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*Articulate*
Department of English

*Articulate* is a publication of the Denison University English Department with kind funding from the Trustees of the Denison University Research Foundation.
Articulate
a journal of literary and cultural criticism
Volume One, Spring 1996

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Shakespeare is an author who deals with many political and social issues in his works. One in particular is the relationships men have with one another. He explores this issue on both the level of male friendship and also what can be referred to as homosexuality. Elizabethan society treats these relationships very differently from today's society. Shakespeare presents a picture of what can be called male love—something ideal yet unattainable. In Romeo and Juliet and Twelfth Night he depicts male homosexuality but, in order to conform to social norms, confuses it with the ideal of Renaissance male friendship and presents problematic male-male relationships that are ultimately unsuccessful.

In order to understand how Shakespeare dealt with male relationships in his writing it is important to understand how Elizabethan society dealt with such issues. As Bruce Smith discusses in Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England, sexuality was tightly woven into the social framework. Because society was dominated by males and women were subordinate, bonds between males were of great importance (Smith 56). This allowed for a very masculine institution known as male friendship: "a higher, nobler thing than love between the sexes" (Smith 96). These relationships between men were viewed as more important and more satisfactory than relationships with women (Smith 38).

It also is important to realize that what the 20th century refers to as homosexuality did not exist then as it does now. Although romantic and sexual relationships existed between men, homosexuality was not a category for self-definition (Smith 12). Due to the male social structure, "behavior that we would label homosexual, and hence a rejection of maleness, was for [those of Shakespeare's time] an aspect of maleness. Whether a man had sex with a man or a woman he was still masculine. By involving himself with another man he was succumbing to depravity, but to no greater degree than if he committed any other immoral act" (Smith 11). Homosexuality in Elizabethan England, according to Jonathan Goldberg, was "something that existed, something that everyone knew existed, but something that had no name of its own" (Smith 74).

Although "Renaissance moralists saw only Chaos beyond the perfectly ordered heterosexual world of Christian dogma," society—through various social institutions and through literature—acted to promote male love or at least provided it with an ideal setting (Smith 20). Smith argues that the male power structure, the education system, cross-dressing during festival occasions, the church, the social
class system, and traditions in private life all acted to promote such actions (21). Each placed males, particularly adolescents, together in the absence of women, making them similar to institutions such as sports teams and fraternities today (Smith 33). In addition, although Elizabethan law considered sodomy—whether among males, females, or both—to be illegal, these laws were not often enforced unless the crime was blatant or severe (Smith 42). Since the classification of “homosexual” did not exist, the law treated it in the same manner as it did other sexually deviant acts. It is for these reasons that Smith argues Elizabethan society “was at least tolerant of homosexual behavior if not positively disposed toward it” (73). Male erotic love was acceptable in society, provided that it occurred within certain contexts and under certain conditions (Smith 128).

All of this is not to say, however, that male relationships in any way infringed upon the institution of marriage. Even though social institutions promoted male bonding and male friendships were held in such high regard, marriage of men and women was still expected. Erotic desire between men was something associated with youth, something to be abandoned for the “higher truth of heterosexual love” (Smith 98). The ideal “marriage of true minds” as Gardiner calls it, was impossible because men cannot marry one another (Gardiner 341). In an emotional context, men could have relationships with other men, but in a social context, marriage was required in order for a male to acquire status and affirm his place in society (Smith 64).

Two plays in which Shakespeare illustrates these societal views are Twelfth Night and Romeo and Juliet. Twelfth Night presents Antonio, a sea captain who rescues Sebastian, a young gentleman, from drowning at sea. After saving his life, Antonio nurses Sebastian back to health and brings him ashore. In Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare creates Mercutio, a kinsman to the Prince and friend of Romeo, another young man of Verona. The relationships between these two sets of characters are very similar. Many instances in the two plays indicate the expression of what today is called homosexuality and the two deal with male relationships in much the same way. This involves two men, one younger than the other, whose relationships possess some common characteristics. The younger man is a main character while the older man is less so. The two men are friends. The older man has erotic desire for the younger. The older man openly professes his love, but the younger either does not know or does not openly acknowledge that this involves more than friendship. At some point the younger man becomes involved with a woman and the older man accepts this. He does, however, experience feelings of jealousy, not toward the woman but toward some other male in the younger man’s life. The older man eventually loses the younger man to a woman. These characteristics, present in both plays, allow Shakespeare to discuss homosexuality in Elizabethan society. Homosexual relationships are present, but homosexuality itself is not allowed to triumph.

Antonio and Sebastian of Twelfth Night demonstrate these characteristics. Although much of their dialogue can be interpreted as friendship, when examined in a sexual context, their relationship can be seen in a different light. In addition to friendship, their relationship also contains erotic elements. Shakespeare introduces the two men in Act two, scene one. At the beginning of the scene, as Antonio brings Sebastian to Illyria, he says, “Will you stay no longer? / Nor will you not that I go with you?” (1-2). He is not yet ready to part with his young friend. Sebastian sees Antonio’s deeds as kind and generous— as friendship— and responds, “I shall crave of you your love, that I may bear my evils alone. / It were a bad recompense for your love to lay any of them on you” (6-7). Antonio, however, still cannot bear to leave him and pleads, “If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant” (31-32). His love is strong enough for him to lower himself to being Sebastian’s servant. Word choice here also suggests homosexuality because “servant,” according to Joseph Pequigney, also means “lover” (“Two Antonios” 203). Sebastian, however, humbly declines and takes his leave. In the last lines of the scene, Antonio makes both his intentions and the degree to which he loves Sebastian clear when he says:

I have many enemies in Orsino’s court,  
Else would I very shortly see thee there.  
But come what may, I do adore thee so  
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.  
(40-43)

He is willing to risk all, including his life, to remain with the youth. Antonio’s actions show extremely strong friendship, even by Elizabethan standards. This intensity suggests a romantic attraction or desire for Sebastian going beyond the realm of just friendship. Pequigney has similar suspicions about Antonio’s intentions. He comments on “the openly amorous language habitual to [Antonio] whenever he speaks to or about Sebastian,” and says that “rarely does his attention turn to anything else—[it] is the foremost clue to the erotic nature of their friendship” (“Two Antonios” 202-3).

Antonio and Sebastian meet again in Act three, scene three. Antonio says:

My desire  
(More sharp than filed steel) did spur me forth;  
* * *  
My willing love,  
The rather by these arguments of fear,  
Set forth in your pursuit.  
(4-13)
His "desire" "spur[s]" him forth and his love is "willing." Word choice here implies sexual meaning. Sebastian, seemingly innocent, replies, "I can no other answer make but thanks" (14). Antonio then describes the nature of his offense:

I did some service; of such note indeed
That, were I ta'en here, it would scarce be answered.
Th' offense is not of such a bloody nature,
Albeit the quality of the time and quarrel
Might well have given us bloody argument.

(27-32)

Then he adds that "only [himself] stood out" (35). Although these crimes involve thievery and piracy, there is also a sexual, perhaps homosexual, nature to these actions when the text is examined literally. Sebastian replies, "Do not then walk too open," (35) which one could interpret as Sebastian advising Antonio to better conceal his sexual identity, lest he get himself into trouble. If this is the case, then Sebastian's innocence becomes questionable. According to Pequigney, Sebastian is well-aware of Antonio's intentions. He maintains that for the three months Antonio and Sebastian have been together constantly. He uses the lines, "To-day, my lord; and for three months before, / No int'rim, not a minute's vacancy, / Both day and night did we keep company" (5.1.88-90) to illustrate his point. The coming night at the Elephant is just another in a long series of nights that the two men have spent together.

Instead of changing the subject or modestly taking Sebastian's advice, Antonio counters, "It doth not fit me" (38), meaning that he is neither able nor willing to hide what he is. Antonio, it seems, is making no great effort to hide anything. Afterwards he offers Sebastian his purse, a very trusting and suggestive move considering what the purse might represent—perhaps Antonio's heart or even payment for a sexual act. This is not unlikely as Antonio is going to secure their lodgings at the Elephant and ends his speech by saying, "There shall you have me" (44). Pequigney agrees that the purse has important meaning. It is "given with the ulterior motive of pleasing if not purchasing the desired youth" ("Two Antonios 204"). He also asserts that Sebastian's use of the "Roderigo" pseudonym in the source play suggests "a means to hide his identity, his true name and family connections, during a drawn-out sexual liaison with a stranger in strange lands" ("Two Antonios" 205), and that Sebastian must know Antonio's feelings because "for months he has continuously remained with an adoring older man who is frankly desirous of him" (Pequigney, "Two Antonios" 204). Pequigney calls theirs "the classic homoerotic relationship, wherein the mature lover serves as guide and mentor to the young beloved" ("Two Antonios" 204).

In scene four of the same act Antonio comes upon Andrew picking a fight with Viola (Cesario) posing as a man. He assumes she is Sebastian and immediately comes to the defense saying, "Put up your sword. If this young gentleman / Have done offense, I take the fault on me; / If you offend him, I for him defy you" (92-94). Again, Antonio is willing to brave danger for his love. When Toby demands to know his reasoning, Antonio replies, "[I am] One, sir, that for his love dares yet do more / Than you have heard him brag to you he will," again asserting his love and devotion (96-97). After Orsino's officers apprehend him, he says to Viola (still thinking she is Sebastian), "This comes with seeking you," (312) and asks for his purse. Viola, who does not understand the request, asks, "What money, sir?" (321). At this point Antonio is amazed that his Sebastian is denying him and "those kindnesses" (230) he performed. Viola's second denial sends him into a rage:

O heavens themselves!

This youth that you see here
I snatched one half out of the jaws of death;
Relieved him with such sanctity of love,
And to his image, which methought did promise
Most venerable worth, did I devotion.

But, O, how vile an idol proves this god!
Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame.

(337-47)

He sees only ingratitude from Sebastian for whom he has done so much. Antonio's feelings and expectations suggest the two have been romantically involved for some time. Like a lover he feels betrayed; his "Sebastian" has changed. In addition, Pequigney points out that in this speech Antonio stresses above all Sebastian's physical beauty, dangerous considering the way sight was thought to be deceiving ("Two Antonios 202"). Antonio's last three words before the officers take him away—"Lead me on" (352)—reveal what he must be thinking: Sebastian is playing games with his mind, allowing him to believe that the love he feels is mutual.

In the final scene (Act five, scene one), Antonio is brought before Orsino who accuses him of past crimes. Antonio denies his guilt, though he confesses to being "on base and ground enough, / Orsino's enemy" (69-70). He explains his story to the Duke saying, "That most ingrateful boy there by your side / From the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth / Did I redeem" (71-73). Antonio considers himself Orsino's enemy and he places Sebastian (actually Viola) with Orsino even though Sebastian and the Duke do not even know one another. Hasler feels that 'he 'places' Viola [Sebastian to Antonio] at
Orsino's side, [to stress] that at this juncture she is very much the Duke's loyal servant. She [he] is where she [he] most desires to be" (280). Antonio's response shows jealously toward the Duke, his "enemy," for he assumes Orsino has stolen Sebastian away from him.

Later in the scene Sebastian expresses great excitement when he finally is reunited with Antonio. Sebastian greets him with, "Antonio! O my dear Antonio, / How have the hours rack'd and tortur'd me, / Since I have lost thee!" (210-12). As Pequigney states, Sebastian is far more excited to see Antonio than he is to see Olivia to whom he is engaged (206). Pequigney concludes that Antonio is not "rejected [by the other characters]" (206), but instead remains an important aspect of Sebastian's life. He asks, "Does this imply a ménage a trois at Olivia's house?" (206). That, however, is a question the text does not answer and one which perhaps pushes the issue of homosexuality too far.

As for the intentions of the two men, Pequigney labels Sebastian as a bisexual, saying his homosexual tendencies have been "awakened . . . under a . . . set of circumstances. . . . [including] . . . continuous and clearly agreeable association, during a lengthy sojourn in the freedom of pseudonymity, with a savior, benefactor, fervid admirer, and would-be lover" ("Two Antonios" 206). He is capable of loving both men and women—Antonio and Olivia—while Antonio, solely interested in men, is a homosexual (206). Sebastian, however, although he treats Antonio with great kindness, never actually accepts the passes he makes. The fact still remains that at the end of the play Sebastian is with Olivia, not Antonio. Antonio loses and marriage wins out over the relationship, whatever its nature, between the two men. Pequigney's argument is complicated by the fact that, as Laurie Osborne points out, Antonio is still being held by the Duke. In the original Shakespearean text he never receives a pardon. At the end of the play, this places a guarded Antonio standing amongst three heterosexual couples: Orsino and Viola, Toby and Maria, and Olivia and Sebastian. Shakespeare sets up a tableau of heterosexuality, and for Antonio, exclusion. How Sebastian feels about Antonio is irrelevant. Sebastian chooses to marry Olivia and the romantic or erotic relationship between the two men fails.

The relationship of Mercutio and Romeo in Romeo and Juliet is very similar to that of Antonio and Sebastian. The same characteristics apply: Mercutio is portrayed as older than Romeo and the two are friends. The relationship between them begins in act one, scene four. Romeo is suffering from melancholy due to problems with Rosaline and does not feel like being merry with his friends. Mercutio attempts to cheer him up saying, "Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance" (13). His use of "gentle Romeo" suggests he views Romeo as young and tender and it also displays his affection. The conversation soon turns to love. Mercutio tells Romeo, "You are a lover. Borrow Cupid's wings / And soar with them above a common bound" (17-18). Romeo replies, "I am too sore enpierced with his shaft" (19), a phallic reference. When Romeo says that love is "too rough, / Too rude, too boist'rous, and it pricks like thorn," (25-6) Mercutio returns the sexual reference saying, "If love be rough with you, be rough with love, / Prick love for prickling, and you beat love down" (27-28). This speech about love implies homosexuality. The love it describes contains two phallices; both the pricked and the pricker are male (Porter, Shakespeare's Mercutio 160).

Immediately afterward, Mercutio has three more lines that suggest his homosexuality. He says, "Give me a case to put my visage in. / A visor for a visor! What care I / What curious eye doth quote deformities?" (29-31). Since the group is wearing masks to a party at the house of Capulet, the remark is not suspicious. However, what Mercutio says is that he is putting on one mask over another. That first mask can be interpreted to mean his homosexuality, perhaps the "deformity" of which he speaks. The conversation then leads to dreams. In the Queen Mab speech that follows, Mercutio gets himself very worked up while describing the fairy who brings dreams to men's heads. These dreams start off innocently enough, but become worse and worse. At the high point of the speech Mercutio says of Queen Mab:

This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage.
This is she--

(92-95)

According to the progression of the speech, this is the worst possible subject. After all of the other evils he speaks of, it is heterosexual sex that riles him. He becomes so heated that Romeo has to cut him off saying, "Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace! / Thou talk'st of nothing" (96-97). This speech reveals much about Mercutio. Of all the evils in the world it is heterosexuality that upsets him the most. Perhaps it is because of repressed homosexuality that he feels this. Childbirth, fatherhood in particular, would be the one thing denied him. If he remains true to himself, he will never have his own children and therefore has limited use for women. Childbirth would serve as a constant reminder of his homosexuality, his male identity, and the forces keeping him from a relationship with Romeo. He says all of this openly to his friends, yet in a private manner that only he can fully comprehend. It is appropriate that Romeo is the character who interrupts his rage, for surely Romeo is its cause. However, instead of showing any inkling of understanding, Romeo says only that Mercutio is not making any sense. This brings him back to reality and, calm again, he replies, "True, I talk of dreams; / Which are the children of an idle brain, / Begot of nothing but vain fantasy" (97-100). Mercutio's mind breeds dreams just as other people breed
children. He understands, however, that his fantasy—his desire for Romeo—is neither feasible nor realistic.

The banquet scene follows, during which Romeo meets Juliet. Interestingly, Mercutio does not speak at all the entire time they are in the house of Capulet. He fades completely out of the picture until act two, scene one, when they have left the house and are going home. By this time Romeo has disappeared. Mercutio assumes he "hath stol'n him home to bed" (4), but Benvolio suspects he ran into the orchard and encourages Mercutio to call for him. Mercutio replies, "Nay, I'll conjure too" (6), implying that he seeks Romeo sexually. He continues with these sexual references saying, "Appear thou in the likeness of a sigh" (8) and "Speak but one rhyme, and I am satisfied!" (9), both references to orgasms. Then he moves into "conjuring" him in Rosaline's name:

by [her] bright eyes,
By her high forehead and her scarlet lip,
By her fine foot, straight leg, and quivering thigh,
And the demesnes that there adjacent lie,
That in thy likeness thou appear to us!

(16-21)

Benvolio is worried that Mercutio will anger Romeo, but he continues:

This cannot anger him. Twould anger him
To raise a spirit in his mistress' circle
Of some strange nature, letting it there stand
Till she had laid it and conjured it down.
That were some spite; my invocation
Is fair and honest: in his mistress' name,
I conjure only but to raise up him.

(23-8)

His use of "mistress' circle," "stand," "laid," "conjured," "honest," and "raise up him" are all either sexual or phallic in nature. Mercutio uses references to both Romeo and Rosaline's genitalia and to sex for and between them, but not so much to his own and himself (Goldberg, "Open Ra" 230). He "very readily grants the phallicus to others, notably including his friend Romeo" (Porter, "Canonization" 135). According to Goldberg, this suggests that Mercutio wants to assume Rosaline's place and become the subject of Romeo's desire (230). In Mercutio's last speech of the scene he again wishes sex for Romeo, saying:

O, Romeo, that she were, O that she were...
tension between the two men. The relationship between Mercutio and Romeo is brought back into the picture when Tybalt says, "Mercutio, thou consortest with Romeo" (44). "Consort," in this case, means playing together or sexual involvement. Interestingly, Mercutio does not immediately deny Tybalt's accusation. Instead he draws a metaphor, saying, "Consort? What, dost thou make us minstrels? / As thou make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing but discords" (45-47). In other words, he implies that, to his own disappointment, there is no such relationship, at least not eroticly as Tybalt accuses and Mercutio desires. On ending the quarrel as Benvolio suggests, Mercutio feels that "Men's eyes were made to look," and in saying, "let them gaze," (53) he echoes feelings from earlier in the play: "What care I / What curious eye doth quote deformities?" (1.4.31-2).

When Romeo enters, Tybalt reacts by saying, "Here comes my man" (55). This "possession" of Romeo bothers Mercutio who responds, "I'll be hanged, sir, if he wear your livery" (56). Romeo, recently married to Juliet, responds to Tybalt with love. This infuriates Mercutio. Astonished, he cries, "O calm, dishonorable, vile submission!" (72). His reaction shows the jealously that Mercutio feels of Tybalt. When Romeo says he loves Tybalt, Mercutio is unaware of the newly formed family connection and assumes that he has lost Romeo's affections to another man. He is not, however, willing to accept this. Instead he takes action, on Romeo's behalf as well as his own, and assumes Romeo's battle. As a result, he enters a fight with Tybalt and is killed.

Before he dies, however, Mercutio makes an important final speech. Romeo can see that Mercutio is wounded, but because Mercutio downplays the seriousness of his injury Romeo assumes the wound is not severe. Romeo remarks, "Courage, man. The hurt cannot be much" (93). Mercutio answers, "'No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve" (94-95). These lines, among Mercutio's last, are open to broad interpretation. It might be considered a stretch to say that he is speaking of his relationship with Romeo. However, it does fit with other evidence of Mercutio's homosexuality. When Romeo says, "The hurt cannot be much," perhaps Mercutio thinks then of his love for the young man, comparing the hurt Tybalt gave him by his sword to that Romeo gave him by denial of his love. In saying, "but 'tis enough, 'twill serve," perhaps Mercutio is saying that although the hurt Romeo gave him was small, or should have been small—"not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door"—it was enough to provoke him to take on Tybalt and enough to bring about his own death. This would lead to a realization that his love was futile and brought him no benefit at all. In fact, Romeo actually aids Tybalt by stepping in between the two men while they are fighting. Interestingly, Romeo's last words to his friend: "I thought all for the best," (102) are ignored by Mercutio. He seeks help "into some house" (103) from Benvolio, not his "beloved" Romeo. This exchange provides strong evidence for Shakespeare's undercutting of homosexuality. Not only does the homosexual relationship fail and the homosexual die, but before his death he comes to a realization that it was nothing more than this same homosexuality that brought about his death in the first place.

Shakespeare presents in these plays two sets of male characters whose relationships contain aspects of both male friendship and erotic love. Antonio and Sebastian in Twelfth Night and Mercutio and Romeo in Romeo and Juliet both, at times, confuse the boundary between these two Elizabethan institutions. In depicting these relationships, Shakespeare presents homosexuality according to Elizabethan standards. The society in which he writes confines him to certain boundaries. Working within these limits, Shakespeare allows the relationships to exist. At the same time, however, he does not allow them to succeed. Sebastian marries Olivia instead of remaining with Antonio and Romeo marries Juliet instead of pursuing Mercutio. Both relationships encounter obstacles that the men cannot overcome. At the end of Twelfth Night, Antonio is held captive by the Duke, and at the end of Romeo and Juliet, Mercutio is dead. Both homosexual men pay a price for their love. Both risk their lives, both are deserted for women, and both are ultimately unsuccessful in expressing their homosexuality.

Works Cited
Glamour and Drag: The Element of Performance in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *M. Butterfly* by Adrienne Fair, '96

In these two works, Manuel Puig and David Henry Hwang have written not only a text, but a work of performance, or a work to be performed. *M. Butterfly* is a play for the stage which contains in itself both a section of another stage production (*Madame Butterfly*) and the role-playing of the character Song Liling. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is a novel written both in a movie/dialogue form and containing descriptions of movies as told through the mouth of Molina, who is in turn playing a role. Within these two theatrical and filmic texts, the two characters of Song and Molina are theatrically playing the roles of women. (Not to mention the characters of Gaillimard and Valentin who are playing the roles of men.) The idea of a "performance" is found throughout both of these works and is linked to several different ideas within the works. In focusing on the role-playing aspects of both of these stories, one can further examine how it is possible for a person to create him/herself-- much in the same way that authors Puig and Hwang have themselves created these stories.

