters of both sexes who diverge from the gender dichotomy" (Jackson 2). *Avatar's* female characters are no exception. They are subversive and well-crafted characters that serve as model examples contemporary works could learn from.

Avatar's central story revolves around Aang, who after running away from his responsibilities as the peace-keeping Avatar, became frozen in an iceberg for 100 years. He is awakened by Southern Water Tribe siblings, Katara and Sokka, and is horrified to learn that the militaristic Fire Nation has waged war against the other nations in his absence.

Aang comes to form deep relationships with both siblings, especially Katara. She helps guide Aang through his emotional struggles throughout the story, and while not the main protagonist, she is written in a way that makes her a female character support the male lead while having a complex history, goals, and motivations of her own.

Katara is a character that falls more in line with traditional notions of femininity; however, she avoids the stereotype of the passive "bystander" female character, not through overtly masculine traits but instead through expressing her femininity unapologetically. She is compassionate and caring, but also not afraid to stand her ground as shown in her very first scene. She is first introduced with her brother Sokka berating her for the use of the show's elemental magic system, aka "bending", and making a sexist remark. Katara responds by fiercely calling her brother out for his bigoted behavior, with her emotion triggering the accidental use of waterbending powerful enough to shatter an iceberg.

Modern writers often refrain from giving their female characters moments of clear-cut emotion like Katara's introduction. Contemporary works wish to avoid the stereotype of female characters being "overly emotional" in comparison to "calm and rational" male characters. But what elevates *Avatar* is that it has the sense to present this moment of Katara's rage as a justified and valid response. It establishes that she was born in a world with sexist views and responds accordingly. This is also not something she does in the face of all conflict; throughout the course of the series, Katara shows the capability for both moments of calm and thoughtful deliberation as well as outbursts of emotion.

After meeting Aang, Katara explains that her mother died protecting her during a Fire Nation raid. From that point, she was forced to take on a "motherly" role for her family, acting as a caretaker and maturing far quicker than others her age. While she enjoys supporting those she loves, the audience also learns that deep down she harbors resentment for her lost innocence and childhood. This is important as the audience gets to see her not as the stock love interest for the protagonist, but as a multifaceted character who is pressured by challenges unique to her experience (Imthiyaz).

Katara is also not a character without flaws. Her sense of justice often leads her into making dangerous mistakes, such as charging headfirst into an uneven battle. Her anger is not always righteous; Katara's short temper is sometimes provoked by petty disagreements. She is also capable of holding long-standing grudges, particularly against those who run against her stringent moral code. These elements do not make her a bad character; they elevate her as a human being who is flawed like any other, and make her strengths stand out more as a result.

Realistic characters like Katara which challenge conventional gender paradigms are important not only for media, but especially for media directed at children. In the face of a persisting belief that children's media only serves the function of entertainment, studies suggest that children's media fundamentally shapes their perception of themselves and society, especially concerning gender roles and stereotypes (Saman 17). Using the perspective of entertainment both reflecting and shaping our views of what is societally acceptable in terms of gender, we can begin to examine the approach that concurrent media takes in expanding and challenging the typical gender norms that have long dominated the entertainment industry.

A modern antidote to the dilemma of women and girl's constricted roles in fiction is the archetype of the "strong female character." While this archetype is flexible, it typically revolves around a female character who exhibits traits that have been traditionally associated with male characters- resilience, intelligence, self-sufficiency, and strength. This trend has shown a degree of success, with studies showing that audiences generally have positive views of female characters who possess these attributes (Oppenheimer et al.).

In a vacuum, the notion of strong female characters is a welcome challenge to the norm. By showing that they are just as capable as their male counterparts, women and girls can see themselves represented far more positively than in past media. However, despite this effort's noble intentions, some of the characters it produces miss the key factors which make for quality representation.

A high-profile example of the "strong female character" in modern media is the character of Rey from the recent *Star Wars* sequel trilogy. Feminist scholars praise Rey, citing her role at the helm of the story in comparison to preceding *Star Wars* heroines who were often made to be "damsels in distress" and less impactful in the overall narrative (Meneses et al. 5). Rey is strong-willed, fierce, and possesses more independence and agency than Princess Leia in the original movies.

However, while Rey might be a step in the right direction, her character has major sore spots that are emblematic of progressive media's attempts at balancing the scales of gender--the narrative gifting of solutions, the erasure of meaningful character struggle, and the overemphasis of physical strength as a virtue.

In the original trilogy, the main protagonist Luke Skywalker had to endure weeks of training to master the Force, while Rey is shown to be naturally talented from the onset. From the first movie she is also shown to be capable in combat, gifted with technology, and an excellent pilot (Adames). She easily overpowers enemies with more experience and

essentially doesn't encounter any obstacles she can't overcome with her innate strength.