The clearest example of playing a role is the character of Song Liling. He plays not only the role of a woman, but the role of someone who sacrifices herself to the desires and fantasies of the west. When Gaillimard first sees Song (during his performance as Madame Butterfly in drag) their verbal exchange reflects Song's feelings about the hollowness of the act he has just performed:

G: I've always seen it played by huge women in so much bad makeup.
S: Bad makeup is not unique to the West.
G: But, who can believe them?
S: And you believe me?
G: Absolutely. You were utterly convincing. It's the first time--
S: Convincing? As a Japanese woman? The Japanese used hundreds of our people for medical experiments during the war, you know. But I gather such an irony is lost on you (Hwang 16-17).

Song's creation of a feminine, Chinese, subservient character throughout *M. Butterfly* is partly made possible through the Chinese theatrical convention of having men play roles of women. Song and Gaillimard actually meet several times in a Chinese theater where Song performs (yet another play within the play). The subservience of Song as Butterfly reflects the western ideal of a willing eastern woman who, like Cio-Cio-San, wants and expects to be treated badly by her macho western husband--
Gallimard, who enjoys the submission of his Chinese lover. Valentin is uncomfortable with Molina's depend on and love each other and they have a sexual relationship. Interestingly, Valentin is unlike Molina to fill a woman's role for him in both an emotional and sexual way. The two prisoners come to

As the novel progresses, Valentin and Molina become closer friends and Valentin, at the end, allows Molina even says that he actually wants to be a woman:

Once again, we see Song's sense of irony towards the whole situation. He seems to be enjoying his role and could even be seen as partly believing in the role. Towards the end of the play he admits some degree of love for Gallimard, or at least a love for Gallimard's adoration of the Butterfly. The role that Song plays has been created for him by the West and it is easily used to manipulate a western man. Through this role, a power play is created: Man over man, and East over West. Ultimately, a role reversal is created, but we will address that later.

Since Kiss of the Spider Woman is written in dialogue form, we as readers do not have a set visual image of how Molina dresses or gesticulates. Through his words, however, we are shown how femininity is central to his character. In the movie version, William Hurt wears scarves, makeup, and so on to suggest a form of drag, but the novel shows the more internal and verbal use of being in drag. Molina even says that he actually wants to be a woman:

As the novel progresses, Valentin and Molina become closer friends and Valentin, at the end, allows Molina to fill a woman's role for him in both an emotional and sexual way. The two prisoners come to depend on and love each other and they have a sexual relationship. Interestingly, Valentin is unlike Gallimard, who enjoys the submission of his Chinese lover. Valentin is uncomfortable with Molina's

wanting to be in a passive role and proposes a more equal relationship:

Molina enjoys not only playing a woman's role, but playing a submissive and stereotypical woman's role—a role that most women would not want to be placed in. This stereotype, in Molina's case, seems to come from a societal aesthetic source: most notably from movies. He recounts six films to Valentin during the course of the novel, all of which contain somewhat one-dimensional, but beautiful, heroines. Molina has created a vision of himself as the heroine of a movie—a mental drag performance. In response to Valentin's question: "Who do you identify with? Irena or the other one?" he says, "With Irena, who do you think? She's the heroine, dummy. Always with the heroine" (Puig 25). To return to the term "performance," the retelling of the six films could be seen as Molina playing the roles of the six leading ladies while also playing out the role of a consoling and mothering woman to Valentin (and of course, later, the role of a lover to Valentin).

The women's roles that Song and Molina adopt can be traced to a filmic history. Song's Butterfly is a mix between both the turn-of-the-century Puccini opera and a 1930's pre-revolution China:

This seems to suggest not only a theatrical history of the Butterfly role, but also a screen-oriented history of an oriental heroine. Shanghai Express (Von Sternberg, 1932) is perhaps the ideal of a pre-revolution China. Glamorous westerners use China as their playground where they have their own theaters, bars, trains, and so forth. Song seems to take elements for his character from Anna May Wong, whose thin and "exotic" look was popular in the 30's and 40's. There are also many other Hollywood films that use an East-West love relationship more directly. Sidney Olcott, for example, directed a film version of
Molina as a gender-bending artist. His role is defined not only by Song, but also by Gallimard, Western history, and the audience of the play itself.

The influence of film on Molina is much more obvious. As he says, he identifies with "the heroine, dummy. Always with the heroine." Through the retelling of the six films, Molina puts himself in the role of the different women, and seems to be bending the characters around his own desires. He changes the women a little to suit his tastes, adds references to domineering mothers, and puts meticulous attention into the clothing and appearance of the women as if he were mentally dressing himself. He admits his manipulation of the stories in the first few pages of the book:

No, I'm not inventing, I swear, but some things, to round them out for you, so you can see them the way I'm seeing them... well, to some extent I have to embroider a little. Like with the house, for example (Puig 18).

One could even say he was creating a mental drag performance. He plays the fiancée of a Caribbean zombie-creating man, a woman who is obsessed with panthers and sexually complexed, the girlfriend of a romantic race car driver turned rebel, and so on. The role of Leni in the Nazi propaganda film is especially true to life. Leni Riefenstahl, screen actress turned director, actually directed films for Hitler. Although Song doesn't refer to being influenced by these movies, the Hollywood ideal of Asian women would definitely be linked to the audience's perception of Song. Hwang, as well, seems to be suggesting a whole history of misconceptions about Asian women that all trace back to the Madame Butterfly stereotype. The audience's preconceived notions are particularly important to _M. Butterfly_ because of the play's focus. As noted by Rosalind Morris, Gallimard speaks to the audience as if they were fellow males capable of sympathizing with his natural, "manly" desires:

Don't we who are not handsome, nor brave, nor powerful yet somehow believe, like Pinkerton, that we deserve a Butterfly. She arrives with all her possessions in the folds of her sleeves, lays them all out, for her man to do with as he pleases. Even her life itself—she bows her head (Hwang 10).

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The quality of glamour, or the art of being glamorous, could be linked to external and manipulatable qualities. Through makeup, clothing, mannerisms, posture, hairstyles, a person can come to seem somehow super-human and illuminated. Hollywood shows us images of perfectly adorned and poised women which become the physical ideals of the public as a whole. Fashion magazines give insights on how to become this ideal, on how to become glamorous. Joseph R. Urgo did a study on advertising in (ironically) _Glamour_ magazine in which he stresses that the body becomes a work of art. Women are invited to become artists of their face, hair, clothing, what have you.

The woman is both the work of art and artist, both product and creator—subject and object. The viewer of the ad is shown what and shown how; she is shown what to look like and how to look well (Urgo 123).

Not to mention makeovers, plastic surgery and sex changes, modern culture presents the body as something that is not definite, not to be accepted. We are compelled to constantly change ourselves. Glamour is a quality that is not connected to an internal or naturally acquired beauty, but to the layers of paint that we put onto our canvasses, our bodies. Glamour is a realizable goal for Song and Molina because it requires not a pre-given beauty or femininity, but a rehearsed and manipulatable one. Song adopts feminine clothes, gestures, makeup; Molina plays the roles of heroines in movies, adopts the speaking style of a woman (especially in his use of "she" and "girl like me"), and in the movie version of _Kiss of the Spider Woman_ wears feminine accessories and makeup. He shows an acute attention to the meanings associated with clothing and appearance—reflecting to some degree the idea that a person can...
... wearing the hair up is—pay attention—important, because women only wear it up, it so happens, or they used to back then, when they wanted to really give the impression it was an important occasion, an important date. Because the upsweep, which bared the nape of the neck because they pushed all the hair up on top of the head, it gave a woman's face a certain nobility (Puig 164).

In addition to makeup and visual clues, words are another way of stressing glamour, another form of paint on the body-canvas. One could be said to have glamorous speech patterns: Molina uses feminine pronouns when referring to himself and uses a stereotypically feminine (or frilly) style of description. Song as well must put his language in drag in playing the role of Butterfly, using "we" when referring to women, and speaking of his history as a history of traditional Chinese woman's innocence and shame.

In continuation of the idea of glamour being defined by external visual and linguistic clues, the whole of gender could be defined by these externals (an idea common to post-modernists, deconstructionalists, social determinists, and others). Judith Butler provides a clear explanation of this theory in her article on "Imitation and Gender Insubordination": "gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself" (Butler 21). Under this theory, the more masculine characters of these two texts are also involved in a drag performance, and are concerned with socially determined ideals for what a "man" is. In the same way that Molina explained the meaning associated with a woman wearing her hair piled on top of her head, one could explain the meaning associated with a diplomat's suit, a military colonel's medals, a prison guard's gun, or a rebel's defiant stare. All the visual clues are readable.

In examining Gallimard's character, one finds many reflections of male hierarchy and governmental power. He is dressed in a European style, contrasting with his Chinese environment, he is shown stamping bureaucratic documents, and can be seen hobnobbing with diplomatic party guests, drinking and smoking. When he first goes to the theater where Song performs as a woman, Song immediately picks him out of the crowd because of his macho European drag:

S: Yes. You. White man. I'm looking straight at you.
G: Me?
S: You see any other white men? It was too easy to spot you. How often does a man in my audience come in a tie? (Hwang 20).

The tie and the white skin are immediate visual readable bits of information. This macho persons is at its strongest when Gallimard is with his friend, Marc. They talk in a good-old-boy fashion in short scenes throughout the play. In the beginning they are portrayed as Pinkerton (Gallimard) and Sharpless (Marc):

S: Who's the lucky girl?
P: Cio-Cio-San. Her friends call her Butterfly. Sharpless, she eats out of my hand!
S: She's probably very hungry.
P: Not like American girls. It's true what they say about Oriental girls. They want to be treated bad! (Hwang 6).

Here, Gallimard plays the role of Pinkerton which he plays to some extent in his relationship with Song. In addition, he could also be seen as playing himself at different stages of his life, since the play is set up with the prison cell as being the center for the dialogue. We see Gallimard in his cell and he flashes back to the scenes leading up to his incarceration—each scene that he reenacts involves playing the role of his former self. It is interesting to consider that while the roles Gallimard plays are very stereotypically masculine, he is not lucidly in drag. Song is constantly reminded by his male genitalia that the possibility of completely being the Butterfly is unattainable. Gallimard, however, is free to believe in his role, Pinkerton. This complete belief on Gallimard's part (both in the Butterfly and in his own male prowess) may be a fundamental reason behind his inability to cope with his situation at the end of the play.

While Gallimard is macho through his governmental position and his dominating Western ideas, Valentin is macho through his daring actions and his rebellious, communistic ideals. He acts the part of a freedom fighter with his fellow rebels in a similar way to how Gallimard acts the part of a diplomat and woman-chaser with his friend, Marc. At one point, however, Valentin questions the role that he is playing. Molina helps him to write a letter to his rich lover, Marta. In it, he confesses doubt about his ideals and about the sacrifices he has made to stay true to the image of himself as communistic and anti bourgeoise. He never intends this letter to be sent.

... you were raised in a clean and comfortable house like me and taught to enjoy life, and I'm the same way. I can't adjust to being a martyr, it infuriates me, I don't want to be a martyr, and right now I wonder if the whole thing hasn't been one terrible mistake on my part (Puig 177).

Valentin admits to having played a role, the role of a rebel which has somewhat romantic connotations in
South America. Specifically, one can trace the romance of rebellion to Che Guevara. He was from a reasonably well-off Argentinean family, and spent several years of his youth traveling around South America on a motorcycle. Through his political theories and his actions in Cuba and elsewhere, he became influential to communist thought and when he was killed by Bolivian soldiers, he became a martyr for the communist cause—and an icon for young idealistic communists. Valentin finds himself on the brink of a similar martyr situation, and feels unworthy of it. The glamour of being a heroic rebel begins to lose its appeal under the reality of rotting away in a prison cell.

At the end of both *M. Butterfly* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, the roles played by the four main characters are interchanged—their performances are, in a way, deconstructed. *M. Butterfly* is visually blunt in portraying this reversal: Song appears in a “well cut suit” and Gallimard dresses himself in Butterfly’s kimono and kills himself. Gallimard, like Puccini’s Butterfly, cannot live with dishonor and cannot accept life without his lover. Song is revealed to have been more like Pinkerton in his manipulation of Gallimard:

“I am an artist, Rene. You were my greatest . . . acting challenge. It doesn’t matter how rotten I answer, does it? You still adore me. That’s why I love you, Rene (Hwang 63).”

Song’s disdain here relates directly to Pinkerton’s assertion that “It’s true what they say about Oriental girls. They want to be treated bad!” Song now has Gallimard “eating out of his hand” and, on a larger scale, has succeeded in aiding China to win a power-play with the West.

In *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, the roles are reversed in a less obvious way. Valentin takes pain killers from a nurse and enters into a dream world that is narrated by Molina. He has become like a character in a movie—a perfect beach scene with a beautiful native girl. Molina, like Song, takes on a masculine, active role. He leaves the prison, tries to divulge information to the rebels, and is killed by the rebels themselves in the process. Molina becomes the rebel and the martyr. He is, in fact, much more of a martyr than Valentin ever was, because he goes to speak to the rebels expecting to be killed.

Valentin, on the other hand, hears the consoling words of Marta after eating guava paste and resting on a beach: “No, Valentin, beloved, that will never take place, because this dream is short, but this dream is happy.”

The term “performance” can be read in these texts as being the performance of several different roles by each character. Literally, Gallimard pretends he’s Pinkerton, and Song sings Puccini or acts in the Chinese theatre—at least three smaller performances within the performance of *M. Butterfly* as a whole. In a drag sense, Song plays the role of Butterfly (subservient Chinese female), Gallimard also plays the role of Butterfly, Molina plays the roles of the heroines of his film (through imagination), and Molina also plays the role of a “woman” or the submissive half of his sexual relationship with Valentin. In a more abstract sense, any of the roles that contain readable gender clues are also forms of drag: Gallimard’s suits and masculine body language, Valentin’s brusque dismissals of Molina’s more detailed descriptions and his initial bravado towards Molina’s attempts to help him. Performance could also mean emulating a particular hero or aesthetic: Gallimard tries to become the all-powerful, loved Pinkerton, and fails. Valentin thinks he is becoming a Gueveraesque rebel martyr, but fails. And then Song and Molina at the end of the two texts come to realize the goals that their lover had had. A final level of performance lies in the simple fact that both of the texts were written in performable forms: a stage play and dialogue suitable for the screen. Insofar as glamour is an element of most stage performances, the drag-glamour connection can also hold true to the play as a whole (*M. Butterfly* plays on Broadway, the height of glitz, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was made into a musical, the pinnacle of glamour-centered entertainment). The plays not only contain the element of beauty through adornment/disguise (body as a work of art) but are presented in a glamorous form that suggests an emphasis on lighting, costuming, effects, settings—beauty through awe, a spectacle. All the aspects of glamour and self-creation and performance and playing roles are, in the end, put into a strange perspective since we are dealing with works of fiction. There is irony in that while Song and Molina are creating their own gender and painting themselves into feminine roles, they are fictional characters. The numerous “roles” that each character plays are trivialized by the fact that each character is no more real, at the core, than any of his roles. And so one could form this image of the authors as being surrounded by the characters they have created, and by the roles that the characters they have created are creating. In looking at Derrida’s analysis of Nietzsche’s style, one could formulate that all writing is a drag performance. He explains...
woman as being unpinnable by truth, and as being uncopiable. The feminine (in a literary sense) is therefore the unreachable side of art.

That which will not be pinned down by truth is, in truth—feminine. This should not, however, be hastily mistaken for a woman's femininity, for female sexuality, or for any other of those essentializing fetishes which might still tantalize the dogmatic philosopher. . . . Nietzsche's writing is an inscription of truth. And such an inscription, even if we do not venture so far as to call it the feminine itself, is indeed the feminine "operation." Because woman is (her own) writing, style must return to her (Derrida 56-57).

If you take this idea literally, writing could be seen as a feminine operation. Even more literally, male authors could be seen as trying to simulate femininity (not in sexuality but in undefinability). Through Nietzsche and Derrida, therefore, male writers performing the inherently feminine act of writing, are, theoretically, in drag. Here, not only are the characters of these two texts in drag and playing several different roles, but the authors themselves, in writing, are fitting into a loose definition of what it means to be in drag.

To end on a lighter, more glamorous note, one could look at one last image. A film still from Shanghai Express shows Anna May Wong and Marlene Dietrich together closed in a train compartment. As the caption suggests, they are pinned into this little box and made easily examinable by the audience. Their clothing, makeup, and body postures are indicative of a heightened portrayal of glamour. They are so glamorized and covered in stylish paints and fabrics, in fact, that they just as easily could be two men dressed as women as they could be two women dressed as men. Either way, they are both in a very readable drag and they are both enclosed together in a train car, ostracized by the other passengers because of their label as "loose women." It is easy to draw parallels between these two women and Song and Molina: appearance, glamour, a sense of disguised disdain for their position in life, and both judged as outsiders. So let's close with this image, like the image out of one of Molina's stories: two "divine-looking women, absolutely perfect. . . . The most divine looking women you can imagine" (Puig 51, on Leni).

Works Cited

Self and Society in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *A Pagan Place*, and *Amongst Women*

by Erin Lott, '96

Since James Joyce published *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1914-1915, Irish fiction has been overshadowed by his dominant voice. Yet themes found in *Portrait* remain the themes in the 1970 *Pagan Place* and the 1990 *Amongst Women*. Something in Irish fiction calls for these themes to be renewed again and again. Characters within these novels attempt to define their own selves in an oppressive society. Through the rejection of both inner and outer forces and the use of language and perception, these characters are either actively devising their own sense of self or passively allowing the outside reality and society determine such a self for them.

For Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait* the struggle to find the sense of self is an active one. The idea of the self is distinct from the social and sensual and religious forces that are surrounding him at all times. Eventually he concludes that the self is formed through artistic endeavors. Although Stephen has not completely solidified his sense of self by the end of the novel, he has come quite far from the original ideas of self that were forming in his mind at the grown-up fight at Christmas dinner. From the beginning of the novel, Stephen understands that he is in search of something; he is just unsure of where or how he will find it:

He wanted to meet in the real world the insubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld. He did not know where to seek it or how: but a premonition which led him on told him that this image would, without any overt act of his, encounter him (67).

Reality and identity formation is dichotomized as inner versus the outer throughout the novel. The first chapter focuses on the outer social forces that are working on the formation of identity: through both the fight at Christmas where Stephen begins to glimpse the difficulties and inadequacies of politics and through the appeal to Father Conmee. Through both experiences he learns that he can and will be in control of his own social influences. The second chapter focuses on the inner force of sexuality. In his attempts to gain his own inner peace through his sexuality, Stephen instead comes to find turmoil in attempts to gain a sense of self through someone else. He then turns to religion. Religion as well fails him. Religion burdens him with guilt and inadequacies so that he cannot move forward in his own quest for self. It is not until he watches the girl wading on the beach that he can decisively move towards

becoming himself and an artist. Watching her is an almost sexual experience, but is removed from the earlier sexuality that Stephen has already rejected. Instead this act of sensuality is his own:

Her image had passed into his soul forever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fail, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! (186).

Through his rejection of sensuality, social influences, language, and religion, Stephen has formed his own self, a self that observes and then recreates from such observations— an artist:

The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in his country where there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets (220).

Stephen comes to understand that the self is a fusion of both the inner and the outer. Stephen becomes the master of his own self through language and through perception. Joyce, using Stephen as his own agent and artist, uses the language and perceptions of “stream of consciousness” to define Stephen. Stephen by virtue of this type of language and perception becomes the artist that Joyce is. The book is seen only through the eyes of Joyce/Stephen. We know only as much as they know. Our perception is their perception of the world. Stephen himself is a product of the language that surrounds him, be that the language of sensuality, religion, society. Stephen wants to push past this language, to break down their barriers by becoming an observer—precisely why it is so important that there was only silence to greet the moment he comes to understand his calling as an artist. Yet most importantly through the rejection of social influences, sensuality, language, and religion, Stephen is able to become an active agent in his own self-creation.

On the other end of the spectrum in Edna O'Brien's novel *A Pagan Place*. The book, like *Portrait*, returns to the Irish childhood. The book is split into three parts: 1) the child world dealing with authority, 2) the pregnancy and punishment of Emma, and 3) the priest who takes advantage of the protagonist and her subsequent retreat to the convent. I would like to focus on the last part of the book in the most detail, but it should be understood that the denial of self (the mother's sense of self as well as the two daughters' senses of self) by the protagonist's father throughout the first two sections of the book only leads up to the end.

The title of the book *A Pagan Place* is a direct reference to a fort from the protagonist's childhood:
It was a pagan place and circular. Druids had their rites there long before your mother and father or his mother and father or her mother and father or anyone would hear tell of. But Mr. Wattle said that was not all, said he had seen a lady ungirdled there one night on his way home from physicking the donkey. The ground inside was shifty, a swamp where lilies bloomed. They were called bog lilies. The donkey went there to die and no wonder because the shelter was ample. No one would go in to bury it. It decomposed. The smell grew worse and worse and more and more widespread. The dogs carried the members around, the bits, big bones and little bones and they were scattered everywhere and in the end were as brown and as odourless as twigs (15).

There comes a connection between paganism, sexuality, and death. Purity is Christianity, ordered and known. Thus, sexuality itself must become dark, mysterious, unknown. These connections are what the protagonist fights against and eventually falls a passive victim to in the end.

In the third section of the book, the protagonist has her first sexual encounter. Unlike her sister's first sexual experience, the protagonist's is somewhat perverted. It is with a priest. Unlike Stephen Dedalus who is able to use religion as a sort of ordering device of his universe that he can eventually reject because of how it inhibits his sense of self, the protagonist sees religion as an absolute. The priest ruins this moral absolute, this order of the universe. Sadly, the protagonist becomes immobilized by the dilemma of her own sexuality and cannot reach the mythology of pure morality. The protagonist cannot settle for anything less than the absolute. Thus she joins the convent in order to assuage her own feelings of guilt. Within the walls of the convent the protagonist can reorganize the society that had failed her. She becomes a passive victim to the chaotic society that surrounds her. She has no hopes of transcending such a society because the society has become so far removed from her life. Society becomes buffered by the walls of the convent, and the protagonist never has to deal within its realms again.

Like Joyce, O'Brien uses the stream of consciousness. However, this does not liberate this protagonist. Instead, she is locked within her own consciousness and cannot reach out to others or allow them within. In addition, she uses other people's language throughout the novel. For example:

You tried to whistle. Only men should whistle [parent's voice]. The Blessed Virgin blushed when women whistled and likewise when women crossed their legs [voice from the church]. It intrigued you thinking of the Blessed Virgin having to blush so frequently [protagonist's own voice]. The bird that had the most lifelike whistle was the curlew [teacher's voice]. The curlew was a grallatorial bird, indigenous to sedge and damp places, more partial to wading than flying [a book] (99).

The outside influence is relevant in her own thought processes. Not even her thoughts can become her own.

In McGahern's *Amongst Women* there is the same sense of outside versus inside as there is in *Portrait* as well as the passive victim (*A Pagan Place*) versus the active creator of society and self (*Portrait*). In post-colonial Ireland, there remains a sense of abuse, of rejection and failure of society that is projected onto the family via Moran. Like Stephen, the members of the family, Moran included, find liberation and a sense of their own identity. However, unlike Stephen, they find it not through observation and eventual love of oneself, but through pain and suffering. Pain leads them to who they really are and thus to liberation.

Moran has a deep sense of hatred, but he is not exactly sure what he hates. Nationalism remains a deeply problematic aspect for Moran. During the civil war, there was a joyous struggle, something worth fighting for. Yet instead of liberation after colonization, simply a reflected power-structure emerges. The structure set about by the British remains the same, only with Irish in control. Nothing has changed at the fundamental level, only on the surface. Within the power structure, there are two evil forces for Moran, the priests and the doctors. Moran's views on this new emergence of the bourgeoisie class are that at least the priests have to pay for their power with celibacy.

As in the other novels, sexuality itself becomes a way of suppressing the self. Michael's sexual experiences with Nell at the beach are completely one-sided experiences.

He pulled down his clothes over his thighs and entered her as she had shown them on their first night, very gently and a little timidly, in spite of the terrible urging of his need. Above them the wind whipped only at the highest tussocks and the ocean sounded far away. When he entered her for a third time she was ready to search for her own pleasure and he was now able to wait. Such was her strength that he was frightened. She shouted, seized him roughly at the hips, and forced him to move; and when it was over she opened her eyes and with her hands held his face for a quick, grateful kiss that he couldn't comprehend (105).

During the sexual experience, the natural world is far away. The wind is only at the highest tussocks and the ocean, although right beside them feels miles away. The experience is a singular one for the two of them, and yet they are removed from each other. Her force scares him and he does not comprehend her gratitude. After the experience McGahern goes on to describe the surroundings:

The weak sun stood high above them. Feeling damp and cold, they dressed, shook the sand out of their shoes and raincoats and climbed back down to the shore. There was not even a dog chasing a stick along the whole empty strand, only several birds walking sedately along the tideline which had now come much further up on the beach. As if
they had set out on a journey they felt morally bound to complete, they walked the whole way back past the cannon as far as the ruined church on the opposite point (105).

The experience ends with the image of the ruined church. Religion figures its way into sexuality again. Yet religion is ruined by this selfish form of sexuality that goes nowhere in the identification of self. They seek to find sexual freedom, but even that fails them. There is this imaginative quality in the book that somehow sex will set them all free. But meaning is not found within sex.

Self is formed, for Moran's children, through the rejection of the society that Moran has set up for them within the walls of his home. They reject his sense of religiousness, his sexual repression, and his desire to never leave the home or to leave Ireland. For Moran, if he could not have gained liberation through the civil war, then he chose to create his own little nation walled within the home. Yet, this separate nation idea suffocates the family. Constantly, McGahern shows the contrast of the private versus the public: the public (in terms of shared with all the members of the family) haymaking and Christmas dinner contrasted with the private desires of each of the family members. It is not until the end of the novel that the public realm and the private realm can fuse for the children.

Moran's dying words are “Shut up.” These are whispered as the family circles around his bed in their public (within the family) utterance of the Rosary. Perhaps Moran understands that the rosary is not being said on his terms with him in the lead, and this disturbs him. Perhaps he knows that this is all for his benefit and as the new generation of Irish they will not continue the Rosary after he is dead, and he does not want them to even bother this one last time for him. Perhaps Moran realized that ultimately the religion has failed him. That it has not kept a sense of order that he (like the protagonist in *A Pagan Place*) wanted it to keep. Nonetheless the family continues their recitation. Once Moran is dead, and the funeral has finished, there is a joy in the family. The public of the family domain has become part of their past. They can move within the new public domains of Dublin and London and all the various places in between and allow their private lives to become fused with their new independent public ones. No longer will the children be inhibited from merging the two for the sake of Moran, who wanted to keep the private thoughts and desires of each child distinct from the public domain of the family and the public domain of Dublin or London or even the small town they live in. It isn't until his death that they can become active agents of their own sense of self. Everything leading up to his death had been either the passive acceptance of the public and private realms that Moran had defined or it was an active refusal and the eventual alienation from the family as it was with Luke.

Unlike *A Pagan Place* and *Portrait*, *Amongst Women* is not written in a stream of consciousness.
Lesbian vampire lore is closely associated with Goddess-based religious traditions. As Pam Keesey explains in the introduction to *Dark Angels*, her anthology of lesbian vampire stories: “The roots of the vampire can be found in early images of the Goddess. Vampires, like the Goddess, are associated with blood, life, death, and rebirth” (11-12). The three representations of the Goddess, “the young woman, the life-giving mother, and the aging wisewoman” (12) are all evident in lesbian vampire lore.

To facilitate the examination of the appearances of Goddess traditions in lesbian vampire stories, it will first help to explain the Goddess traditions and how they have been repressed and misrepresented. Second, the use of vampire imagery as a metaphor for lesbianism will be explored. Once these explanations have laid the groundwork, then the appearances of the three aspects of the Goddess in lesbian vampire lore will be examined. Finally, I will discuss how the legends of lesbian vampires and Goddess-based concepts have been reapportioned by a feminist and/or lesbian audience.

With the rise of Judeo-Christian beliefs Goddess traditions and all that they espoused were repressed and misrepresented. The importance of women, their sexuality, and the lunar-based cycles of life and death were replaced with a very male-centric perspective of the world. Everything previously associated with Goddess traditions was demonized. In the introduction of another anthology of lesbian vampire stories, *Daughters of Darkness*, Pam Keesey explains this phenomenon: “Goddesses embody all that is evil in Judeo-Christian philosophy: they are female, sexual, pagan, and embrace death as a part of the cycle of life. These women are not holy; these women are monsters!” (8).

Also repressed and misrepresented in the contemporary world are lesbian women. Their sexual autonomy directly threatens supposed male prerogatives. Lesbian women threaten to subvert all that the patriarchal society holds dear--male dominance based on the possession and subjugation of female sexuality for the purpose of ensuring proper lineage. Lesbian women have often been presented as either masculine-looking mutants or (possibly to the titillation of heterosexual men) as excessively sexual, lustful creatures who prey on innocent, naive young women.

This latter image of lesbian women is that which can be associated with female vampires. In *Vampires and Violets*, her book about lesbians in film, Andrea Weiss explains some of the cultural attitudes surrounding the equating of female vampires with lesbians:

Merging two kinds of sexual outlaws, the lesbian vampire is more than simply a negative stereotype. She is a complex and ambiguous figure, at once an image of death and an object of desire, drawing on profound subconscious fears that the living have toward the dead, that men have toward women [and that mainstream society has toward homosexuals], while serving as a focus for repressed fantasies (84).

In light of this cultural baggage, lesbian vampires have a particularly interesting history. Female vampires have traditionally been presented as lustful, destructive, wanton women obsessed with blood, lust, and sexuality. It is with this negative image of the female vampire that lesbian women have been conveniently demonized. The vampire metaphor makes it clear that sexual relations between women are inherently destructive. Lesbian vampire stories depict “a consensual relationship between two women as inherently pathological, with the self-preservation of the one appealing to the self-destructiveness of the other. One woman's survival is always at the other’s expense” (Weiss 104).

Pam Keesey clearly explains how the female vampire came to represent popular beliefs about lesbian women: the female vampire “is so closely associated with women's sexual and social improprieties, it's no wonder that the female vampire came to be equated with the lesbian in the sexually repressive atmosphere of nineteenth century Europe” (*Daughters of Darkness* 8-9). Weiss extends this statement when she explains a theory forwarded by Lillian Faderman in *Surpassing the Love of Men*. As Weiss explains it, Faderman connects the emergence of the female vampire as a metaphor for lesbianism with the pathologizing of women's romantic friendships in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. “The vampire metaphor, Faderman asserts, served to enforce the transition from socially accepted close female friendships to the redefinition of such relationships as deviant” (87).

The use of female vampires as a convenient tool to demonize lesbian women reveals a deep social fear—that of women's ability to penetrate. The female vampire penetrates her victims with her teeth, thus confusing the gender-based boundaries of inserter and receptor.

Medical case histories in the early twentieth century reveal deep anxieties about the possibility of female penetration. In the lesbian vampire story, this anxiety has been displaced and refocused on the mouth, another “feminine” sexual orifice which combines the “masculine” ability to penetrate, via the teeth. Thus the vampire embodies age-old popular fears of women which have been expressed through the image of the “vagina dentata,” the vagina with teeth, the penetrating woman (Weiss 91).

The association of female vampires with lesbian women clearly demonstrates deep cultural anxieties concerning women's sexuality. Women who possess sexual desire or aggressiveness are perceived as
threatening to the patriarchal, heterosexist paradigm. Lesbian women not only offend deep-rooted anxieties regarding the sexual appetites of women, but they also offend deep-rooted social fears of same-sex relations. As a result of such fears, the dominant culture has found it useful to demonize lesbian women and cast them as abnormal and outside of usual and acceptable human experience. Therefore it is fitting that female vampirism acts as a metaphor for lesbianism.

As has been established, lesbian vampire lore is closely associated with Goddess traditions. Both Goddess-based religions and lesbian vampires are concerned with the cycles of life and death. An important element in the cycles of life and death is blood. “Blood, of course, is the very essence of life. Along with water and oxygen, it is one of the most important fluids that make life on this planet possible. Blood always had an important symbolic power” (Keesey, *Dark Angels* 11). Blood embodies very important symbolic, as well as literal, powers for both the Goddess and lesbian vampire. For the Goddess, blood, especially menstrual blood, represents life. As Pam Keesey explains:

Menstrual blood, also known as lunar blood, was considered to be especially powerful because it gave life, not only by coursing through the veins of the living, but also through the miracle of birth. Many believed that blood contained the life-essence: the soul. That women could shed blood without injury contributed to this mysterious and sacred essence (*Dark Angels* 11).

Blood for the vampire also represents life—the vampire must rely on the blood of the living in order to remain in their realm. “Vampires are most often thought of as revenants—those who come back from the dead—and therefore need the blood of the living to maintain their undead state” (Keesey, *Dark Angels* 10).

The Goddess has been honored in her three countenances: the young woman whose sexuality was held sacred and for whom sex was a form of divine union; the life-giving, middle-aged woman who took the dead into her womb and prepared them for rebirth; and the aging wisewoman who was seen as a devouring mother (Keesey, *Dark Angels* 12). Accordingly, many of the representations of lesbian vampires included in both of Pam Keesey’s anthologies fall into one of these three categories. The stories that fall into the first category, that of the young virgin, are the most non-traditional of all. They present the lesbian-oriented vampire as a gentle, caring woman who participates in sex and blood-letting only as an act of love and reciprocity. The stories which can be grouped into the second category honor women’s regenerative power; these women help each other become healthy and revitalized through blood-letting and blood-sharing (*Dark Angels* 17). Their blood-sharing is a covenant offering “protection, purification, and salvation” (*Dark Angels* 11). The third and final image of the Goddess is

the easiest to cast as the lustful, destructive lesbian vampire. She is a woman obsessed with blood, lust, and sexuality. She is a “wanton woman whose sexuality brings destruction, the cruel and terrifying woman as death personified, the woman whose need leads to a wasting away of those around her” (*Dark Angels* 15).

“Lilith,” written by Robbi Sommers and included in *Daughters of Darkness* is a lesbian vampire story which represents this third aspect of the Goddess. It is a story of the traditional evil vampire. “Set in the dark streets and mythic underside of New Orleans,” (Keesey 16) “Lilith” is the story of a happy lesbian couple torn apart by a demonical and destructive vampire. Lovers Kay and Francine happen upon a tarot-card reader named Miss Mattie while wandering Burton Street, on which they had been accidentally delivered by the taxi-driver who misunderstood Francine’s pronunciation of Bourbon Street. Miss Mattie warns them of impending doom—their relationship is soon to be destroyed when Francine is lured away by an incredibly captivating woman. Miss Mattie tells Kay that when Francine returns she will be an altered woman and warns her not to look into her former lover’s eyes. To prevent this catastrophe altogether Miss Mattie advises them to leave New Orleans at once.

Dismissing Miss Mattie’s advice as merely tourist-baiting mysticism, Kay and Francine successfully make their way to Bourbon Street where they enjoy a fun night of music, dancing, and drinking. Later that night they end up relaxing in the lounge of their hotel. Francine soon finds herself mesmerized by an auburn-haired, creamy-skinned woman clad in a black silk dress.

Francine felt hypnotized. It was almost as if the woman had been waiting—waiting for Francine’s eyes to finally find her—patiently sitting alone and waiting for that very moment. And although Francine could vaguely see her eyes through the net, it seemed as if they were imporing Francine to meet her gaze. Francine felt somewhat dizzy. She could hear a faint humming somewhere, perhaps in the very heart of her soul. A tingling, a warmth, an excitement overcame her. Without turning away, the woman carefully lifted the veil—exposing first the full lips, then the chiseled nose, and finally, those burning, deep eyes (140).

Kay, unable to see what had Francine so captivated, angrily goes up to bed while leaving her lover in the lounge alone. Immediately after Kay’s departure, the mysterious woman approaches Francine and introduces herself as Lilith. Francine unsuccessfully tries to break Lilith’s hypnotizing gaze. Although she feels a strange nagging that she is forgetting something, someone who is waiting for her, Francine accepts the enchantress’s invitation to leave the lounge. Up in a strange hotel room, Francine is seduced by Lilith’s intense sexuality. Francine in drawn into passionate lovemaking. At the point of her climax, Francine feels Lilith’s sharp teeth pierce her neck. Although initially terrified, as the pain in her neck
begins to ebb, Francine experiences a sense of bliss and gratification. She is "starting to embrace oneness with Lilith" (145).

The newly pale and languid Francine then goes to get her lover—to have Kay join her in this deathless journey. Kay soon understands that the woman standing opposite her is no longer the same woman she had loved. While Francine tries to get Kay to look her in the eyes, Kay knows that she must send the woman she loves away.

The story ends on a vague note with Kay trying to send her lover away—knowing that Francine has been somehow changed—while Francine tries to make Kay meet her captivating gaze. While the reader is left unsure of Kay's fate, it is clearly understood that the evil, destructive Lilith is the cause of all of this pain. It was the forceful, captivating lesbian vampire who seduced the innocent and weak woman. Lilith is, indeed, the death-giver, the creator of Francine's undead state. Her vampirism is not presented to be in any way healthy or rejuvenating. Her destructive activities are only perpetuated because her victim is sent to find someone else to convert. Lilith is a woman obsessed with blood, lust, and sexuality. She is a "wanton woman whose sexuality brings destruction, the cruel and terrifying woman as death personified, the woman whose need leads to a wasting away of those around her" (Dark Angels 15).

Representative of the second aspect of the Goddess—the generous and caring middle-aged mother who, through blood-sharing, regenerates other women, is the story entitled "Medea," written by Carol Leonard and found in Dark Angels. This story is quite non-traditional in that the vampire Medea is by no means interested in bringing about death. Rather, she is concerned with revitalizing women's bodies and souls.

It is a story of a woman named Hannah who is joining her old college friends for their annual vacation at an island retreat. While taking a rest from her activities with her friends, Hannah meets a woman, a "vampira" (58), about whom she has literally dreamed since she was a small girl. As they begin to converse they get to know much about each other.

The middle-aged woman, the "vampira," is named Medea. She is a midwife who has spent her life honoring the life-giving powers of women's blood. She is approaching menopause, but she knows that Hannah is in her "fullness right now" (62). Medea explains her knowledge of Hannah's fertility by saying:

I could smell you as soon as you entered the building. I was a midwife for many, many years. Somehow I was always drenched in the blood from births and I loved it. I loved everything about birth: the smells, the sounds, the great mystery of life coming back in.

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I had tremendous respect and awe for the process and for women's power in the moment. Birth blood to me was joyous and sacred (62).

Medea then informs Hannah that, since her own fertile years are coming to an end, she wants and needs to initiate a younger woman into vampirism. As Medea is aging, she knows that the time has come to pass the torch onto someone younger and more able to continue the tradition of blood-drinking and blood-sharing. At the same time, Hannah knows that the wise-woman is hungry and in need of her blood. With their blood-sharing, Hannah will be "born anew into the mysteries and wisdom of the Mother" (Keesey, Dark Angels 17), and Medea's hunger will be sated and her body and soul refreshed.

The blood-sharing takes place during passionate lovemaking when Medea reaches deep inside Hannah and makes her bleed. As Medea reaches deep within her, "Hannah [feels] an indescribable power surge through her and [feels] as though Medea [is] searching, grasping for her very soul" (66). This is, indeed, a life-giving exercise, for each is helping to regenerate the other.

The next morning, after the blood-drinking, Medea appears radiant and glowing, fully healthy again. Although Hannah appears rather pale and tired, her young body will certainly return her to normal in a matter of days. As Medea leaves, vowing to return during Hannah's next "moon cycle" (68), each woman is eternally grateful to the other for enriching her with the blood-born gift of renewed life.

"Louisiana: 1850," written by Jewelle Gomez and included in Daughters of Darkness, is a lesbian vampire story which represents the first aspect of the Goddess. It is definitely one of the least traditional of all the lesbian vampire stories included in Keesey's two anthologies. It is an incredibly calm, gentle, and relaxing story.

The story begins when a young slave girl, simply called "the Girl," is rescued by a kind, older woman known as Gilda. Gilda runs a brothel with her lesbian vampire partner, Bird, employing eight girls. The Girl is brought under Gilda's care not to work as a prostitute but rather to perform regular household chores. Although a little uneasy about Gilda's and Bird's mysterious behavior—they never eat in a matter of days. As Medea leaves, vowing to return during Hannah's next "moon cycle" (68), each woman is eternally grateful to the other for enriching her with the blood-born gift of renewed life.

The Girl is brought under Gilda's care not to work as a prostitute but rather to perform regular household chores. Although a little uneasy about Gilda's and Bird's mysterious behavior—they never eat and always move around in shadows or at night—the Girl knows that these two women love her and are providing her with a home and a sense of place.

Gilda and Bird are, indeed, not typical women. Nor are they typical vampires. When they take blood they do not take life. They believe that there is no need for such destructiveness. Gilda explains:

There are those of our kind who kill every time they go out into the night. They say they need this exhilaration in order to live this life. They are simply murderers. They have no special need; they are rabid children. In our life, we who live by sharing the life blood of others have no need to kill. It is through our connections with life, not death, that we
live. There is a joy in the exchange we make. We draw life into ourselves, yet we give life as well (130).

Gilda has been alive for three hundred years. Bird has lived as Gilda's partner for a good portion of a normal human lifetime. But now Gilda is tired. She loves Bird with all her heart and is afraid to leave her, but she is tired of this life. She is tired of trying to understand people's destructiveness—she knows a great war is coming and she believes that she simply cannot endure anymore. Gilda wants to be free from this life and finally rest.

Gilda decides to initiate the Girl as a new partner for Bird. This initiation consists of reciprocal blood-taking. After sharing blood with Gilda, the Girl, feeling sick and tired, sleeps, only to awake to find Gilda gone and Bird standing over her. Gilda has left—she has gone out into the ocean, into the sun that will strip her body of its flesh and its life—but she will finally be able to rest, for she has lived a long and full life. Although hurt and scared, Bird must be strong and accept Gilda's departure. Now that Gilda is gone, Bird is left with the Girl as her partner in life. Everything occurs in cycles—Gilda had lived her long cycle of life and now she finds freedom in death. Bird and the Girl (now known as Gilda) are finding freedom in their new life together.

The young Gilda is a virgin girl, newly initiated into the life of blood-sharing. She is gentle and caring and views sex and blood-letting as an act of love and reciprocity. She is anything but destructive and never takes more than she gives. Lesbian vampires such as Gilda are very far from the traditional notion of the lustful, destructive female vampire.