This would not be an issue if the mental and emotional aspects of Rey's character were well fleshed out to balance her raw talent. Rey *does* have an arc of defining herself beyond her past and finding meaning in her found family; however, this aspect of her personality takes a backseat in the overall narrative. She grows even more adept in her natural talent with the Force, acquiring a growing set of fearsome abilities with little time given to exploring her mindset as a character. This is in stark contrast to Luke, who along with vanquishing the Empire, had to grapple with his ties to the dark side of the force, in both himself and his father.

While on the surface Rey's character might seem empowering, it fundamentally goes against what makes characters like Luke so compelling. A character's struggle is why the audience wants to root for them. Furthermore, Rey's situation calls into question why it is that female characters cannot be "empowered" without being both masculinized and defanged of personal depth.

In comparison to Rey, Katara's equivalent to the Force- her waterbending skills- are not a superpower that exists to solve all her problems, but rather a narrative manifestation of her inner strength and character progression. As waterbending is a martial art with ties to the spiritual and mental state of its user, Katara's physical power comes as a result of her fortitude and desire for growth. She learns new techniques and hones her skills alongside Aang, having her own goal of becoming a waterbending master.

Katara shows us that she is much more than just her physical abilities, that it is possible to be strong while retaining femininity. But the archetype of the strong female character often seeks to "empower" female characters by masculinizing them both physically and emotionally (Lavenia). This is not inherently problematic, as women with more masculine traits exist and also deserve representation. However, these characters are often half-baked in comparison to the boys and men they are emulating.

Season 2 of *Avatar* sees the introduction of Toph Beifong, Aang's earthbending teacher and Katara's polar opposite. Toph is aggressive, stubborn, and far less mature than Katara, happily playing the role of the team's muscle. She is also incredibly powerful, proclaiming herself to be the strongest earthbender in the world.

But what makes Toph another phenomenal female character is that like Katara, she also carries hidden depth. Toph is underestimated by others on account of her blindness, most crucially her parents, who

raised her under a controlling household that restricted her every waking moment. Wanting to defy her parents' perception of her as a helpless and sensitive blind girl, Toph leaves home to join Aang on his journey.

Toph's upbringing encapsulates the idea of infantilization in feminist theory. Infantilization is the forcing of submissive and "youthful" ideals onto women and girls, such as child-like innocence, dependence, and appearance. It assumes that they are "too weak" to handle the pressures of the world and must rely on a parental/masculine figure to keep them safe. Women with disabilities are even more likely to be victims of infantilization, being subject to microaggressions and the persisting belief that they are always the receivers of help and never able to offer strength of their own (Olkin et al. 5).

Toph's main character arc centers on a self-imposed overcorrection for her controlled childhood. To escape her past of being seen as completely dependent, she strives for complete and uncompromising independence, pushing away the help offered by others. She eventually comes to learn that there is nothing wrong with receiving support from those who care about her, and while initially hostile towards Katara, the two go on to forge a bond of mutual support and respect.

Katara and Toph both demonstrate how the strongest female characters are elevated first and foremost by being actual characters, rather than less interesting males. Katara shows us that it is possible to be both conventionally feminine and robust in conviction, to be supportive of the men in her life while also having an identity and goals of her own. Toph shows us that people are complex, and not beholden to preconceived notions. A blind woman can be powerful, masculine, and self-sufficient without being emotionally distant to those around her.

Ironically, media's attempt to curb the infantilization of female characters through superficial strength removes their agency in a roundabout way. If writers don't trust their female characters to withstand the same hardships as males, they might instead provide them with narrative cushions. They don't make real choices or have real motivations; they've already saved the day with their amazing superpower gifted to them by the writers.

The women and girls watching might wish that they too had this power, but they don't. They exist in the real world, one that increasingly wants to choose everything for them. They aren't able to use the Force to crush the patriarchal systems that exert enormous pressure over their minds and bodies. Instead, they have to fight and struggle for their voices to be heard and for lasting change to occur.

This is why proper representation matters. Women and girls should have strong role models, but they should also be able to relate to them.

An important note of clarification is that female characters do not need to have their struggles be related to sexism for this to be achieved; however, so long as gender inequality exists, it is important for these issues to be put to the screen and adequately challenged.

In 2024, Netflix released its live-action remake of the original *Avatar* series, retelling the events of season 1 in an eight-episode run. Rather than being a shot-for-shot remake, it made significant alterations to the story and its characters. Regrettably, Katara and other female characters were in the firing line, and they did not change for the better.