The lesbian vampire stories described here are associated with the three aspects of the Goddess. Such a chronicling of lesbian vampire stories (from the most traditional to the most non-traditional) traces the progression of lesbian vampire lore that has allowed for the reappropriation of lesbian herstory. Stories of female vampires, intricately woven with images of the Goddess and lesbianism, have traditionally demonized both lesbians and the Goddess. In recent years, with raised feminist and lesbian consciousnesses, lesbians have begun to reclaim and reinvent these stories. With the reclamation of lesbian vampire stories, women, lesbians, and the Goddess are glorified. Pam Keesey describes this reclamation of lesbian herstory well:

We revision the dark angel, embrace the aspects of sexuality, blood, death—all that we are taught to deny and fear. We look death in the eye, we see not the horrific figure of death that we are taught to expect, but the beauty of death when it comes to us in its natural form (Dark Angels 15).

With such redefinition we are able to create a world around us that does not fear, hate, or repress the aspects of sexuality, life, and death that are intrinsic parts of our lives. We create a community that is dedicated to our lives, our empowerment, and our regeneration.

Works Cited


Women in Madness: Ophelia and Lady Macbeth
by Melissa Bosstrom, '96

The Renaissance marked a turning point in the popular perception of insanity. Some people adhered to a belief in supernatural causes of madness while others were beginning to think that it might have other origins (Neely 315). In the Elizabethan era, witchcraft or sin was still widely suspected to be at the root of madness (Vey-Miller and Miller 81). Carol Thomas Neely points out that some people, such as Edward Joden, were already trying to separate madness from a divine or supernatural cause. In *A Brief Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, one of the first works to provide a rational explanation for madness, Joden attempts to sharpen the distinction between bewitchment and insanity. His theory, also held by many of his contemporaries, was that madness was the result of biological irregularities such as retention of menstrual blood or a “wandering womb” (although this theory was somehow supposed to apply to both sexes). The cure for this insanity, according to Joden, was marriage and the regular sexual activity that accompanied it, which would bring the woman’s reproductive system under her husband's control (Neely 317-18). Although such a theory is somewhat physiological in nature, the power differential between the sexes is also an integral element. In analyzing the possible reasons behind the madness of Shakespeare’s characters such as Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, such inter-gender power differentials take on great importance.

A variety of theories abound to explain Ophelia's madness. Marguerite Vey-Miller and Ronald Miller propose that Ophelia and Hamlet have, in anticipation of their marriage, already enjoyed each other sexually (82). Vey-Miller and Miller argue that the familiarity of the characters’ language stems from a sexual familiarity. When Ophelia loses Hamlet despite her acquiescence to intimacy, she must face not only the emotional loss but also the continual praises of her purity. The hypocrisy of her situation and the secret which she must keep within her finally drive her to madness, according to Vey-Miller and Miller (82-83). Yet the text does not support their view of Ophelia's madness. Why should Hamlet ask Ophelia “Are you honest?” (3.1.103) if he already knows that he has compromised her chastity? Similarly, Ophelia’s confusion at Hamlet’s behavior in act three, scene two hardly paints her as a woman familiar with sexual matters. When Hamlet asks if he may lie in her lap, for example, her answer is not a teasing “Maybe later” or a concerned “Not here, my lord.” Instead, she says “No, my lord” (108)—a response that indicates her bewilderment and sexual innocence in the situation. Hamlet's insinuations finally build until she is entirely uncomfortable and can say nothing but “You are merry, my lord” (116). He is having fun at the expense of her confusion, it seems to her. She never realizes that Hamlet has projected his mother's perverted sexuality onto her and that this is the reason for his attack (Traub 219).

In fact, Valerie Traub has argued that the only expression of Ophelia's sexuality is in her death (225-27). Hamlet has told the audience earlier that death is “A consummation / Devoutly to be wished” (3.1.63-64). Traub argues that the same is true for Ophelia, for it is her only consummation in the course of the tragedy. It is only after her death that Hamlet can express his feelings for Ophelia: “I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers / Could not with all their quantity of love / Make up my sum” (5.1.256-58). Traub likens this consummation to the tomb scene of *Romeo and Juliet* in which the lovers die in an embrace of consummation. Yet Ophelia dies before she ever has the opportunity to enjoy the consummation of her love for Hamlet. At her grave, her brother cries: “From her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring!” (5.1.26-27). With such textual emphasis on her chastity, the explanation of Ophelia's madness as the result of impurity can no longer hold true.

Elaine Showalter presents R.D. Laing’s clinical view of Ophelia’s madness as schizophrenia in response to her environment of conflict (77). David Leverenz supports this theory in pointing out that Ophelia is torn between conflicting voices: her desire to obey her father’s wishes and her love for Hamlet (299-301). Polonius wants her to make a good match, yet he tells her to break off her interaction with Hamlet, who exhibits a destructive power in his very speech, according to Inga-Stina Eubank (87). The conversation between Ophelia and Hamlet in act three, scene one is a particularly powerful example of this type of speech. Hamlet at first tells Ophelia, “I did love you once” (115). Yet in his next speech he proclaims, “I loved you not” (119). The conflicting messages from Hamlet and Polonius seem a plausible explanation for Ophelia’s madness.

It is important to note, however, that Polonius and Hamlet create her very identity. If Ophelia had a sense of self-worth not derived from these men, perhaps she would have not have been so vulnerable to the mental disturbance caused by Polonius and Hamlet. Showalter points out that it is impossible to construct a biography of Ophelia from the text of the tragedy alone—she has no history that is not connected with Hamlet (87). When compared to the characterization of Hamlet, Ophelia is a
"creature of lack" (78). This idea, Showalter says, is emphasized when Hamlet tells Ophelia that "nothing" is "a fair thought to lie between maids' legs" (3.1.112-13). A few lines further into the scene, the image of nothingness is reinforced when Ophelia tells Hamlet, "You are naught, you are naught" (139). Ironically, it is Ophelia herself who is "naught." A.C. Bradley describes her as beautiful, sweet, pathetic, and dismissable (Neely 316). To Bradley—and perhaps to the audience as well—she is not a fully characterized woman suffering from intense emotional conflict. She is merely a tragic element.

As a figure without an identity of her own, Ophelia is not a thinking being. Rather, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge proposes, she feels too much where Hamlet thinks too much (Showalter 80). In fact, Carol Thomas Neely and Margaret Ferguson both propose that Ophelia is a double to Hamlet. Neely points out that Ophelia becomes mad while Hamlet is absent, in England (325). Not only is her physical presence a parallel to Hamlet's absence, but Shakespeare has set up a number of counterparts between the two characters. Ophelia's true madness is the complement to Hamlet's feigned insanity; Hamlet's madness takes the form of political, thoughtful speech where hers is somatized and eroticized (325-26). The two characters even share associations of imagery, according to Ferguson (298). For example, Hamlet tells Claudius at the beginning of the tragedy that he is "too much in the sun" (1.2.67), and later warns Polonius regarding Ophelia, "Let her not walk I' th' sun" (2.3.184).

Karín Coddon alludes to the Renaissance view of madness as feminine in discussing Hamlet's feigned insanity (52). Hamlet himself seems to share this view, Showalter asserts, in his disgust with his womanly feelings (90). According to her, Hamlet suppresses intense emotions of fear and betrayal. Yet these emotions must be expressed somehow, and Ophelia becomes the character who displays them (90-92). Shakespeare presents an image of madness as womanly in an Ophelia draped in garlands, singing and speaking in lyrics. Hamlet's masculinity is thus preserved and Ophelia suffers the insanity that is the expected outcome of such powerful emotions (93). Ophelia even fulfills Hamlet's wish for death. His "To be or not to be" soliloquy (3.1.56-88) reveals his inner turmoil concerning his situation and his thoughts of suicide. Yet it is Ophelia, who never delivers such an introspective speech, who kills herself, thus again carrying through Hamlet's emotions where it would be womanly for him to do so.

Lady Macbeth is a natural counterpart to this characterization of Ophelia as a woman who possesses no integral identity without men. Writers even through the end of the nineteenth century adhered to an interpretation of Lady Macbeth's madness as a progression through the stages of demonic possession (i.e., Corson 245-47). Other writers of that century disagreed with this conception of Lady Macbeth's character, however. Johanne Luise Huberg, a Danish actress of the nineteenth century, proposed that Lady Macbeth suffered from a "demonic intoxication" of power rather than a full-fledged possession (Krabbe 147). Her interpretation of the character envisioned Lady Macbeth as a young woman driven by passion and ambition rather than possessed by evil (Krabbe 147-48).

Although Henning Krabbe uses the character's childlessness as support for Huberg's youthful interpretation (145), other writers have construed the childlessness as a possible source of Lady Macbeth's madness. Sigmund Freud proposes that she goes mad as a reaction to her childlessness (40). In her society, Lady Macbeth's only means of gaining power is through childbearing. Because she either cannot bear children or has raised none to maturity (the text is not clear as to the precise reasons that she and her husband are childless), her only access to control is blocked (40-43). Marilyn French also envisions Lady Macbeth as thwarted in seeking the means to power, but she suggests that power itself is accessible only to males (17-18). As a woman and a wife, Lady Macbeth's chief duty is to bring her errant husband to virtue, French decrees, and in failing that duty she violates her womanly identity as well as her duty to God (18). In seeking power, Lady Macbeth goes against her feminine nature; the natural outcome of such action is madness (18-19).

Other authors have focused on Lady Macbeth's attempts to "unsex" herself as the reason behind her insanity. Robert Kimbrough argues that she knows that she cannot commit Duncan's murder as a woman (178). Murder is an action of masculinity, and Lady Macbeth asks the gods to remove her womanly nature so that she may fulfill her purpose:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty.

Come to my woman's breasts
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief (1.5.38-41, 45-48).

Kimbrough further suggests that Lady Macbeth's attempt to eliminate her femininity is unsuccessful; her cruelty cannot be maintained, and she goes mad (178-80). Helen Faucit's interpretation of Lady Macbeth presents the character as possessing human affections but suppressing them, a pattern of behavior exemplified by the "Unsex me" speech (Carlisle 211-12). Such a suppression of emotions could lead to madness. Joan Larsen Klein's argument follows a similar path in assessing Lady Macbeth as maintaining her femininity because she never realizes her murderous intent (246-47). Indeed, Lady Macbeth does make an attempt on the life of Duncan, but she reveals that a weakness stops her: "Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't" (2.2.12-13). This comment shows her weakness for the structures of patriarchal society and provides a glimpse into theories of madness through male constructions that will be presented later.

Still other writers have centered on the influence Lady Macbeth has on her husband in initiating the string of murders which occur in the course of the tragedy. French argues that Lady Macbeth has the opportunity to dissuade her husband from the initial murder, but she chooses to support Macbeth instead (20). Although she does encourage him into action before Duncan's murder ("But screw your courage to the sticking place / And we'll not fail") (1.7.60-61), she can hardly be held responsible for the later murders, as Klein asserts (249). In fact, it appears that the initial assassination (that of Duncan) is Macbeth's own idea. Shakespeare makes it clear in act one, scene three that Macbeth is startled by the weird sisters' proclamation of his impending Kingship in Banquo's question: "Good sir, why do you start Macbeth's own idea. Shakespeare makes it clear in act one, scene three that Macbeth is startled by the weird sisters' proclamation of his impending Kingship in Banquo's question: "Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (51-52). This visible start implies that Macbeth has already thought about taking the throne, even without the encouragement of his wife.

Klein states that Lady Macbeth cannot be held responsible for the subsequent murders of Banquo and Lady Macduff and her children because Macbeth decides on these murders by himself (249). Lady Macbeth is increasingly left out of the decision-making process. Before Banquo's murder, she is aware that her husband has plans to secure his throne, but he refuses to give her more precise information in the matter: "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, / Till thou applaud the deed" (3.2.45-46). Lady Macbeth seems to have even less information about the murders of Lady Macduff and her children; Lady Macduff is only mentioned for a moment in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking: "The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?" (5.1.39). As Macbeth's "dearest partner of greatness" (1.5.10), she does not seem to be allowed to fulfill her role. Her other major role, according to Klein, is that of the hostess (252). When Duncan arrives at Inverness, Lady Macbeth busies herself with the entertainment of the guests as almost her sole occupation. By the coronation banquet, however, Macbeth has taken over her duties in inviting the guests and supervising the preparation of the feast (253). Without a role to play as either the wife-partner of great Macbeth or the proud hostess, Lady Macbeth's only power and identity in patriarchal society have been eliminated. Her sense of individuality has been stripped away, and she is left to madness and suicide.

Friedrich discusses this loss of individuality in a few fleeting comments concerning Ludwig Jekels's theory that Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are halves of one whole (45). Jekels's argument uses evidence from the text to reveal that the natural outcomes of Macbeth's thoughts appear in Lady Macbeth. For example, he points out that Macbeth proclaims that he "does murder sleep" (2.2.35), but it is Lady Macbeth's sleep which is disturbed into sleepwalking. It is Macbeth who speaks of his fear that he will never be able to wash Duncan's blood from his hands: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" (2.2.59-60), but Lady Macbeth is the character who even in sleep cannot escape the bloodstains: "Out, damned spot! Out, I say!" (5.1.32). Finally, it is Lady Macbeth who must pay the price of madness for her husband's unnatural deeds. When she is no longer needed by him as either wife or hostess, when she no longer has an identity, she loses her sanity as well.

Ultimately these many theories of madness converge. Both Ophelia and Lady Macbeth's madness results from the construction of their identity by men. For Ophelia, it is the identity of the dutiful daughter and chaste lover that tears her apart. With her father dead and Hamlet shipped away to England, she no longer exists in relation to these men. In fact, she barely exists at all; she dies within a short time of her father's death and Hamlet's expulsion. Her madness is the logical result of the loss of her identity through the absence of the men who constructed it. Lady Macbeth suffers a similar fate. As a hostess and a wife, her identity has been constructed by men. Once she is no longer needed by her husband, she exists without a purpose. Her madness, like Ophelia's, is the logical result of losing her identity, constructed by men. These women are doomed to insanity and death because they subvert their individuality to become the male construction of themselves. When they are no longer defined by those men, the women lose themselves to madness.

Works Cited
Madonna has been called "the most provocative artist in popular music today." The public controversy surrounding virtually every project she has undertaken from "Like a Virgin" in 1984 to her starring role as Eva Peron in the forthcoming Andrew Lloyd Weber version of Evita attests to her ability to push people's cultural buttons. Madonna has not only grabbed the attention of the general public, as any person who has had her 15 minutes of fame might do, but has also made her way into the realm of serious academia, arguably a more respectable accomplishment. In this essay, I will discuss academic arguments both criticizing and applauding the uses of the erotic. Finally, I will illustrate how Madonna embodies the ideologies of postmodernity in her representations of eroticism.

One criticism of Madonna's portrayals of sexuality is that they are not erotic but, in fact, pornographic. This criticism surfaced in 1990 with the production of her Justify My Love video, which MTV refused to air in any time slot—even evening rotations. In "Madonna's Postmodern Feminism," Cathy Schwichtenberg says that "Justify My Love has been characterized with a moralistic litany of charges against nudity, bisexuality, sadomasochism, and multiple partners (group sex). The video opens up a Pandora's box of sexual prohibitions, which are judged as such through the maintenance of a single sexual standard" (137). Schwichtenberg illustrates how this "single sexual standard" may be utilized by two very different camps:

Perhaps most alarming is the tactical alliance between antiporn feminists and the right wing, of which Rubin notes that, "stripped of their feminist content, much of the language and many of the tactics of persuasion developed by the feminist anti-porn movement have been assimilated by the right-wing" (Stamps 1990, 9). Thus, feminists concerned with violence against women find themselves strange compatriots with the Moral Majority in a coalition that will not necessarily deter male-perpetrated violence, but is likely to place sexual minorities under siege by the state (137).

The coalition of these two groups in the fight against "pornography" illustrates how "one's body (and what one chooses to do with it) may be the last bastion of freedom against those discourses that try to restrict it" (Schwichtenberg 137), for not only is the right wing suppressing sexual minorities in its typical form, but liberal feminists are assisting them in the effort. Schwichtenberg asserts that this feminist position demonstrates how "even those discourses associated with the progressive agendas of liberalism, socialism, and feminism, which supposedly pride themselves on a politics of cultural
Madonna poses a threat to many of her critics because she portrays sexuality in its various forms. She has asserted that you can only be controlled when you give up your sexuality, a view that echoes the sentiments of Audre Lorde in her 1978 essay, “The Uses of the Erotic.” Lorde says, “In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial” (342). For both women, eroticism provides a source of personal power. “Of course,” Lorde says, “women so empowered are dangerous” (340).

While the comparison to Audre Lorde is my own, Schwichtenberg herself compares Madonna to another figure from Abelove’s section on “The Uses of the Erotic”—Robert Mapplethorpe. She says:

Both Madonna's polymorphic video and Robert Mapplethorpe's S/M photographs have served as vehicles for public controversy. The two have much in common as multidiscursive fragments that have insinuated themselves into our culture's sexual lingua franca as so many loaded signifiers. However, they share even more than representational proliferation and an excess of signification, for Richard Meyer (1990) notes that Mapplethorpe's visual aesthetic relies on the intrinsic theatricality of S/M, a high stylization that also informs the sexual stylistics of Madonna's Justify My Love video (138).

In "Looking for Trouble," Kobena Mercer's essay on Mapplethorpe, the issue of political alliances based on cultural discourses is discussed once again. Though Mercer was initially offended by Mapplethorpe’s images of black men because they seemed to him to objectify the subjects, he says “I've changed my mind . . . because I have no particular desire to form an alliance with the New Right” (359). He says:

The fact that Mapplethorpe's photographs are open to a range of antagonistic political readings means that different actors are in a struggle to hegemonize one preferred version over another. The risky business of ambivalence by which his images can elicit a homophobic reading as easily as a homoerotic one, can confirm a racist reading as much as produce an antiracist one, suggests that indeterminacy doesn’t happen “inside” the text, but in the social relations of difference that different readers bring to bear on the text, in the worldly relations “between” (359).

The ambiguity of Madonna's work leaves it subject to the same types of “antagonistic political readings.” For example, the scene in Justify My Love in which Madonna is kissing an androgynous individual can be read several ways. One might suggest that Madonna is illustrating her own homophobia by kissing an androgynous person rather than someone readily identifiable as a “real” woman. On the other hand, this scene could be viewed as highly homoerotic in that Madonna is kissing a woman who has not gendered herself according to compulsory heterosexual standards of the “real.” The latter would be my interpretation.

Madonna's role as postmodern revolutionary is most evident in her representations of sexuality. Her eroticism has been perceived by some in the gay and lesbian community as an affront to their identity. She appropriates what she needs from them yet refuses to identify as a lesbian herself. However, it is, in fact, the polymorphism in her theatrics and a rejection of identity that makes her postmodern. Schwichtenberg confirms that “sexual identities are displaced by multiple erotic acts” (138).

While Madonna may indeed be perceived as a threat to gay and lesbian identity, she represents a threat only inasmuch as she is a postmodern activist. She takes these identities our culture insists are natural, essential, and real (heterosexual/homosexual, woman/man, religious/secular) and challenges their transparency. There is a fear that gay and lesbian people could become more politically disempowered if postmodern theorists and activists discount essential gay/lesbian identity. This concern is understandable because civil rights protection has historically been extended to people based on essential characteristics such as race and sex. In an attempt to ease such a concern, Judith Butler explains that “the deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated” (quoted in Schwichtenberg 141).

Madonna has taken it upon herself to make “political the very terms through which identity is articulated.” She is no more a tool for establishing gay, lesbian identity than she is for reifying heterosexual identity. She works to challenge both these identities by setting the example of her own postmodern eroticism.

Notes

1. Kobena Mercer goes on to talk specifically, as did Cathy Schwichtenberg, about the appropriation of feminist rhetoric for the purposes of the political right.

We have seen how the initial emancipatory aims of feminist antipornography arguments have been appropriated, translated, and rearticulated into the coercive cultural agenda of the New Right. Paradoxically, the success of late-seventies radical feminism lies in the way the reductive arguments about representation have been literally translated into the official discourse of the state, such as the Report of the Meese Commission in 1986. Such alliances are rarely controlled by authorial intentions, yet feminist discourses have helped to strengthen and extend neoconservative definitions of "offensive" material into more and more areas of popular culture (359).

2. I have intentionally mentioned only gay and lesbian identity here. I have excluded transgender and bisexual identities as those which are threatened by Madonna’s activism because they are in fact more
represented than challenged through her polymorphous eroticism.

Works Cited


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The Comic Rival: An Evolution from Molière's Trissotin and Wycherley's Sparkish to Stiller's Michael

by Mark Evans Bryan, '96

Northrop Frye writes that in a comedy “what normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will” (Frye 163). Frye continues this handy recipe, writing that “the obstacles to the hero's desire, then, form the action of the comedy” (Frye 164). One of these obstacles, matching even paternal opposition in its import, is the rival. From the grand comedies of the French baroque period (of which Molière is the unquestioned father and champion), to the comic plays of Restoration England (William Wycherley's stomping grounds), to the contemporary American cinema (Ben Stiller's place of business), the romantic comedy is and was necessarily peopled with rivals for the affections of the male hero's love interest. Even though the rival character has evolved quite considerably throughout the past four hundred years, the formula remains, if not the same, at least evident. What is fascinating, however, are the ways in which the rival character has been broken down into its component parts and redistributed between the romantic rivals in the films of the contemporary cinema, including and especially, Ben Stiller's unbearably trite, often unwatchable 1994 Slacker-esque romanti-dramedy, Reality Bites.

Molière (the nom de plume of 17th century French playwright Jean Baptiste Poquelin) wrote many of the great comedies of world literature over the course of his long life as a playwright, director, and actor. While he employed the convention of the comic rival in many of his plays, The Learned Ladies' Trissotin is his most textbook example of the comic rival in action. Far less despicable and lascivious than Tartuffe's title character, Trissotin is much more similar to the foppish would-be wit rival characters of the English Restoration. Trissotin is by all accounts—even those of Henriette, the unreciprocating object of his affections—not that bad a guy. He is a would-be wit, a faux scholar, and an occasional plagiarist, more interested in the lace on his cuff than the philosophy he espouses, but his pursuit of Henriette is one of simple greed and sexual attraction; he is at no point looking to throw the merchant class family, on whom he is an over-educated parasite, out on the street. Richard Wilbur, Molière's greatest translator, calls Trissotin merely "a vain and narrow pedant" (Molière 82). Trissotin is an unmitigated fool and hypocrite, but not a fiend like Tartuffe.

Molière's Trissotin fits very clearly the comic rival role that would become so popular across the
English Channel. Though Molière throws us a bit of a curve in that Henriette's father, Chrysale (the role that Molière himself originated on the stage), approves of her marriage to her love, Clitandre, and it is her mother, Philaminte, who has decided that it is Trissotin whom Henriette will marry, the rival plot of The Learned Ladies is, nevertheless, one which would become quite familiar. Trissotin advances with a sparkling tongue, Henriette retreats with a sharp one. Clitandre engages Trissotin in wit combat and Trissotin is nearly beaten. Clitandre's love is expressed time and time again. Trissotin literally chases Henriette around the set for a scene. And, finally, the marriage of Trissotin and Henriette is thwarted at the last minute thanks to the scheming of Chrysale's brother, Ariste. Clitandre and Henriette are married and everyone, except Trissotin, live happily ever after.

In The Learned Ladies, Molière created a template for the would-be wit comic rival that nearly all playwrights who followed would trace, however bluntly or incompetently. Trissotin is: a hypocrite, a fool, a fop, a relatively harmless fellow, and, most importantly, not the man whom the heroine loves.

In 1675, a mere three years after Molière's The Learned Ladies premiered in France, William Wycherley's The Country Wife took the stage in an England steeped in Restoration chic. One of that play's myriad sub-plots concerns the rivalry between Harcourt (what passes in the Restoration for a decent guy) and Sparkish (quite the foppish would-be wit) for the hand of Alithea, an heiress. Over the course of Wycherley's five acts these three circle each other until, in the end, Harcourt and Alithea are married—Frye's signification of order restored—and Sparkish, our comic rival, comes up empty.

The audience is fully aware of Sparkish's role from his first appearance (in act 1 scene 1, in which he drops fancy restaurant names and calls "wit... the greatest title in the world") to his ironic words in Act 3 scene 2:

... the reason why we are so often louder than the players is because we think we speak more wit, and so become the poet's rivals... Damn the poets!... they make a wise and witty man in the world a fool upon the stage, you know not how; and 'tis therefore I hate 'em too, for I know not but it may be my own case; for they 'll put a man into a play for looking aquint. Their predecessors were contented to make serving-men only their stage-fools, but these rogues must have gentlemen.

Wycherley portrays in Sparkish exactly the sort of vapid depthless rival that Molière perfected in Trissotin. Horner, The Country Wife's rake hero, describes our classical sense of the rival in his final lines:

Vain fops but court, and dress, and keep a pother, To pass for women's men with one another

Sparkish and Trissotin, both, are relatively harmless objects of ridicule throughout their respective plays and, in the end, are defeated to no great consequence. What is of most importance is that at no point do Molière or Wycherley leave the judgement of these characters to the audience; there is no ambiguity—Trissotin is a fake and Sparkish is a fool and neither of them cares about the object of their desires except as objects with rather deep pockets. The audience is never given a legitimate chance to, even for a moment, side with these rivals. It is never a race with an uncertain finish; we know who's the hero and who's the rival. The rival is, as Frye puts it, an "obstacle to the hero's desire." Further, their quests come to a very finite conclusion: Trissotin is discovered to be only interested in Henriette's family's money and, with great flair, exits the final scene of The Learned Ladies, and, similarly, Sparkish backs his way out of the Alithea sweepstakes with his declaration that he will not play the part to which Harcourt has agreed. These classic rivals are clearly defined and without question the lesser man in each case.

Three hundred and nineteen years after The Country Wife was first seen in England, Ben Stiller's comedy Reality Bites premiered in the United States and while this film contains all manner of contemporary shadows of the Restoration dramaturgical form, the film's basic departure (keep in mind I'm correcting for three hundred years) is its treatment of the rival character, the MTV-esque executive, Michael. One can, of course, make a very legitimate point that the film is an interesting contemporary take on the Restoration's style: there is a very palpable tension between old and new societies (young slacker versus work-a-day parents as well as the metacinematic element of Stiller's casting his famous mother, Anne Meara, in the role of an older generation employer who doesn't hire Leleina), a rake hero (Troy), a relatively self-assured heroine (an aspiring documentary film maker who Stiller even goes as far as to call "Leni," in this case short for "Leleina," but also, coincidentally, the first name of the greatest female documentarian of all time, Leni Riefenstahl), a specific audience focus (the so-called "Generation X" or "Slacker generation"), a good degree of wit combat (between Leleina and Troy, and Michael and Troy), several under-developed and unnecessary sub-plots (Vicky's possible AIDS, Sammy's coming-out to his mother) and a rivalry between two men for the heroine's affections (Michael versus Troy). It is this rivalry that forms the basic conflict of the film, as Frye would agree. Nevertheless, it is also the treatment of these rivals that is, curiously enough, the most peculiar element of Reality Bites.

The first filmic scene (as opposed to the video documentary scenes that begin the film), in which Leleina and Troy have dinner with her divorced parents and their spouses, seems to set Troy up as the
typical suitor whose opposition is largely paternal (Leleina's father's description of Troy later supports this). Over the course of the first several scenes of the film we see how close Leleina and Troy are and his role seems clear: up until we meet Michael, Troy seems the perfect Frye-esque comic lover.

From the first moment Michael is introduced, however, we are made to understand that not only are he and Leleina very similar (young and awkward, uncomfortable with their roles), we are beaten over the head with how similar Troy and Michael are (college drop-outs, obsessed with nostalgia—from Troy's description of the head with how similar Troy and Michael are (college drop-outs, obsessed with nostalgia—from Troy's warmed over hippie sensibility to Michael's Dr. Zeius/Planet of the Apes bank—who are relatively well-versed in TV's "Good Times" and enormously drawn to Leleina). This is a decided departure from the classical comic rivalry situation, wherein, for example, Trissotin and Henriette have absolutely nothing in common). Possibly Stiller's greatest departure from the Restoration rival formula is the brief discussion Leleina and Michael have at dinner on their First Date in which they, together, make fun of the rivals watered down to an exceptional degree, but also that the "twist" that enables the hero Restoration or Gen X, is shared by the rivals Trissotin and Sparkish and the hero Troy.

Finally, in both The Big Face-Offs between Michael and Troy (in the apartment and outside the club), Michael wins the battle of wit combat. He couldn't be more right in each case. In the end, the rivalry in Reality Bites has two major problems: 1) except for several shallow blemishes (like the ridiculous lines "What's your glitch?" and "I know what she wants in a way you never will"), Michael is consistently portrayed as the better guy—it is possible that the audience is supposed to believe that in the commercial edit of Leleina's documentary there is an implicit betrayal, BUT the film goes to great lengths to show that he was ignorant of his network's re-edit and that he did everything in his power to remedy the situation; and 2) there is no conclusion to the Michael plotline—sure he loses, and one can even buy that scenario (he may be the "better" guy, but she clearly loves Troy)—however, in the end, Michael does everything right and then, because that makes the ending awkward, we just never see him again. And so the role of rival is transformed and made respectable and therein made so damn appealing that the film makers needed to sweep it under the rug in the end.

The comic rival of old may be as dead as the enemy in the no longer black and white arena of contemporary literature and film. If Reality Bites can be held up as any sort of representative sampling of the contemporary cinema (admittedly a dubious assertion), the implicit complexity of the conflict between rivals is just far too interesting to paint with only two colors. Frye might argue that not only are the rivals watered down to an exceptional degree, but also that the "twist" that enables the hero ultimately to win has been circumvented, replaced with a betrayal (and I hesitate to even call it that) with very little literal or metaphoric weight and then the simple absence of the rival. While Reality Bites borrows from the likes of Molière and Wycherley, it does not, in the end, follow the recipe too carefully.
The idea of power and control over oneself appears throughout Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. Although she discusses power in many contexts, one of the most interesting ways that she expresses her ideas of power is through her continual references to hands. One uses one's hands to write, to sculpt, to draw, to mold, to destroy, to work. Hands are a means to power--either your own power or someone's power over you. For example, without slaves' hands, the southern plantation owners would not have had crops and profits. In Morrison's novel, a character can gain power only after realizing that her hands belong to her and to no one else. Morrison uses this idea to advance her own attitudes toward slavery and its impact on the American society of today.

The most obvious case of hands being the means to power emerges through the story of Baby Suggs. Baby Suggs asks, "What does a sixty-year-old slavewoman who walks like a three-legged dog need freedom for?" (141). She does not want Halle, her son, to waste his money paying for her freedom. But when she steps onto the ground a free woman, she realizes the joy of being free. She no longer has to answer to the white man. She discovers that only now can she truly own herself. Baby's first realization of her freedom involves her hands: "suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, 'These hands belong to me. These are my hands'" (141); hands that slave traders used to measure her worth; hands that did what the slave master commanded; hands that she never even noticed because they always belonged to someone else. Now these hands are hers, and no white man will ever own them again. Baby Suggs has discovered power through the ownership of her hands.

Perhaps Baby's self-empowerment explains why Morrison so often mentions Baby's hands in the healing and molding of Sethe. Sethe says that "If she lay among all the hands in the world, she would know Baby Suggs'" because Baby's hands "dropped just about anything they were doing to massage Sethe's nape" (98). When Sethe first arrived from the South, Baby's hands caressed every part of Sethe's body, helping her to recover from her horrific journey. Baby's hands started to remold Sethe into a free woman. But Sethe never has the chance to reclaim her hands and thereby realize her own power. Instead, she loses all when she kills the already-crawling baby. Sethe's hands, therefore, can knead bread and make food for Mr. Bodwin, but when it comes time for soothing, Sethe still prays for Baby Suggs' touch. She needs it to calm her. In this way, hands have a spiritual, rather than a physical, power--they
that represent the heart, the head, and life. But Beloved's hands are lineless, suggesting that she is a
Morrison's story. In either case, however, their ultimate value is to bring power—power to heal as Baby
these deadly hands belong to the already-crawling, dead baby, but only Denver admits that this child has
manifested herself in the form of Beloved. Thus, hands have both a positive and a negative role in
Morrison's story. In either case, however, their ultimate value is to bring power—power to heal as Baby
Suggs' hands do or power to kill as Beloved's lineless hands attempt to do.

By mentioning that Beloved's hands have no lines, Morrison once again calls attention to hands' central role in life and their significance in her story. All hands have lines, appropriately called life lines, that represent the heart, the head, and life. But Beloved's hands are lineless, suggesting that she is a spirit—an other-worldly being without a heart. Perhaps she represents slavery come back to gain power over the characters who did not realize their autonomy. This idea certainly works in the case of Sethe, who, after falling prey to Beloved's strangling in the Clearing, begins to give up her outside life. She first decides that "the hand-holding shadows she had seen on the road [at the beginning of the book] were not Paul D, Denver, and herself, but 'us three'"—herself and her two daughters (182). And later, Sethe begins to yield to Beloved's every wish—giving up food for the ungrateful Spirit and sitting passively and lamely in the corner not even brushing her own hair. She does not use her hands, her power, for anything. Thus, slavery, in the guise of Beloved, has gripped Sethe once again.

Not until Sethe sees Mr. Bodwin, whip in hand, approaching 124, in a scene that loosely resembles the earlier approach of the slave catcher and the schoolteacher, does Sethe show any emotion, any power. Not surprisingly, her hands play a major role in this scene: "The ice pick is not in her hand; it is her hand" (262). But instead of using the ice pick against her daughter, as she did eighteen years earlier, she runs toward Mr. Bodwin. Sethe has finally realized some sense of her freedom and her power: freedom to use her hands however she pleases and power to destroy whatever might get in her way.

A cursory look at the last scene, however, which shows Sethe lying, "tired," in bed, seems to contradict the idea that Sethe has realized her power. But looking deeper we discover that Morrison wants to convey no such idea. She brings the power of hands and touch back into the story through Paul

D. He "takes her hand. With the other he touches her face" and says, "'You your best thing, Sethe. You are'" (273). She is her own "best thing" because she owns her hands now and thus controls her destiny. She is no longer a slave to anyone.

This holding of hands, which Morrison describes as "His holding fingers . . . holding hers" (273), recalls the image at the beginning of the novel when the shadows of Denver, Paul D, and Sethe all look as if they are holding hands. At the beginning, however, none of the characters had dealt with his or her own personal slavery. They had not reclaimed their hands, their power as autonomous people. Thus, they could not hold hands in real life. Nor could they support another person, as Baby's hands so often did. It took the lineless, heartless hands of Beloved—the hands of slavery—threatening to reclaim their souls to make the characters confront their pasts. Only now could they claim the power that comes from controlling one's own hands.

And in a more spiritual sense, the characters can now use their hands to help each other; they have the power of touch, the power that heals. No longer must they rely on Baby Suggs' hands for healing. Sethe can trust Paul D to "hold her feet"—a promise he made at the beginning of the novel, symbolizing his willingness to support her emotionally as she tries to deal with her past. But he breaks this promise when he hears of her scandalous actions. He had not dealt with his own fears from the past and he had not reclaimed his own spirit; thus he could not use his hands to support or soothe anyone else. In the end, however, Paul D's hands attain a healing power—he is going to rub Sethe's feet. The touch of his hand awakens Sethe once again to the world, and the reader realizes that Sethe will no longer have to pray for the healing touch of Baby Suggs' hands because Paul D will always be there to lend a helping hand and to soothe away the pain and fear of the past.

Morrison's novel, more than dealing with the physical scars of slavery, focuses on the psychological scars of slavery that persist even after the slave is free. Only Baby Suggs has overcome her psychological wounds from slavery at the beginning of the story. Morrison uses Baby Suggs' healing hands, so often sought by the ex-slaves, to show that this wise woman has gained power over herself and has come to terms with slavery. Perhaps she dealt with the psychological aspects of slavery so well because Halle bought her out of slavery; she did not have to escape and to thus experience all the physical hardships and tortures that Sethe and Paul D had to overcome. In order to survive the physical torments, Sethe and Paul D allowed their psychological wounds from slavery to close but not to heal, which means that these characters must open the wounds again in order for the wounds to heal correctly without leaving scars. Once they confront their lingering fears of slavery, Sethe and Paul D will have hands as powerful and as equipped to heal as Baby Suggs'. Therefore, slavery, according to Morrison,
did not end when the slaves were freed, because too much psychological pain lingered.

The psychological scars of slavery still exist today, Morrison realizes. In a sense, Morrison suggests that as a country, we need to open the issue of slavery up and confront it so that a more equal society develops. Her story seems to argue that as a country we will destroy ourselves if we do not deal with our past slave history as Sethe and Paul D did and if we do not reclaim all our hands—all the people who live in America, no matter what his or her race or ethnic background is.

In 1986, a campaign called Hands Across America took shape to unite both sides of the country from the Pacific coast near Los Angeles to the Statue of Liberty. People of every race, ethnic background, and religion joined hands in what is considered one of the largest community gatherings in the nation's history. The object of the project was to raise money for the nation's hungry and homeless. In an abstract way, each person in the chain of people held hands with everyone else in the chain, disregarding race, color, and religion. The chain could thus symbolize the diversity of our country and our pride in this diversity. But Morrison would argue for a more concrete acceptance of our cultural diversity. In her eyes, we must be willing to hold hands with our neighbor, whoever he or she may be, before we have truly accepted the diversity of this country. Hands Across America is like the shadow of Sethe, Paul D, and Denver—the potential for power and for healing is in each of them, but until they deal with their pasts, they cannot touch each other and feel the soothing comfort of friendship. The novel suggests that Americans today must be able to touch each other without noticing the color of the person's skin before we will truly heal as a country. Only then have we erased the psychological scars of slavery.

Works Cited


Can a female hero exist within the traditional hero structure? Is it possible to remove the male hero from the myth and merely insert a female? Can she perform the duties of the hero as a female, or must she shed her femininity for a more masculine exterior to function as a hero? And if she denies her femininity, is she still a female hero? When a female is discussed in the hero structures of Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, and Robert Ray, her role is usually secondary to that of the male hero. She is an accessory that he carries with him as a badge of honor. Should the reader attempt to substitute a female hero from the male hero, it becomes clear that the hero structure quickly disintegrates. A deeper look at each of these hero structures reveals that a female hero cannot exist and that in order to have a satisfying female hero a new structure must be established.

The traditional heroine of myth has been the passive female—the tragic beauty who waits for the hero to rescue her from death or the clutches of another man. She is a heroine only because of her association with the male hero, not because of any deeds of valor that she has performed. Western culture has integrated this ideal of the passive female hero into all forms of literature and entertainment—from novels to movies the female hero, in true heroic form, hardly exists. And that is not because of a lack of mention of women in the hero structure; instead, it is due to the lack of strength in the women who are described by men such as Campbell, Ray, and Frye. All of these men work women into their hero structures but none create a hero structure within which a female hero can thrive.

In each of the three hero structures offered by Campbell, Frye, and Ray, the authors base the structures on masculine characteristics that cannot transcend gender lines. To create a female hero who retains her feminine nature, one must extract the characteristics that are specifically heroic and specifically female. A masculine female is not a true feminine hero. A damsel-in-distress is not a true feminine hero. Instead, a woman who is strong in her femininity and is not forced into a male hero structure is the true female hero.

So, who is the true female hero?

Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, and Tom Robbins each offers a unique and compelling look at the female hero. The heroines in the novels Sula, The Handmaid's Tale, and Still Life with Woodpecker differ greatly from the female heroes as defined by Campbell, Frye, and Ray. Each of these authors has
found characteristics that are inherently female and created female heroes that follow a new set of rules. For these reasons it has been greatly disputed whether or not these women are true heroines. Instead, Offred is regarded as an inactive hero, Sula as a woman of ill repute, and Princess Leigh-Cheri is an unconventional princess. A closer look at these heroines reveals that there are in fact heroines, but because they are not working within traditional male hero patterns they are not considered as such.

Can the female hero exist outside the male hero structure and be accepted as a hero in her own right? It is unclear whether or not an inherently feminine hero can be accepted in a male-based society. Offering only those characteristics that are considered weak by the rest of the world, the female hero is confined by the walls of sexism. In fact, unless the reader is willing to accept that two separate hero constructs can coexist, the female hero will never gain any ground in the fight against the male-dominated society.

To begin the search for the female hero, one must first look to the established male hero construct and how it portrays women. Campbell, Frye, and Ray ignore the female as hero completely—all mention of the hero uses the pronouns “he” or “him”—and any mention of women whatsoever is in the secondary role of reward. Are we to assume then that the female hero is merely a woman who shrugs off her femininity in order to adopt the male persona of hero? According to Campbell, Frye, and Ray that is precisely what is necessary.

Joseph Campbell’s *Hero With a Thousand Faces* offers many different aspects of the hero—none of which can fit a female. In chapter four, appropriately titled “The Keys,” Campbell outlines the structure of a hero from birth to death. Throughout this entire chapter of the book he hardly mentions women heroes, and those that he does mention are somehow not quite as heroic as their male counterparts. The hero is generally a warrior of some type, and this part of the structure is the first to disregard women. Traditionally considered the homemakers, women do not fit Campbell’s “Hero as Warrior” structure because they do not battle the world in the conventional ways. Bogged down in example, Campbell offers one female warrior-hero in the story of Saint Martha.

Now Saint Martha, at the earnest request of the people, went against the dragon. Having found it in the forest, in the act of devouring a man, she sprinkled holy water on it and exhibited a crucifix. Immediately, the monster, vanquished, came like a lamb to the side of the saint, who passed her belt around its neck and conducted it to the neighboring village. There the populace slew it with stones and staffs (Campbell 340).

This story of Saint Martha exemplifies the problem of woman as warrior-hero. Unlike the male heroes, Saint Martha is unable to slay the enemy herself. She first subdues the dragon with a crucifix—the ultimate symbol of male sacrifice, in terms of both the father and the son. For whatever reason, Saint Martha does not kill the beast herself; she instead allows the people to kill it and the implication is that it is destroyed with the help of men. The woman is a giver of life, a nurturer, and because of that she is incapable of taking life in any form. Campbell’s hero structure falls apart here because the woman cannot fulfill her duties as warrior and retain her true feminine nature. Saint Martha turns to men for help as any female hero would do in Campbell’s warrior structure.

“The Hero as Lover” also offers an interesting view of the female in terms of the male hero. The woman is the bride of the hero—she is beautiful and innocent and always in need of the hero’s help. Campbell describes the woman as “the ‘other portion’ of the hero himself—for ‘each is both’: if his stature is that of world monarch she is the world, and if he is warrior she is fame” (Campbell 342). The female cannot exist independent of the male hero. She is part of him—she is the reason for his fight, she is the prize that is won. It is impossible then to remove the male hero from that construct and replace him with a female. If the structure is reversed and a male is relegated to the “reward” or “prize” position, that emasculated male is no longer appealing to the reader. Western society has programmed the reader to idealize the strong male and a rescue by a female does not offer such a man.