No longer does Katara free Aang with an emotionally fueled display of her waterbending potential or challenge her brother's sexism as it has been removed entirely. She is not the impassioned and opinionated Katara that fans loved; she is quiet and subdued. She doesn't grow her waterbending skills through hard work and dedication; a single moment spent training with Aang seems to graduate her to master level.

While Toph has not yet made an appearance in Netflix's *Avatar*, another casualty of the changes is Suki, a minor character who kickstarts Sokka's arc of humbling himself and becoming a true leader. In the original series, she is a competent and well-studied fighter for the Kyoshi Warriors with a playful side who meets Sokka by defeating him in a fight. He is humiliated and begrudging toward Suki at first, but desperate to become strong like her, he apologizes and asks to be trained in their ways. Suki obliges and the two begin training together, and Sokka learns to see her as both a girl and a warrior.

But in the remake, Sokka's sexism has been wiped from his character entirely for being "iffy" according to the writers, despite it being a necessary element to his growth (Pollaco). Coinciding with this, Suki has been downgraded into a mostly mute, socially maladjusted recluse who falls in love with Sokka the moment she sees him. She has been reduced to nothing more than a pretty training dummy for Sokka who doesn't challenge his views in any meaningful way.

What both these new renditions of the old characters have in common is that they are emblematic of a terribly misguided attempt at feminism. Not wanting Katara to appear "overly emotional" the writers stripped her character of everything that made it special. To give Suki more "agency" Sokka's sexism is removed and she is the one to pursue his company, but in doing so she becomes a prop to boost Sokka's physical abilities and nothing more.

If writers are to create more positive female role models like the ones seen in the original *Avatar*, then they must learn the fundamentals of what quality representation actually looks like. Both male or female role models should be written like real people- flawed, multifaceted, and

not bound by restrictive gender stereotypes. Women must be written to be more than hollow imitations of men- they should reflect the real-world experiences of those who are watching and inspire not through superficial strength but by the quality of their character.

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"This is my last chance to make people love me again": Celebrating Kate Purdy's Work On *BoJack Horseman*

Kariana Wyatt

"Downer Ending"

Kate Purdy, TV writer and producer, is known primarily for her work during the six-season run of the Netflix adult animated series *BoJack Horseman*. With her no-holds-barred approach and fierceness, Purdy uses the cartoon to address topics like trauma, existentialism, and drug abuse. Even though her writing is unapologetically cutthroat, she handles the emotionally powerful and more often than not controversial subjects she explores with respect and grace, molding them into stories that are as revelatory as they are tastefully entertaining.

In 2014, Purdy wrote "Down Ending," the eleventh episode of the first season of *BoJack Horseman*. The episode follows the titular horse as he grapples with the idea that people don't love him for the reasons he assumes. His ghostwriter, Diane Nguyen, leaks a sample of his upcoming memoir, *One Trick Pony*, and it quickly garners great media reception. BoJack's fans enjoy this sneak peek of *One Trick Pony* because, in it, Diane paints her subject in all his imperfect glory, but BoJack would much rather be idolized for his infallibility. Diane explains to him that the reason people love this version of the memoir is because they see

themselves in his crooked portrait and relish the opportunity to learn about him outside of his celebrity and, in typical BoJack fashion, he dismisses her. "This is my last chance to make people love me again," he says, "If this goes out, everybody's gonna see the real me. Now, I spend a lot of time with the real me, and believe me, nobody's gonna love that guy."

In an attempt to avoid self-reflection, acceptance, and emotional growth, BoJack — accompanied by his former co-star, Sarah Lynn, and his current roommate, Todd Chavez — gets high on a variety of pills at once and tries to write his own version of *One Trick Pony* within one week in hopes of deifying himself in the public eye.

Throughout the episode, Kate Purdy implements surreal imagery to demonstrate BoJack's warped perception of himself and his life, especially during a sequence in which he is so inebriated that he cannot differentiate his present from his past or future, which leads to a series of distorting scenes that leave viewers as dizzy and out of control as he is. Purdy even works to distort the audience's own perspective of BoJack, showing how blatantly selfish he is for one of the first times in the show. At this point in the series, while BoJack has definitely made poor decisions, he appears to be just a washed-up actor who struggles with no longer being famous; "Downer Ending" exhibits how brightly this issue burns at his core and how his obsession with public reception prevents him from developing as a person, forming healthy relationships, and practicing empathy.