Northrop Frye discussed the hero of the quest-romance in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. In the section, “The Mythos of Summer: Romance,” Frye outlines the hero structure of the quest-romance. Women are central to the quest-romance but not as the hero. As with Campbell, Frye’s females are generally the reward of the quest. Sometimes they are accompanied with a monetary gain for the hero or an elevation in stature. But overall, women are secondary characters in the quest-romance, even though they may in fact be the catalyst for the quest. Frye further says that the potential bride often “sits quietly at home waiting for the hero to finish his wanderings and come back to her” (Frye 195). However, the hero cannot commit to this woman because “she spoils his fun with the distressed damsels he meets on his journey, who are often enticingly tied naked to rocks or trees” (Frye 196). Here Frye splits the females of the quest-romance into two categories: the lady of duty and the lady of pleasure. It is this split that pits females against one another, fighting for the affections of a man.

Frye’s inability to structure the quest-romance story without a damsel-in-distress makes it impossible to trade a female hero for a male one. The female hero would not find it necessary to cavort with any male along the way if the ultimate goal of her quest was her true love. Frye’s structure does not work because it is based solely on the masculine nature or on a masculine cultural construct for male behavior—in order to work a female into this particular hero structure she would only be placed into the masculine mode of heroism. A female hero must be defined not by the masculine constructs, that are set
up by men such as Frye and Campbell, but instead by a new construct completely based on a feminine nature.

In an excerpt from his book, A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, Robert Ray examines the American hero, specifically the outlaw hero versus the official hero. Ray explains the difference between the two types of heroes and how each hero reacts to certain situations and rules of society. Ray does not, however, touch on female heroes and how they fit into his hero structure. Like Frye and Campbell, he does refer to women as related to the male outlaw hero. He completely ignores the role of women in the lives of the official hero, leaving the reader to speculate. Overall, women are basically unimportant to Ray as well as to the heroes that he outlines.

In the chapter titled, “The Thematic Paradigm,” Ray describes the competing values associated with the official hero-outlaw hero opposition. Grouped with society, women are addressed only as baggage that the outlaw hero does not want to carry. Any relationship with a woman constitutes a compromise with traditional society. “The outlaw hero’s distrust of civilization [is] typically represented by women and marriage” (Ray 243). The only women acceptable in the life of the outlaw hero are the “bad” women, generally the prostitute with the heart of gold. She poses no threat to the outlaw hero because, although she loves him, she will not conform to society’s laws either by marrying the hero. She is merely an “object of lust” (Ray 243). Women become objectified by the outlaw hero; they are less than human, only things to be used and discarded at the hero’s disposal.

In regards to the official hero and his relationship with women, Ray completely ignores the role of the female in the life of the official hero. The reader is to assume that the official hero marries a respectable girl who will give the hero many children. In fulfilling her wifely duties, the official hero’s female companion becomes non-existent in his life. How often do we hear heroic tales of Martha Washington or Mrs. Benjamin Franklin? Thomas Jefferson was a widower; perhaps the official hero does not even need a woman except as a reproduction partner and a link to traditional society.

Women cannot fit into Ray’s hero structure in any capacity other than as an object of lust for the outlaw hero or as a symbol of traditional society in the life of the official hero. In order to create a female hero—whether she be an official or an outlaw—one must disregard Ray’s hero structure, in the same way the structures of Frye and Campbell have been disregarded, and create a new hero structure.

In each of these three hero structures, the authors base the structures on masculine characteristics that cannot transcend gender lines. To create a female heroine who retains her feminine nature, one must extract the characteristics that are specifically heroic and specifically female. A masculine female is not

a true feminine hero. A damsel-in-distress is not a true feminine hero. Instead, a woman who is strong in her femininity and is not forced into the male hero structure is the true female hero. Until hero structures such as Ray’s, Campbell’s, and Frye’s are thrown out, there will be no place for a female hero in Western society.

In his essay titled “Queen Moves to Protect King,” Arnold Wesker purports that "men are quintessentially moral while women quintessentially amoral" (1). While this may sound harsh at first reading, Wesker goes on to explain that women act out of a sense of duty, a sense of practicality, a sense of survival while men act according to a moral code. Furthermore, men may not always behave according to the moral code by which they live, but when they break the rules of that code, guilt is the result. Having no moral code other than their own, women are free of guilt because their actions are a result of survival tactics rather than selfish indulgence.

Wesker, perhaps unknowingly, offers a view of the female as hero; her actions have heroic meaning—she strives to protect those she loves and herself. Other writers have attempted to create female heroes that do not adhere to the accepted hero structures of men such as Campbell, Frye, and Ray; they have all met with controversy. Margaret Atwood, in her novel A Handmaid’s Tale, introduces a female hero named Offred. Regarded by many as an inactive hero or not even a hero at all, Offred’s problematic heroic trait is her gender. Sula, the heroine of the novel Sula by Toni Morrison, has also been confronted with the same gender problem. Her uniquely female traits are the cause of many a controversy over her heroic nature. In his irreverent love story between a princess and a bomber, Tom Robbins paints the portrait of a princess who does not need to be rescued. Princess Leigh-Cheri, of the novel Still Life with Woodpecker, is Robbins’ heroic version of the princess of traditional quest-romance tales. Each of these writers does not work within the traditional male hero pattern and successfully creates a new female hero. Offred, Sula, and Princess Leigh-Cheri are different types of the female hero; just as Campbell offered the male hero with a thousand faces, so too is the female hero multifaceted.

If survival is heroic then the main character of Margaret Atwood’s novel, The Handmaid’s Tale, is full of heroics. Offred, as she is referred to throughout the novel, concentrates on her survival alone. In an oppressive society, Offred is forced to appear as though she has internalized her oppressor in order to survive. Deprived of anything that will remind her of the time that has passed, Offred takes drastic measures to insure her sanity. A pat of butter, which at one time she would have used to cook for herself or for her family, becomes an instrument of survival. She saves butter from her dinner plate to use as lotion for her skin, a remnant of the past that she is now deprived of using. Throughout the novel she repeats her mantra—words that she does not understand but that rather connect her to another human
being who has equally shared her pain. "Nolite te bastardes carborundorum"; Offred does not even know that her mantra perfectly fits her situation until two-thirds of the way through the novel. When she presses the Commander for the meaning of the phrase he obliges her: "Don't let the bastards grind you down" (242). While the phrase may not have been written by her predecessor, it is a signal from Atwood for the reader—survival is the most important thing for Offred. She must live, not only for herself but for her child and the generations to come that must know what has happened. Throughout the novel, Atwood stresses the importance of children. The cruel system of Handmaids and Wives was created in order to make children. When Offred visits the doctor, for the first time the reader is aware of just how important it is that she conceive. The doctor offers himself to her, reminding her that if she does not reproduce soon she will be sent to the Colonies. When he questions her, "You want a baby don't you?", her answer is an instant "yes" (79). She thinks to herself, "Give me children, or else I die" (79). Offred has stated an essential female heroic quality. The hero as mother. The irony is that Offred is a mother but her child has been taken from her; she can no longer nurture in the way that is true to her nature. Instead, she is a rented womb—a space for other people's children to grow but not for her own. Her oppressors have taken from her the most fundamental of her rights—the right to love her child.

The loss of her husband, Luke, is nearly as great as the loss of her child. She cannot bear the solitude of being who has equally shared her pain. "Nolite te bastardes carborundorum"; Offred does not even know that her mantra perfectly fits her situation until two-thirds of the way through the novel. When she presses the Commander for the meaning of the phrase he obliges her: "Don't let the bastards grind you down" (242). While the phrase may not have been written by her predecessor, it is a signal from Atwood for the reader—survival is the most important thing for Offred. She must live, not only for herself but for her child and the generations to come that must know what has happened. Throughout the novel, Atwood stresses the importance of children. The cruel system of Handmaids and Wives was created in order to make children. When Offred visits the doctor, for the first time the reader is aware of just how important it is that she conceive. The doctor offers himself to her, reminding her that if she does not reproduce soon she will be sent to the Colonies. When he questions her, "You want a baby don't you?", her answer is an instant "yes" (79). She thinks to herself, "Give me children, or else I die" (79). Offred has stated an essential female heroic quality. The hero as mother. The irony is that Offred is a mother but her child has been taken from her; she can no longer nurture in the way that is true to her nature. Instead, she is a rented womb—a space for other people's children to grow but not for her own. Her oppressors have taken from her the most fundamental of her rights—the right to love her child.

Before she became a handmaid, Offred had a child, a husband, and a life that could be referred to as normal. The loss of her child is acutely felt—the littlest things bring memories flooding back. As she enters her evening bath, Offred remembers her daughter and it is the memory that comforts her and ultimately helps her to stay alive.

I close my eyes; and she's there with me, suddenly, without warning, it must be the smell of the soap. I put my face against the soft hair at the back of her neck and breathe her in, baby powder and child's washed flesh and shampoo, with an undertone, the faint scent of urine. This is the age she is when I'm in the bath. She comes back to me at different ages. This is how I know she's not really a ghost. If she were a ghost she would be the same age always (82).

The loss of her husband, Luke, is nearly as great as the loss of her child. She cannot bear the solitude that the Republic of Gilead has forced upon her. It can be said, then, that the female hero is not a loner. A companion of some kind is necessary—not as a foil to the hero but rather as someone with whom the hero can share her strengths and weaknesses, her desires and fears. Without Luke, Offred is forced to look elsewhere.

The other relationships that Offred cherishes to keep her sanity are her relationship with Luke and her relationship with the handmaid before her, the other Offred. Her relationship with Luke is a matter of survival. Serena Joy wants a child and she no longer believes that the Commander is fertile, so she allows Offred to sleep with Luke in the hope that a child will be born for her to love. Offred's feelings for Luke deepen; he is the only person that seems to care about her and she is willing to do anything for him—she tells him her name, she even gives up on her dreams to escape. Her realization comes when Ofglen tells her that the "others" could rescue her if she is in grave danger. "The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him" (348). Her desperate need for affection of any kind in a world where she is denied all affection is what leads her to this confession. He will not betray her, she believes, and the knowledge that her life means something to someone else is enough to sustain her.

The relationship she carries on with the "other" Offred is only in her head, but it is a fundamental relationship for Offred. It is necessary for her well being to know that someone else has felt her pain, has known a loss similar to hers, and has escaped, even if it was through suicide. Near the end of the novel, Offred realizes that she has never been alone, that this other handmaid has always been with her, pushing her toward escape for the both of them. "There were always two of us," Offred muses (375). She hears the voice of the other handmaid telling her what she has always known. "There's no one you can protect, your life has value to no one" (375). It is this lack of ability to protect that ties into the other characteristics that make Offred a hero. She is fundamentally a nurturing female, but this society has stripped her of those things that make her a female hero. When she realizes this and leaves with the Angels (on the order of Nick, who tells her they are safe), it is then that she assumes her full role as feminine hero. It is her thoughts that are her heroic deeds, her survival, her careful account of events; these are the legacy of Offred and simultaneously her heroic characteristics.

Toni Morrison's *Sula* offers quite a different view of the female hero. Like Offred, Sula is a survivor. More importantly, however, Sula is a healer of society. Whether Sula realizes it or not, she bands the people of the Bottom together through their common hate of her. She is acting out of self-interest--Sula is looking to heal herself--and along the way she heals the people of the Bottom. Her loss is deeply felt in the interpersonal relationships of the people; they loved and cherished one another more because Sula was among them but without her they fall apart.

As a healer of self, Sula searches to make herself before she can make others. Sula has no children because she is not yet comfortable with herself. In a fight with Eva she exclaims, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Sula understands motherhood better than the true mothers of the novel. Hannah, her own mother, did not understand motherhood, and Sula is not ready to make the same mistakes. In creating herself, however, she creates Nel (her best friend) and the two form
beautiful, charming, intelligent, and sexually active—so active that she has been pregnant twice by the
romance section of the novel begins, the reader is given some background on Leigh-Cheri. She is
it is her inner relationship with herself that defines her as a female hero.

It is not Leigh-Cheri's relationship with Bernard the bomber that defines her as a hero; instead,
bomber. Like Offred, Princess Leigh-Cheri is a thinker; she is not an active hero in the Campbellian

female hero.

is a love story; it is the tale of a misplaced princess and a mad
Still Life with Woodpecker

Without Nel's friendship, disease strikes at Sula and she dies. Never reconciling with Sula, Nel
lives out the remainder of her life alone, without a lover or a friend. It is only at the end of the novel that
Nel realizes the pain she has felt for years is the loss of Sula, the loss of a friend. “All that time, all that
time, I thought I was missing Jude . . . We was girls together . . . 0 Lord, Sula, girl, girl, girlgirlgirl”
(174). Nel's cry for Sula is the call for the hero to return. The hero cannot return, but the
acknowledgement of her existence may be enough to heal Nel.

Sula's heroic qualities surface only through her relationships with others. She is the hero as healer, the hero as friend, and her worth is not recognized until it is too late. Without her, the people of the Bottom fall through the cracks, for the tie that bound them has disintegrated. Without her, Nel
cannot function, for the hero as friend is what sustained Nel and, in fact, what sustained the hero Sula herself.

Tom Robbins' crazed love story, Still Life with Woodpecker, offers yet another view of the
female hero. Still Life with Woodpecker is a love story; it is the tale of a misplaced princess and a mad
bomber. Like Offred, Princess Leigh-Cheri is a thinker; she is not an active hero in the Campbellian
respect. It is not Leigh-Cheri's relationship with Bernard the bomber that defines her as a hero; instead,
it is her inner relationship with herself that defines her as a female hero.

Leigh-Cheri recognizes her femininity and society's attempts to squelch it. Before the quest-
romance section of the novel begins, the reader is given some background on Leigh-Cheri. She is
beautiful, charming, intelligent, and sexually active—so active that she has been pregnant twice by the

The pregnancy ends in miscarriage and disgrace for Leigh-Cheri, but it forces her to realize the
irresponsibility of her actions. From that moment on she is no longer the damsel-in-distress. She takes
hold of her own life and of her ability to create life.

Unlike the typical heroines of the traditional quest-romance, Leigh-Cheri does not need to be
rescued, nor does she want to be rescued. “I goddamn refuse to be dragon bait,” Leigh-Cheri tells
Bernard early on in their relationship. “I'm as capable of rescuing you as you are of rescuing me” (99).
Furthermore, she does not look to assume the role of male hero by rescuing Bernard. When he is jailed
after visiting her home, she visits him in jail but rather than devising a plan to free him, she chooses to
share his confinement by cloistering herself in the attic of the Seattle palace. Leigh-Cheri's relationship
with Bernard leads her down the path to heroism; he is the friend, the companion that leads her toward
herself.

Early on in the novel, Robbins poses that “there is only one serious question. And that is: Who
knows how to make love stay?” (4). It is this question that Leigh-Cheri ponders while soaking up the
solitude of the attic. In order to make love stay, one must first find love. Leigh-Cheri, until she meets
Bernard, has yet to find love. “I don't have a love life because I've never met a man who knew how to
have a love life. Maybe I don't know how, either” (76). As a heroine, Leigh-Cheri recognizes her
failings and it is through her relationship with Bernard that she begins to understand the romance of
solitude; it is this understanding that leads her to a greater understanding of self.

At the end of the novel, Leigh-Cheri and Bernard are reunited but their lives appear to be over as
they have been locked inside a pyramid. The roles of bomber and princess are reversed; she sets the
dynamite and throws her body over his in an effort to save him. Neither lose their gender roles as a
result of this reversal. Leigh-Cheri's need to protect Bernard is a result of her innate female nature.
Protecting Bernard is what she must do--any other choice is not right. Leigh-Cheri realizes that it is this
word, this choice, that makes love stay. It is “the word that allows yes, the word that makes no possible
. . . In the beginning was the word and the word was CHOICE” (190).
In answering the question of how to make love stay, Leigh-Chen finds the hero within herself. She is the contemplative hero, driven to action by her desire to make love stay. Her ability to choose love, to choose to save Bernard rather than herself, that makes her heroic. This choice is an intellectual one rather than an active one, and it is the intellectual that is uniquely feminine. Not to say that women heroes are solely intellectual and male heroes solely active, but when it comes down to the choice, the female hero arrives at conclusions through an inner, intellectual struggle rather than an active, physical confrontation.

What can be concluded about the female hero from the three versions of her offered by Atwood, Morrison, and Robbins? The female hero does not need to be active in the way that her male counterpart must be in order to achieve heroic stature. She is a nurturer, a lover of life, a searcher for self, a healer of society, a carrier of knowledge and above all a carrier of life. The capacity to carry life inside her is the one trait that completely separates the female hero from the male hero. Any of the other qualities, while innately female, can be achieved by men. But modern science has not yet found a way to allow men to be the carriers of life, the vessels of knowledge, the connector between past, present, and future. It is the choice to create life that is the ultimate characteristic of the female hero. It is this choice that separates her from the male counterpart and makes her heroic; she can make this choice alone and still retain her femininity. Offred is caught in a world that has twisted this choice and made it her duty to create life; at the same time it does not allow her to see her creation through to its fruition. Sula recognizes her choice and at the same time realizes that she is not yet prepared, that she must make herself before she can properly make another person. Leigh-Cheri also recognizes the choice but adds the love component to the mix as an essential for the creation of life.

While this notion of female hero as creator may not be easily accepted, the question must be asked: If it was accepted once before with a male hero, God the father as hero and creator, then why not once again with female hero as creator? Arnold Wesker purports that women have, in one way or another, shaped the world by being the mother of men. Did the story of Eve evolve out of a distrust of women, "or did the story reflect what had been observed of the female mind—a mind for which I'm personally grateful since it was a mind that ignored God, bit the apple, and released knowledge" (2). It is this ability to shape the minds of men, to create new life that truly defines the female hero.

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The structuralist view of the heroic/epic form would have us believe that all heroes, whether in literature or in myth, conform to a basic cycle. According to Joseph Campbell, that basic structure is the three-part Departure, Initiation, and Return that he outlines in his major work on heroic form, The Hero With A Thousand Faces. The form here, according to Campbell, stems from his theory that the desire to create myth is a basic element in human nature. This theory is backed up in the book by hundreds of examples from all cultures in history, from all over the globe—Primitive, Occidental, Oriental, and Creative Mythology—all carefully sifted through by Campbell to show that all legends have the same common elements (see Campbell’s four-volume Masks of God series). It is these common elements that Campbell uses to base the foundation of his structuralist form, saying that all mankind’s heroes are a part of the same mythic cycle, and in fact, are all variant versions of one another.

Campbell’s scholarship and knowledge of myth and legend is to be admired, yet his theory is flawed. The idea that the desire to create legendary heroes through storytelling amounts to a common element within human nature is a fascinating theory, but using it as justification for such a colossal structuralist purpose lends itself to question. In effect, Campbell is using one of his theories (however intriguing) to justify the other. In addition, his use of examples is both selective in its inherent purpose and biased (consciously or unconsciously) by Western philosophy. Also, in creating such a vast infrastructure, which according to its very purpose should be all-encompassing, Campbell has lent himself to folly: if a heroic epic is found that meets the requirements of the formula, but has no specific place within the cycle, the infrastructure falls. The examples that follow should prove that while Campbell may have been a leading authority on myth and its role in society, his word (especially in Hero With A Thousand Faces) should hardly be taken as law on heroic cycles.

First comes the issue of the structure of Campbell’s argument: he first advances the theory that all heroes conform to a basic structure. This, of course, is the basic premise of Hero With A Thousand Faces, and from this theory comes the seemingly endless stream of examples Campbell provides in evidence of this cycle. The true cycle of the book, however, is buried among the examples in the second major theory: that myth-making has always been a basic human need. Campbell cites Freud among his primary inspirations, and says in his introduction to the book, “we must learn the grammar of the symbols [in myth], and as a key to this mystery, I know of no better modern tool than psychoanalysis” (Preface). In presenting his theories in this way, a nicely self-perpetuating cycle is established, one theory presented as “proof” of the other and vice-versa, and the multiple examples and stories Campbell fills the book with distract the reader from ever questioning either.

Campbell’s usage of these examples in Hero With A Thousand Faces serves a second function as well: in trying to outline a uniform structure to all myth, the author sometimes overreaches himself and fails to explain how certain aspects of specific stories fit into his overall design. In these cases, he simply loads the chapter with examples and, in effect, asks the reader to let them stand as self-evident proof of the theory. This occurs notably in chapter three, section two, “Transformations of the Hero,” where Campbell outlines all the roles the hero plays within the scope of human imagination, including “The Hero as Saint” and “Departure of the Hero.” In addition, Campbell allows Western philosophy to affect his presentation of myths from other cultures. Native American folklore, Oriental spirituality, Middle Eastern legend, and ancient lore are all viewed through Campbell’s own Judeo-Christian idealism, and in being taken out of context in this way, they lose their basic purpose. These examples are offered in proof of conclusions about myth that, consciously or not, are basically Christian principles. For example, in chapter two, section four, “Folk Stories of Virgin Motherhood,” Campbell includes the New Testament ideal of a blessed child being born from a virgin mother among his variations of the hero myth. This is also an example of another section of Hero With A Thousand Faces where Campbell clouds his basic point with stories. In this chapter, Campbell passingly cites the stories of Buddhism, Aztec myth, and Ovid’s Metamorphoses as examples of virgin birth, then goes on to recount in detail a Tongan folk tale he calls “queer” about a mother giving birth to a clam, which in turn becomes pregnant from eating a coconut husk and gives birth to a human boy. Campbell never specifically explains exactly how the image of virgin birth fits into the heroic cycle as he sets it up; in fact, Campbell’s own explication in this section is limited to a few sentences, while the storytelling takes up several pages. Again, we see that while it is admirable that Campbell knew myth and legend so well, his usage of it in his examples is, at best, questionable.

A final point concerning Campbell’s selection of legends to back up his theories is that he is too discriminative in each specific chapter for all the examples in Hero With A Thousand Faces to support each other collectively. A favorite example of Campbell’s throughout this book (and many of his others) is the Arthurian saga. However, if the Arthurian myth is applied to the chapter on virgin birth above, it fails to correspond. Far from being the holy child of a virgin mother, Arthur was begotten on the Duke of Cornwall’s wife, Igraine, by the would-be High King of England, Uther Pendragon. This illegitimate
consummation was achieved by an even further anti-Christian concept. Merlin the Wizard assisted
Uther's lustful purpose through magic in changing Uther's form to that of Igraine's husband, the Duke of
Cornwall, so that she could be deceived (see Book 1, Chapter 2 of Malory). Arthurian legend is one of
Campbell's main sources in composing his heroic cycle; however, it is clear in viewing how Arthurian
lore works within this chapter that the structure within Hero With A Thousand Faces focuses on
examples too specifically to be all-encompassing.

Keeping these basic ideas in mind, we will examine how truly flawed The Hero With A
Thousand Faces is in a detailed examination on three major premises dealing with the creation of heroes
and heroic cycles. First comes the creation of heroes from history. It is a well-known fact that history is
recorded from the point of view of those in power. Michael Foucault's theories of truth and power will
enter here in our look at William Shakespeare's heroes from his history plays, particularly Henry V. Next
we move to the creation of heroes from legend in the tales of Robin Hood, the outlaw hero of Sherwood
Forest. Here, we will see the evolution of a heroic cycle down through the passage of time. Finally, we
will move to the creation of heroes from fantasy, quite possibly the only true mythic form remaining in
the twentieth century, in the writings of J. R. R. Tolkien, author of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings.
These three examples (none of which fit Campbell's qualifications for a "true" heroic cycle) will
highlight the inherent weaknesses in Campbell's structure and show that not all heroes conform to his
supposedly all-encompassing design.

I. Creation of heroes from history: William Shakespeare's Henry V

Henry V is popularly known as England's finest monarch, and is also felt by some to be the
greatest of Shakespeare's history plays. Such a noble monarch, immortalized forever in the words of the
greatest poet in the Western world, would surely be expected to conform to Campbell's outline. He
seems to complete the three major stages outlined in Hero With A Thousand Faces: Departure, in which
he holds council about his right to begin his campaign in France, and later leaves for the French shore;
Initiation, where the young King sees the atrocities of war first-hand with the murder of all the young
boys by the French nobles; and Return, in which he brings the French princess Kate home to the English
shore, having completed a successful campaign. The basic problem with Henry V is, the man is not quite
so heroic as Shakespeare would like us to believe.

First comes the notion of Foucault's concept of truth and power. Hal is extremely problematic
with regard to this theory, as he was (naturally) the "winner," and history would show him favorably
because he was so, but he was also very well-liked by his subjects (at least in the Shakespearian version).

We are faced with a hero who, because of his status, could write his own role in the history of England
and be loved by his subjects, feared by his enemies, and respected by his peers all at the same time.
Foucault tells us that we should question this, as he was the King, he had the power he needed to create
his own "truth." This would be the truth that Shakespeare picked up and elaborated so dramatically in
his play. No power figure could ever dream of more. Our first question in regard to Henry V as a heroic
cycle arises: can we trust him as a hero? The simple fact that history is written from the point of view of
those in power would lend us to some doubt on this point. In addition, since Henry V was arguably the
most powerful king in English history, it fits within this theory that he would be portrayed the most
heroically.

A closer examination of Shakespeare's play yields even more doubt. First there is the fact that
Hal, once he gained his place on the throne, turned his back on his old friends among the common
people. Falstaff and the others in the tavern are almost forgotten by Hal until the French campaign, when
he orders the execution of one of his old drinking mates for plundering. His old mentor, Falstaff, dies
alone of consumption, and Hal does not go to him. The friends of his youth have been replaced by his
noble advisors, who, even though portrayed honorably by the playwright, have Henry's best interests at
heart, for their fates (and their powers) are bound to his. Again, Foucault enters—Hal now has the power
to surround himself with friends who are charged by honor, duty, and self-interest to him. He no longer
needs the common folk.

Even more disturbing is the final scene, with the "wooing" of the French princess, Kate. Again,
Hal is in complete control of the situation—so much so that this scene has been looked at as a kind of
rape in Shakespearian criticism. He has won the field in battle, utterly destroyed the French army, and
claims Katherine as the spoils of war. The French king has no choice but to accept his terms, and Kate,
in her innocence (and very poor English) fails to understand completely what is happening to her. In
this, at the end of the play, it would seem that if Henry V fit in with the theories of Hero With A
Thousand Faces at all, it would be only in chapter three, section five: "The Hero as Emperor and as
Tyrant" (see 345-49). Of course, history was not Campbell's main focus; his expertise lay primarily in
myth and legend. The next two examples should show even more how the kind of structuralism
displayed in Hero With A Thousand Faces operated on Campbell's own level.

II. Creation of heroes from legend: The tales of Robin Hood

It seems that everyone is familiar with the legendary medieval bandit of Sherwood Forest and his
troop of merry men. It also seems that no one would question Robin Hood's status as a hero; his only
The legend of Robin Hood is a fascinating study into the evolution of a heroic cycle from the fifteenth century to the present. The problem is, the adventures of Robin Hood have never been collected into a single, definitive volume (such as has been the case with Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*); and thus, his tales are too scattered for the mythic outlaw to complete each of Campbell's three basic requirements. The simple reason for this is that the legend of Robin Hood has undergone several drastic changes as each age adapted him to its own standards. To understand this better, an explanation of how these variations within the mythology of Sherwood Forest and its legendary inhabitants is needed.

Robin Hood in the 1400's was very much a common man's myth. His legend began in the ballads of medieval minstrels who portrayed him not as the noble "prince of thieves" that we in the 20th century have come to know him, but as outlaws were known in that same day and age. There was no Maid Marian, no Friar Tuck, no sense of robbing the rich to give to the poor, and no sense of the "jolly" nature of life in the forest as it has come down to us. Robin and his men were out for personal gain, pure and simple, and they would attack anyone who dared set foot in the greenwood (which, in the beginning, was Barnesdale—not Sherwood—Forest, just north of the traditional roaming ground in Nottingham).

Still, the basic elements that made Robin Hood a lasting force in English folklore were there: due to his love of Mary Magdalene and the church, he would never let any woman come to harm by his hand or by his men's. He would not rob the poor (though, as mentioned above, he did not rob the rich solely for his tales are too scattered for the mythic outlaw to complete each of Campbell's three basic requirements. The simple reason for this is that the legend of Robin Hood has undergone several drastic changes as each age adapted him to its own standards. To understand this better, an explanation of how these variations within the mythology of Sherwood Forest and its legendary inhabitants is needed.

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Campbell cites as examples of the heroic epic formula (Beowulf, Malory, the Bible, and so on), as he too of the structures that Campbell established in his writings. Tolkien had the same sources in mind that Campbell's book (from 1937-1948), he still set to work to bring about a heroic epic along the guidelines before the publication of The Lord of the Rings, in his own words, was:

The writings of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien are the best-known examples of fantasy epic form in the modern world; and, noting that modern fantasy is the direct descendant of epic myth, it would seem that these writings would be the most compatible with Campbell's form. Tolkien, a former Oxford professor of Anglo-Saxon literature, clearly had the heroic/epic structure as found in Beowulf and other early literary/mythic cycles in mind while creating his own three-part saga; his reason for writing The Hobbit, in his own words, was:

... an equally basic passion of mine ab initio was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me) for my appetite... I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story... which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country (Carpenter and Tolkien 144).

Clearly, even though Tolkien wrote and revised The Lord of the Rings just before the publication of Campbell's book (from 1937-1948), he still set to work to bring about a heroic epic along the guidelines of the structures that Campbell established in his writings. Tolkien had the same sources in mind that Campbell cites as examples of the heroic epic formula (Beowulf, Malory, the Bible, and so on), as he too knew them well, and even cited a few as inspirational for his own work: "Beowulf is among my most valued sources; though it was not consciously present to the mind in the process of writing" (Carpenter and Tolkien 31).

The most curious feature of Tolkien's writings to note in this analysis is that his prelude to Lord of the Rings, the children's story The Hobbit, conforms entirely to the heroic structure set up by Hero With A ThousandFaces. A single main character, Bilbo Baggins—the hero, the hobbit—goes through Campbell's three stages step-by-step: Departure, as he leaves his small Shire to adventure out into the world in search of dragon's gold; Initiation, where Bilbo, in his travels, begins to think and act as a hero and eventually reveals his heroic nature by bringing dwarves, elves, and men together by his example; and Return, where the hobbit (with his golden hoard and magic ring) travels back to his peaceful Shire, having had quite enough adventuring. Of course, this is a very condensed version of both Tolkien's book and The Hero With A ThousandFaces, yet it proves beyond a doubt that Tolkien knew the heroic cycle very well and could incorporate it into his own writing at will.

With this in mind, we come to the very point: even though Tolkien meets all the heroic expectations of Campbell's cycle in his prelude, and in fact reinforces them by meeting them so exactly, when it comes time to expand the story of The Hobbit to true epic proportions in Lord of the Rings, he fails to meet those same specifications on all fronts, in point of fact proving that the heroic theories in Campbell's book are not by far all-encompassing as they claim to be. Quite simply, The Lord of the Rings fails to meet Campbell's theories as completely as his prelude The Hobbit fulfills them. Strictly according to Campbell's structure, there are no heroes anywhere to be found in the entire three-volume saga.

To prove this, and to disprove the theories of Hero With A Thousand Faces on this topic, we will embark on an individual analysis of several main characters in the saga who are set up "heroically" throughout the cycle. Frodo Baggins, the Ringbearer and nephew of The Hobbit's Bilbo, is the obvious choice to be the saga's hero: he accepts the quest to destroy the ring, bears its weight through the "underworld" of Gorgoroth and Mordor, and finally returns to Rivendell and his friends and family. However, Frodo does not fit the hero code; he is not alone in his actions. The hobbit has his trusty friend/servant Samwise Gamgee helping him along every step of the way from the beginning of the quest in their home to its resolution with the destruction of the ring in the bowels of the mountain where it was forged—even to the point where Sam himself takes up the ring for a time. In this, neither Frodo nor Sam can be epic heroes, as both of them share in the responsibility that Campbell says only one should bear—each of them becomes a "half-hero."
Possibly Aragorn, or Strider the Ranger, is the hero then—at the conclusion of the saga, he is crowned High King of Middle Earth, he leads the final forces of elves and men into Mordor for the battle that ended the war, and of course, he does have the ancient noble blood of the line of Elendil in his veins. Still, Tolkien very deliberately sets Aragorn up as a “fringe” character through most of the cycle; he describes the Rangers as “mysterious wanderers . . . [who] were taller and darker than the Men of Bree and were believed to have strange powers” (165), and Aragorn himself, while his role grows throughout the cycle of The Lord of the Rings, still does not take an active enough part in the story to complete any of the three requirements of The Hero With A Thousand Faces. In fact, according to those specifications, he is as much a “helper” figure as he is “heroic.” His place in the story echoes Tolkien’s description of his people: he fades into the story towards the beginning to lead the hobbits to safe ground, and when the quest to destroy the ring is decided, he leads them again for a time, then turns away to rally the forces of Men together to combat the Dark Lord’s armies in battle as the hobbits (Frodo and Samwise) go on alone.

Gandalf the Wizard, then, may be the hero of the story; he accepts his responsibility to oversee the quest to destroy the ring, journeys into the “underworld” of the Mines of Moria and is there killed in combat with a demonic Balrog (whom he also kills), and then returns from the dead to assist Aragorn in rallying the forces of Men to arms. However, Gandalf, like Aragorn, is more a helper figure than a singular hero. His is a position of advisor, as it was in The Hobbit, as he is a messenger of the gods of Middle Earth, a divine spirit in human form. Thus, even though he is not omniscient—the final outcome of the War of the Ring is decided by the inhabitants of Middle Earth and not divine intervention (as in some of Campbell’s examples such as the writings of Homer and Virgil)—his power is too great to allow him to be classified as the hero.

Legolas the elf and his friend, Gimli the dwarf, are two other possible candidates—as members of the “Fellowship of the Ring,” they too accept the quest to destroy the ring, journey into the Mines of Moria (where Gandalf is slain), and reemerge again to leave with Aragorn to assemble the peoples of Middle Earth to rally for war. Still, even though these two are major characters in the saga, they do not play as active a role as some of the other members of the Fellowship (as say, Frodo, Aragorn, and Gandalf), and thus do not complete the three stages required of heroes—they are simply part of a team in which they are not major players. True, both of them have moments where they shine individually; Legolas and Gimli both are truly responsible for the survival of Aragorn and other lesser characters at the battle of Helm’s Deep, yet on the whole, they are simply not individually active enough for consideration.

The other two hobbits in the Fellowship, Peregrine Took and Merry Brandybuck, seem to complete a heroic cycle after the Fellowship is broken: they (like everyone else) accept the quest, then are captured by a company of orcs (goblins), and are carried through what might be called an underworld as their evil captors race away from the pursuing trio of Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli; and then escape to meet the tree-people called Ents and return with their newfound allies to the battle (and the company of their friends). Yet Merry and Peregrine, like Gimli and Legolas, do not take an active enough role to truly be considered heroes. In fact, these two are almost comic relief from some of the harsher elements of the story which affect some of their more prominent comrades.

The final member of the Fellowship, Boromir, takes what can only be called a minimal part in the story, as he is only featured from the time the Fellowship is assembled to a short time later when he is killed by the orcs that steal away with Merry and Pippin. It is a “heroic” death, as he fights off hoards of goblins while shot through with arrows and calls Aragorn to his aid with his battle-horn (in the tradition of Robin Hood!), yet his role is minimal, and he cannot be a hero because he is simply not alive long enough. This eliminates the entire Fellowship of the Ring—the logical place to look for our hero: Frodo, Samwise, Merry, Pippin, Aragorn, Gandalf, Legolas, Gimli, and Boromir. There are others that might be considered, yet they can all be eliminated fairly quickly, as the only characters who truly play a large enough role in the story are the first eight members of the fellowship. Elrond, the keeper of the elvish safe haven Rivendell, like Gandalf, knows too much about events that are transpiring in the war, he never leaves his valley, and is clearly a helper figure. Eowyn Shield-Maiden destroys the evil King of the Ringwraiths, yet aside from the fact that Campbell does not include women among his heroes, this is her only major role in the story (though it deserves to be noted that Tolkien’s women figures do play very important roles in the saga serving as everything from fighters to advisors). There are many other powerful characters that the Fellowship comes across in their travels: Galadriel, the elvish queen; Tom Bombadil, the master of the forests; and Eomer, brother of Eowyn; but all these characters are very clearly nothing more than helper figures and not heroes in their own right (according to the structuralist guidelines).

Perhaps an even more interesting point is this: there are only two characters in the saga that play a major enough role to be considered enemies: Sauron, the Dark Lord of Mordor (who is, in fact, considered by the good characters to be the enemy and is named as such); and Gollum, or Smeagol, the former hobbit who was warped in body and mind by the evil power of the ring. The most obvious difficulty with finding a specific enemy at this point is this: Campbell describes the enemy as being a polar opposite of the hero; yet in Lord of the Rings, we have no hero to compare an enemy to. Sauron, the
Dark Lord (the Necromancer of The Hobbit) is named by all the good characters in Lord of the Rings as "the enemy" repeatedly—they call him this for fear of even uttering his name. However, in truth, Sauron is no more than a presence in Lord of the Rings. He has no corporeal form, he never leaves his high tower in Mordor, and he does nothing more than watch the progression of the good characters against his forces and instills fear in them through some form of telepathy. This is the point that eliminates Sauron from being an enemy according to Hero With A Thousand Faces, and is a very interesting detail to note in relation to the fact that he has no hero to contrast himself to: through the entire story of The Lord of the Rings, Sauron takes no action at all! Gollum, or Smeagol, the former hobbit, does take action through the story—he constantly antagonizes Frodo and Samwise once they reach the valley of Gorgoroth in his attempt to regain his ring, his "precious." However, Smeagol cannot be considered the main enemy because of one simple point. He is simply not powerful enough. The War of the Ring has nothing to do with him specifically; he was simply its former owner (the one whom Bilbo stole it from in the events of The Hobbit). He only accosts Frodo because he wants it back. He is not evil in nature (as is Sauron); he has been enslaved by the corruptive power of the ring. Smeagol is not the enemy either.

In Lord of the Rings, the choice of the hero is left up to the reader, as we are presented with a wide array of major characters who, while not jumping through the hoops set up by Hero With A Thousand Faces, act heroically—and individual choice is something altogether missing from that book’s theories. Campbell would tell us exactly who our heroes are, while Tolkien leaves the choice up to us. It is this notion of choice, or of individual freedom, that eliminates the Lord of the Rings from meeting Campbell’s qualifications. There is no room for choice within the rigid structure of Hero With A Thousand Faces, and this may be the most disturbing point about the entire book. Either one is a hero, or one is not a hero. Richard II was not a hero; Henry V was. Robin Hood was not a hero; King Arthur was. And no one in Lord of the Rings is a hero, and neither are there any enemies, at least according to the structuralist view.

IV. Conclusion

There are several critical problems with The Hero With A Thousand Faces, but it is still a remarkable piece of scholarship, both in its influence and, since its publication, in the impact that it has had on modern hero cycles—both within its structures and those that range outside it. It inspired a young George Lucas to write a hero epic in complete conformity with Campbell’s theories, but to place it in space, and call it Star Wars. Similarly, fantasy author Michael Moorcock, creator of the Elric Saga (a distinctly anti-hero series), says in his introduction to one of his books:

Since the publication of Campbell’s work, we have seen the rise of many kinds of heroes—some traditional, some very much anti-traditional—and despite Campbell’s own apparent misgivings about heroes in the modern world (see his epilogue, section three, “The Hero Today”), there seems to be no end of heroic cycles in sight. Perhaps, on one count at least, Campbell was right; perhaps it truly is human nature to create heroes.

Works Cited


The relationship of language to music and whether or not their origins lie in a common source has been a long-debated issue. The basic concept uniting language and music is their use of a "common frequency component" (Levman 153). Both language and music form their communication from the most simplistic sounds (e.g., a single vowel sound or a single musical note). These basic sounds grouped with other basic sounds create more complex sounds leading to their own individual messages (Levman 154). These individual messages conveyed by language and music that "manipulate sound" are still closely linked according to Levman through five specific areas:

(1) pitch, or highness and lowness; (2) duration of individual sounds and speed of overall vocalization; (3) dynamics, including softness, loudness, and accent; (4) timbre or distinctive vocal quality; and (5) articulation (151).

In each of these areas, parallel examples can be displayed from language and music. For instance, the pitch of a male or female voice compared to a flute or bass create the effective highness and lowness (this example holds true for timbre, also). Dynamics and articulation are demonstrated depending on the skill of the performer. However, the duration of sound remains dependent on the basic components of the word itself or the indicated length of the musical note.

Several languages are mainly accentual (e.g., Greek) while others are quantitative, English being one (Monelle 263). By being a quantitative language, English sounds are prolonged. Therefore, its quantitative origins led the way for English to be more closely related in its sound capabilities of duration to music than, say, Greek. English is also an accentual language which works well with music since music is a language of duration and accent.

Another interesting relationship that comes into play between language and music is the variance between accentual verse (e.g., iambic pentameter) and quantitative verse. In essence, Shakespeare took a quantitative language, English, and shaped it to fit the form of accentual verse. By contrasting two opposite forms in this manner, dissonance should be heard by the listener; however, melodious lyrics roll off the tongues of Romeo and Juliet.

For example, consider that in Juliet's famous line "0 Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?" (2.2.33), the downbeats fall on the word "Romeo" three times out of the five possibilities of this pentameter rhythm. Romeo is the stressed word on the first, second, and fifth beats ("wherefore" is stressed on the third beat and "art" on the fourth). Monelle, who writes on the fact that poets have often referred to the conventions of musical meter in writing their poetry, states, "recurrent stressed syllables in verse resemble the first beats of [musical measures]" (254). In a musical composition written on common time (four beats to a measure), the first and third beats are felt the strongest and anticipated by the listener. However, this is a five beat line. Shakespeare, by placing "Romeo" on the first beat emphasizes the name and then on the fifth beat (the next odd beat after three) repeats it again. Thus,
Shakespeare allows the line to begin and end with its stress on "Romeo,"

In the following and preceding lines, Shakespeare did not stick to the same meter and in turn changed the rhythm. In music, the meter changes at unpredictable moments. Berlioz, as Shakespeare, changed time signatures (therefore placing the stress on a different beat) throughout his Scene d'amour (Berlioz, second section). Lightfoot solidifies this comparison in saying, "Music and verse rhythm are essentially alike in terms of employing downbeat in a divisive time pattern of expectation" (255).

Along with these stresses comes the phrasing of the line. Shakespeare wrote his lines with punctuation. If he did not write with punctuation, the long "0" sounds in "Romeo" would have run into one another. And even if Juliet's line was written without punctuation, it would still liken itself to musical sounds, for Charyn believes, "Word against word sounds like music" (120). However, with the commas and exclamation marks, Shakespeare asked the performer to take a breath, a minute silence. These sounds and silences shape the line's musical rhythm, for sound and silence are the basic fundamentals that shape rhythm.

The rhythm is also kept alive by the repetition of words and sounds that occur frequently throughout the conversation of Romeo and Juliet in the well-known balcony scene. Again, returning to Juliet's previous quoted line, the long sound of the vowel "0" can be heard eight times in a line of only seven words. Being a long vowel, its duration is longer than a short sound and the combination of eight long "0" sounds make Juliet's line linger in the listener's ears. Undoubtedly, this line's musical structural quality contributes to its fame and commitment to memory over time.