While Purdy has written and produced several different episodes of *BoJack Horseman*, as well as worked on shows like *Undone*, *Cougar Town*, and *The McCarthys*, "Downer Ending" is a piece that is especially emblematic of her writing style and showcases her importance and influence on its own. As of 2025, on IMDb, "Downer Ending" has a 9.1/10 out of approximately 8,400 reviewers, deeming it the highest-rated episode of the show's first season. The episode demonstrates the power of transparency when it comes to writing about self-loathing, addiction, and untouched trauma. It is wholly unproductive to sugar-coat issues regarding mental health; oftentimes, it is best to have a deeply personal, uncomfortable, and maybe even aggressive approach. "Downer Ending" is impactful, elucidating, and necessary to its viewers because Purdy isn't looking to hold anyone's hand. She doesn't stroke your hair and try to soothe you. She's honest, mean, and in your face.

The Rhetorical Triangle

An outstanding quality of "Downer Ending" is how the episode is generally entertaining and appeals to a broad audience but does not

squander its rhetorical merit in favor of that entertainment and appeal. Kate Purdy's understanding of the rhetorical triangle — ethos, pathos, and logos — is adhered to beautifully while simultaneously proven malleable and bent into various shapes and sizes.

The ethos of the episode is never stated directly, but when taking Kate Purdy's personal history into consideration, it is absolutely present. Ostensibly (and understandably), Purdy is a private woman, as there is little information available to the public in terms of her personal life. According to her Wikipedia page, however, "in 2012, Purdy became depressed and suffered anxiety whilst working as a writer on the *Cougar Town* television series." Given Purdy's eloquence when displaying depression and anxiety in "Downer Ending," it is sadly unsurprising that she has endured these issues herself. While no one deserves to undergo depression or anxiety, the fact that Kate understands them so intimately makes BoJack's ultimate breakdown a disturbingly real experience for the audience and a powerful achievement for herself.

The logos of "Downer Ending" is present throughout its storyline even though it's told in the same chaotic, gonzo manner most episodes of *BoJack Horseman* are written. Logically, BoJack cannot write a memoir if he isn't being honest about himself, especially in the time frame he's been given. In that same vein, BoJack's attempts to force people to like him by writing a book in which he falsifies his past and depicts himself as far less self-centered than he truly is.

The appeals to pathos in "Downer Ending" are rooted deeply in self-loathing. Pathos refers to appeals that are emotional and relate to audience members' lives, beliefs, values, fears, etc. and it does not always have to be nice. As previously discussed, "Downer Ending" is brutal. Kate Purdy is ruthless in her exposition of BoJack's insecurities. While he boasts an army of fans who love him for his work as an actor, he feels he doesn't have any friends or family members who love him for who he is. In all actuality though, he has done very little to prove himself worthy of the immense affection he craves because he is selfish, manipulative, and lazy and does nothing to break these flaws.

While it is not necessarily included in the rhetorical triangle, kairos is also an important element of "Downer Ending." Let's talk about it and call this a rhetorical square. In terms of kairos, the time in which "Downer Ending" was written is significant. In this day and age, many children, teens, and young adults are enamored with the lives of celebrities of all sorts, whether they be movie stars, singers, or even social media influencers. It is astronomically important that we recognize these celebrities as people. In 2014, with Kim Kardashian and Kanye West getting married, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon premiering, and

Instagram usage beginning to skyrocket, the idea of celebrity worship was blossoming. Choosing to write "Downer Ending" in the midst of all of this phenomena was purposeful on Purdy's part and helps to quell celebrity devotion and obsession.

Form, Content, and Genre

Diving deeper into this rhetorical analysis of "Downer Ending," let's delve into how Kate Purdy communicates its messages technically. "Downer Ending" is an episode of BoJack Horseman, which is an animated series. Some viewers may see BoJack Horseman advertised as a drama and assume that, because the show is a cartoon, the drama genre would not be written realistically or engagingly. Kate Purdy takes this expectation and turns it on its head, allowing the cartoon medium to empower her messages in a way that the live-action medium cannot always manage.

In "Downer Ending," during the scenes in which BoJack is hallucinating, Purdy uses the agency of animation to exemplify the bizarreness and surrealism that may occur in someone's head under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs. Throughout BoJack's drug-induced delirium, he and his surroundings are animated in a variety of unusual, dreamlike manners: Diane morphs into a horrific, bulging, Junji-Ito-esque creature; BoJack sees his friends animated similarly to Peanuts characters; BoJack loses his outlines, his skin becomes the texture of paint, and parts of his body start dissolving into space, etc. Even with the aid of CGI, a live-action show could not illustrate such simultaneously frightening and strange instances as effectively as an animated show. Purdy's decision to contort this art form not only serves as a marvelous visual spectacle, it also supports the underlying themes of "Downer Ending," as it showcases the mind-rattling effects of drug abuse and how, no matter how many pills BoJack takes, he doesn't feel better about himself or his life.

Social Functions and Goals

Diving a little deeper into this rhetorical analysis of "Downer Ending," let's take a look at James Herrick's "An Overview of Rhetoric," an essay in which Herrick shares the many goals successful rhetoric can achieve and how its functions operate. One such function Herrick lists are that "rhetoric assists advocacy". Under the section dedicated to this function, Herrick writes "the art of rhetoric is the method by which we advocate ideas we believe to be important. Rhetoric gives our private ideas a public voice, thus directing attention to them" (Herrick 17).

The rhetoric of "Downer Ending" fits this objective, because,

in writing it, Kate Purdy advocates against the idea that one can make others like them without first reflecting upon and improving oneself. Likely using her own personal experiences with anxiety and depression, she writes this story of a man desperate for people to love him to publicly demonstrate how, although the fact that self-loathing is, unfortunately, normal, it is important for people to learn to love themselves and mature before seeking love, validation, and acceptance from others.

Additionally, Kate Purdy also advocates against drug abuse. Throughout the episode, she is respectful and does not paint any of the characters who use drugs in a negative light *because* they use drugs; she understands that they are downtrodden and desperate to find meaning in their lives but are still very much human. At the same time, Kate Purdy does not shy away from the fact that BoJack and his friends are suffering terrible mental repercussions as a result of taking pills and makes it very clear that their actions should not be mirrored.

Intertextuality

Diving even deeper into this rhetorical analysis of "Downer Ending," it's now time to peruse Charles Bazerman's "Intertextuality: How Texts Rely on Other Texts," a piece in which Bazerman explores and analyzes the uses of intertextuality, A.K.A. "the relation each text has to the texts surrounding it" (Bazerman 84).

Early on in *BoJack Horseman*, as well as in the end credits of nearly every episode, it is established that BoJack became famous in the 1990s after becoming the star of the hit TV series *Horsin' Around*. *Horsin' Around* follows the story of an unnamed protagonist played by BoJack as he raises three human orphans on his own. Does this sound maybe just a tiny bit familiar? While the premise of *Horsin' Around* is absurd, it's undeniable that the show is reminiscent of many real-world 90s sitcoms, particularly *Full House*. BoJack's character, who is often vaguely referred to as "the horse from *Horsin' Around*," is even a single dad whose personality bears a striking resemblance to that of Danny Tanner, who is, arguably, television's most recognizable sitcom father.

During a segment of BoJack's extensive, pill-induced trip, he envisions an illusion in which he and two of his co-stars – his onset children – are performing an episode of *Horsin' Around* together. One of the actresses, Sarah Lynn, who acts as BoJack's three-year-old adopted daughter, says her line to BoJack. He doesn't hear her, so she repeats it and, when she repeats it, she suddenly transforms into her thirty-year-old old, present-day self. When *Horsin' Around* first started, Sarah Lynn was extremely young, innocent, shy, and sweet. At age thirty, due to

the many pressures that come with immense fame, she is now a drug addict who has difficulties forming healthy relationships. This change is incredibly frightening for the audience, because it mirrors the effects *Full House* had on the Olson twins, as well as other child actors who were exploited and abused, like Lindsay Lohan, Amanda Bynes, and Drew Barrymore.

A Few Final Thoughts

It's no secret that women often feel the need to soften the blow when expressing their inner thoughts and feelings. More often than not, when a woman is asked how she's doing, she will respond with a vague "I'm fine" to ensure the person asking won't be uncomfortable or feel like they have to help her sort out her issues. Similarly, when a woman is hurt by someone in one way or another, it is not uncommon for her to respond to her situation with an even more doubtful "*it's* fine."

Kate Purdy's unabashed methods of writing about such frightening, sometimes controversial, and always deeply personal experiences are remarkably momentous not only for other women writers, but for her women audiences, as well. Other women writers watch "Downer Ending" and understand that there is a place for them in the animation industry, that there is room for their work, and that they are welcome to implement their own personal emotions, experiences, and trauma into their storylines to create an intimate connection between their work and their viewers.

Kate Purdy's audience of women watches "Downer Ending" and recognizes that they don't need to hold back when articulating their emotions; they are allowed to be loud and explicit. Women are constantly painted as overly emotional and told they are overreacting when enduring any sort of pain or anguish, physical or mental. Purdy's work in "Downer Ending" shows just how influential being open about one's trauma can be. BoJack Horseman may think he has only one chance to "make" people love him again, but with the help of Kate Purdy, viewers recognize their own imperfections within him and wish to see his journey to the very end.

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