Romeo's name itself holds a melodic quality. Monelle calls dactylic and trochaic meters "prose-songs" (257). Romeo's name is a dactyl in nature (one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables) allowing the beats of the line to fall on his name and emphasizing the duration of the sound "0." Also, the listener is hearing this line from the same speaker, Juliet, thus establishing the pitch in the higher register. Combining these two aspects of the duration of sound and the regulated voice-pitch (taken into consideration without the fluctuations produced by the other vowel sounds) along with the constant rhythmic beat of the line, a correlation between pitch and time is formed. With this identification, the listener has presented to his or her ears "Pitch-time events ... the basic psychological building blocks of tonal music" (Raffman 27).

Another unique function of Romeo's and Juliet's names deals with the emotive effect the listener feels upon hearing a certain number of syllables that make up a word. Hugo states that multisyllabic words "have a way of softening the impact of language ... [by generating feelings of] compassion, tenderness, and tranquility" (8). It is this overwhelming emotion of passion thrust upon the listener while hearing Romeo and Juliet voice their lover's name in a declaration of love.

However, the names of Romeo and Juliet contrast also. Romeo's name is a dactyl and Juliet's name is a trochee (one stressed syllable and one unstressed). Romeo's name ends on an open vowel and Juliet's ends on "t" closing the word (Gass 17). Yet the two names together, when heard in the title Romeo and Juliet, create a sound pleasing to the ear, thus yielding harmony.

Berlioz combined Shakespeare's balcony scene (2.2) with the love scene (3.5) to create his climactic section, Scene d'amour. This combination resulted in his interpretation of the drama he saw and the sounds of harmony he heard. Berlioz even labeled a section Allegro agitato (quickly agitated). Berlioz was most likely describing the emotion he heard through the intonation of the performers' voices, concerning the discrepancy which English speakers know of as the scene where Romeo swears by the moon.

Berlioz himself was aware of the power of sound. Of course he was a composer of music and was partial when he stated, "Music is the sole art that has this retroactive power; no other, not even that of Shakespeare, can thus poetise the past it recalls" (443). Here it appears that Berlioz addressed the message words can convey in meaning and not sound. Raffman agrees with Berlioz concerning this point, saying, "The tie between music and feelings is considerably tighter than the tie between a sentence and its meaning" (55). Therefore, Berlioz left the goal of communicating individual messages up to the sounds created by language and music. Therefore, is it any coincidence, though voices are heard frequently entering and exiting throughout Berlioz's masterpiece, that the Scene d'amour section was dedicated to entirely instrumental sounds after the initial chorus leaves singing their good nights after the Capulet ball?

The aspect of silence must also be considered here because it is the other half constituting rhythm. Shakespeare used the device of the rhetorical question. Looking still at Juliet's previous quoted line, it is a rhetorical question. This one Juliet herself does not even answer. The inflection of the voice ends on a higher pitch (or note) when asking a question. Berlioz heard these raised inflections at the end of the questions, but heard no other voice answer it. He only heard Juliet continue to speak. Where was the other voice? It remained in silence. Raffman proposes, "we can assume that perception originates with the transduction of acoustic properties of the sound signal" (26). The question mark serves as a signal to the eye of the reader. However, the sound of the raised pitch of the voice serves as a signal to the listener.

No, it cannot simply be assumed Berlioz detected each and every sound he heard, for only Berlioz himself can answer that question. However, an Irishman during that time seemed to believe...
Berlioz did understand when he said to him, "I beg your permission to grasp the hand that wrote the symphony of Romeo. You understand Shakespeare!" (Berlioz 377).

Imagine if Shakespeare's sound and silence were taken away. Something else, quite different, would be formed. For example, if Berlioz had heard Shakespeare in French instead of English, Shakespeare's sound would be drastically different. The flowing, melodic discourses between Romeo and Juliet would be lost if Shakespeare's love poetry was translated directly word for word into Japanese, for example. In fact, Kennedy (in reference to foreign translations of Shakespeare) explains that "audiences in linguistically foreign environments have to find a desire for him [Shakespeare]" (3).

However, it is Shakespeare's message and driving tales of human passion that come across in translation and not his beautiful sound, unless heard in its native tongue. Kennedy speaks earlier on the idea of Anglophone critics who do not really consider Shakespeare in translation; therefore, implying "the superiority of English as the medium for Shakespearean cognition" (2). It is Shakespeare's musical language that keeps him alive today and did in the mind of Berlioz. Without the musical language of Shakespeare's English, Berlioz's perception of Romeo and Juliet would have been quite different.

Berlioz's emotive interpretation was therefore left to sound and silence, not to words, that convey his own personal emotional message. The same holds true with the lingual sounds created by Shakespeare. Each sound defines the emotional meaning of his words. For Kemp believes, "Berlioz's structure is . . . dramatic, [and] Shakespeare is musical, and that both derive from the same archetypal source" (68).

Language and music, being both built on this foundation of sound, form a given structure. Once this structure is in place and the listeners obtain a level of experience where they are comfortable in the workings of their language, then understanding what they hear is natural. Thus, Raffman explains the structures the listener hears in this way, "the meaning of a musical work consists in the feelings that result (or would result) from the experienced listener's unconscious recovery of structures constitutive of the work, whatever those structures may be" (53).

Shakespeare set up the departing love scene (3.5) in the structure of an aubade (interchangeable idea of a song or poem of departing lovers at dawn). The beauty lies in Shakespeare's use of couplets. Throughout the play communication is usually silenced between the parents and their children or between families because of the feuding. However, Romeo and Juliet do communicate to one another (Deats 77). They share their communication in the form of a duet as seen from their back and forth use of the rhyming couplets. For example, the lines alternate their solo voices and then come back together on their rhyming couplets stressing words otherwise looked over (the intention of accents). However, Shakespeare played with the rhythm and rhyme and created a melody of sonorous sound. Romeo's begins the first rhyming couplet of the series with (all underlining by the author):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Romeo} & \quad \text{I must be gone and live, or stay and die.} \\
\text{Juliet} & \quad \text{Yond light not daylight: I know it, I} (3.5.11-12).
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Romeo} & \quad \text{How is't, my soul? Let's talk; it is not day.} \\
\text{Juliet} & \quad \text{It is, it is! Hie hence, be gone, away} (25-26).
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Juliet} & \quad \text{O, now be gone More light and light it grows.} \\
\text{Romeo} & \quad \text{More light and light--more dark and dark our woes} (35-36).
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Romeo} & \quad \text{Farewell, farewell! One kiss, and I'll descend.} \\
\text{Juliet} & \quad \text{Art thou gone so, love lord, ay husband-friend} (42-43).
\end{align*}
\]

And Shakespeare gave Romeo the last couplet with:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Romeo} & \quad \text{And trust me, love, in my eye so do you.} \\
\text{Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu, adieu!} (58-59).
\end{align*}
\]

These specific words Shakespeare chose to rhyme all happen to be single syllable. Hugo states that single syllable words "show rigidity, honesty, toughness, relentless, the world of harm unvarnished" (9). Romeo and Juliet live within a world that does not accept them as a couple, and they know this undeniable fact. It is this melodious structure combined with this harshness created by the single syllables that shape the harmony and dissonance within their discourse.

Yet Romeo and Juliet's word sounds fit their discussion. They are disagreeing over the bird they have heard outside the window. Romeo thinks it is the lark, and Juliet thinks it the nightingale. Shakespeare chose two birds known for their music (a coincidence?). Whether it be either the lark or the nightingale, the bird is trying to tell the lovers a message through beauteous song for which he is known. Yet Romeo and Juliet disagree and their words not only produce a sound of harshness, but the meanings do also. Grouping their couplets together produces a sad message: "day away!" "growes woes." "descend friend?" "you adieu!" Undoubtedly, Berlioz understood the final word "adieu," only adding to his understanding of the emotion of the scene.

Romeo and Juliet sing a duet in this scene, and it is to each other. It is in a form of an epithalamium (a lyric song or poem to a bride or bridegroom). However, these rhyming couplets connect them with one another. Berlioz, in his Scene d'Amour, set a duet between the flute and the viola. One sounds while the other "listens" and then it "responds" to answer its duet partner instrument. These
instruments also bring out the musical theme and bring it back several times to the listener's ears. By far, it is one of Berlioz's most beautiful and most emotionally driven compositions. Romeo and Juliet sound the theme through the use of the single syllable words they use. They also echo one another's phrases. Now the same sounds are heard but on differing pitches. Thus, adding another variation to their duet (all underlining by the author):

Juliet O, now be gone! More light and light it grows.
Romeo More light and light--more dark and dark our woes (3.5.35-36).

Shakespeare even created the word "husband-friend" to rhyme with "descend." Shakespeare invented words continuously in order to fit his plays the way he saw fit (Garner 40). Shakespeare also invented the word "silver-sweet" that is within the quote that opened this paper.

Romeo How silver-sweet sound lover's tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears! (2.2.166-167).

The alliterated "s" sound is really never stopped by punctuation. Yes, there is a comma after "night"; however, that is a natural break because the closing "t" sound already finishes that line. It moves and pushes one word in the next making that word-next-to-word-music that Charyn was quoted stating earlier. Its melodious sounds stay in the ear and is even echoed later in the play by Peter (4.5.120-123), a servant to the Capulets (Andrews 322). Romeo declares, through his words' meaning, what Berlioz discovered through experiencing Shakespeare's sounds and placing his interpretation to the sounds of instrumental music.

Kennedy asks a pertinent question in the end of his introduction. He concerns himself with the idea of the day when the English speaking population will no longer understand the meaning of Shakespeare's words. He asks, "What is it that endures when he [Shakespeare] is deprived of his tongue?" (17). Shakespeare's sounds already have endured through Berlioz's dramatic symphony and the hundreds of other musical compositions written upon hearing his pure melodic sounds.

Works Cited


Sociologists are still trying to figure out what happened in the 1980s. For the most part, the 80s seem to be a decade in which the individual raised his or her fists to the "system"—whether that be government, religion, education, whatever—and said, "I can do this better without your help." From the political and social trends of the decade, it appears these systems listened to the rallying cry of the people. Reagan's years in office were marked by an attitude of _laissez faire_, and religion in the 80s became increasingly secularized. Due in part to these separations, the rich and poor classes in America were pushed even further to the polar extremes; the middle class, an ever growing percent of the population, was defined as the political, economic, and moral norm. One significant impact the middle class made on America was the romanticization of the American family. Stephanie Coontz in, _The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap_, discusses family politics of the 1980s in conjunction with the national ethos of the time. Just as religion and politics were forced into their specific realms, family and family morals became a very private issue:

Middle class Americans elevated family values and private rectitude into the defining features of the Gilded Age morality [late nineteenth century]. Aside from attempts to convince rich and poor to adopt virtuous family values, they largely abstained from social reform, asserting that private morality and family life represented a higher and purer duty than did political or social activism (107).

Middle class families in the 1980s enjoyed widespread economic success and repeated a trend first demonstrated in the 1950s; they moved away from the cities and into suburbs where families were sheltered from the dangers of city life. Families during the 1980s had more expendable income than in earlier decades and were often able to afford larger houses and spend more money for the purpose of family entertainment. Although the political conscious of the nation was decidedly conservative, women and homosexuals slowly began to gain political voices. Sodomy laws in many states were overturned and while gay and lesbian marriages were not legal, homosexuals did not have to fear, in most states, that the "morality police" would barge in on them in the privacy of their own home. While the family became the moral center of the nation during the 80s, the definition of family became more obscure. In a poll taken in 1989, only 22 percent of those polled defined a family strictly in terms of blood marriage or
adoption. Seventy-four percent responded that a family “is any group whose members love and care for one another” (Coontz 21). These statistics seem to suggest that same-sex relationships may have been considered legitimate by many Americans.

However, the 1980s family had a darker side. While many strides were made for gender and sexual equality, the decade seems marked by a lack of fulfilling relationships:

Between the late 1970s and late 1980s, marital happiness did decline slightly in the United States. Some authors see this as reflecting our decreasing appreciation of marriage, although others suggest that it reflects unrealistically high expectations of love in a culture that denies people safe, culturally approved ways of getting used to marriage or cultivating other relationships to meet some of the needs that we currently load onto the couple alone (Coontz 16).

This feeling of alienation from family members and loved ones during the 1980s brings us to the discussion at hand, Tony Kushner's portrayal of familial relationships and roles in Angels In America. Kushner, in writing on “nationalistic themes” during the 1980s, could not glance over the importance of family and the changes that were occurring around the institution. What he says about the family, how he envisions the family, the role of family members and the state of love and commitment in modern times is intrinsic to the meaning of both parts of the play. Sorting through and analyzing the relationships in the plays through the framework of family can be confusing. Entering the text, we would expect Kushner to provide us with a picture of homosexual domestic tranquility and devoted gay partners; America needs good, gay role models. What Kushner dishes out—most prominently in Millennium Approaches—are dysfunctional familial relationships and partners who run from each other when the going gets tough. Is Kushner, a gay playwright, doing a disservice to the gay community presenting homosexual relationships in this light? Do Americans need reinforcement of the already well established belief that homosexual relationships are not long term affairs?

David Savran writes of the ambivalence in Angels. “The opposite of everything you say about Angels in America will also hold true . . . Angels mounts an attack against ideologies of individualism; it problematizes the idea of community” (208). Yet Kushner nearly always manipulates this ambivalence to make his opinion clear to readers. Or, as Savran writes, “One side of the binary opposition is always favorable” (215). Kushner presents his readers with dialectical problems, but usually provides the reader with enough information to decide which side of the equation looks most promising. How does Kushner, then, answer the problems of “the family” in America, and most specifically, in the gay community? What about his vision seems troublesome? Art Borreca in a review of Angels in America, Part One:

Millennium Approaches writes, “Relationships crack apart simultaneously and we see, through the theatre’s capacity to evoke simultaneously, something essential about America where selfishness and abandonment occur more frequently than love” (236). Is this what Kushner finally portrays? Does the ethic of self-aggrandizement popular in the 80s win out in Angels? We may come closest to understanding these questions through an analysis of three relationships in the play: Harper and Joe, Prior and Louis, and the characterization of Belize as an ultimate mother figure.

Kushner wastes no time in presenting his audience with a dysfunctional, “heterosexual” marriage. From the first time they appear together, Harper and Joe are evidently not a happily married couple. When Harper suggests that they not move to Washington because they are both happy in New York, Joe replies, “That’s not really true” (1:23), and the relationship deteriorates from there. Harper accuses Joe of having “secrets and lies” (1:27) and being the cause of her emotional problems (1:27). Not only does their emotional relationship seem lacking, their sex life is miserable for both of them; Harper tells Joe, “You think you're the only one who hates sex; I do; I hate it with you; I do” (1:37). Perhaps no line in the play portrays their relationship more clearly, however, than Harper’s, “It was wrong of me to marry you. I knew you . . . It’s a sin, and it’s killing us both” (1:37). Indeed, the relationship does seem to be pulling the life out of both Harper and Joe. Harper, a delusional woman addicted to Valium, staggers from scene to scene, one moment fighting to keep her sanity and the next, slipping into fantasy. Joe admits, “I’m a shell. There’s nothing left to kill” (1:40).

By Act One, scene eight, we understand why the marriage between Harper and Joe has not succeeded; Joe is a homosexual. Kushner presents us with scenes from an unhappy marriage—which should look familiar to us; they are common enough on soap operas and film—and then gives a non-traditional explanation. The marriage was doomed from the start; as delusional as Harper appears, Joe has played his own game of “pretend.” Unable to express his desire for men, Joe has accepted the role society expects of him and fights to repress his erotic feelings towards men. Had Joe been able to express and act on his homosexuality, this marriage would have never occurred. In an environment where homosexual unions were legal and condoned, both Joe and Harper might have found themselves in much happier relationships. Joe is perhaps incapable of love because he has never been given the opportunity to express it as it is natural to him. Borreca writes in his review, “Kushner is saying we don't love enough because we have become terribly uncertain of our responsibilities to ourselves, let alone each other” (236). This seems to be precisely Joe’s problem: he has failed himself; therefore, he fails Harper, whom he cannot love romantically. As readers, we must not judge Joe for walking away from his marriage; our society demands that he live in a state of false consciousness; we have abandoned him.
There are troublesome aspects, however, to Kushner’s portrayal of this family, particularly in the character of Harper. Kushner has drawn a dynamic and, at times, deeply moving character, but despite her depth, she retains many of the stereotypical “hysterical wife” characteristics. David Savran writes, “Harper may be crucial to the play’s structure but she is still pathologized, like so many of her antecedents on the American stage. . . . With her hallucinations and ‘emotional problems’ (1:27) she functions as a scapegoat for Joe” (215). While Kushner makes bold statements about redefining the family, the roles within heterosexual families are hardly bold. Harper remains dependent on Joe long after he has gone, appearing in his dreams and begging for him to return (2:20-21). She finds herself exchanging places with the mute Mormon wife in the diorama (2:71), a symbol of her own feelings of voicelessness. When she is finally able to assert her independence and leave, she asks for Joe’s credit card, almost a comical parody of wives who leave their husbands and take the credit cards with them. In Harper’s most outstanding moment, she is thrust back into the role of the money spending, financially dependent, wife.

Harper and Joe’s marriage is set up as a foil to the relationship between Prior and Louis at the beginning of Millennium. Where Joe and Harper have such trouble communicating with each other, Louis and Prior seem to speak openly and honestly with one another. Where Joe and Harper’s sex life is unfulfilling, Prior accuses Louis of being “oversexed” (1:38). While Joe and Harper are decided on separating, Prior and Louis seem to be working hard to stay together, in spite of the fact that Prior’s having AIDS is extremely difficult for Louis. From the outset, we expect Kushner to put the relationship between two devoted, monogamous gay men on a pedestal; in effect, to show America that such relationships can, and do, exist. Kushner does the opposite. Louis leaves Prior dying of AIDS, has sex with a stranger in the park (1:57) and eventually enters into a relationship with Joe. Isn’t Kushner doing a disservice to the gay community with such a portrayal of homosexual relationships?

AIDS presents its victims and those who love them with a series of tough decisions. Unless we have experienced the death of a partner to AIDS, it might be difficult to rationalize Louis’s decision to leave Prior. We find that it is not an easy decision for Louis to live with either. Kushner, in fact, portrays a relationship between two men that is multi-layered and full of complexities. Had Louis stayed by Prior throughout his sickness, perhaps the relationship would have become simplistic and one-dimensional. In reality, familial relationships are fraught with pain and suffering: homosexual relationships must not be overlooked as incorporating these emotions as well. The “bruises” that Louis carries with him—internally and externally—are symbols that Louis still loves Prior deeply despite his decision to leave. There is a love that transcends the familial roles they found themselves acting out, however non-traditional those roles may have been. The idea of family as represented in the 1980s is not the institution that serves the needs of Louis and Prior. Its expectations are not relevant to their situation and they find they must abandon it entirely. In the final analysis, however, it is clear that selfishness and abandonment do not win out over love. Near the end of Perestroika, when Louis returns to Prior this transcendent love and failure of family, as Louis and Prior recognize it, is this evident:

LOUIS. I really failed you. But . . . this is hard. Failing in love isn’t the same as not loving. It doesn’t let you off the hook, it doesn’t mean . . . you’re free not to love.
PRIOR. I love you, Louis.
LOUIS. Good. I love you.
PRIOR. I really do.
   But you can’t come back. Not ever.
   I’m sorry. But you can’t (2:143).

Throughout the play, Kushner gives familial relationships a new spin. Hannah takes on the role of mother to Prior in Perestroika, taking him to the hospital and sitting by his side. Roy’s discussion with God in Act Five, scene seven of Perestroika posits God as a dead-beat dad who has abandoned his children. Even the Reagan family is analyzed and deconstructed (1:71). One of the most interesting characterizations, however, is that of Belize, an ex-drag-queen-turned-nurse. Belize takes on the role of mother to all who pass through his care. The best characteristics (although perhaps stereotypical characteristics) of motherhood are bestowed on him. Savran writes of Belize, “He becomes the purveyor of truth. He is cast in the role of caretaker” (222). He advises Louis, teaches him, and reprimands him when he finds Louis making racist remarks (1:95). He teaches Louis through storytelling, a traditional method of passing knowledge used by African parents (1:96).

Belize’s most motherly tendencies shine through in his care for the sick. Belize tells Prior, “Whatever happens, baby, I will be here for you” (1:61). As readers we already know that spouses cannot be counted on unquestionably. The ideal mother, however, we would expect to continue loving and supporting her son, through even the worse circumstances. Belize not only stands by Prior, an ex-lover, he patiently cares for Roy despite Roy’s unabashed lack of concern for anyone but himself. Belize continues to care for Roy, even after he is dead, forcing Louis to say the Jewish prayer for the dead over Roy’s body (2:124).

The character of Belize is not, however, without his share of ambivalence. Kushner creates in Belize a character who is more “feminized” than any of the other gay men. Drawing Belize as a mother
figure and an ex-drag queen seems to suggest that only someone who has developed the feminine characteristics of oneself is capable of nurturing and caring for others. The gay "masculine" men turn away from this role time and time again. Again, Kushner seems to be playing into a stereotype.

Finally then, what do these "familial" relationships boil down to in the end? What is Kushner's vision for the family in *Angels*? David Savran points out that, "Prior and Louis, Louis and Joe, Joe and Harper have all parted by the end of the play and the romantic dyad (as primary social unit) is replaced in the final scene of *Perestroika* by a utopian concept of (erotic) affiliation and a new definition of family" (209). Perhaps a clue to Kushner's vision lies somewhere between Savran's notion stated above and his discussion of Mormon family ideals mentioned in the same article. Kushner's repeated emphasis on Mormonism begs us to take a look at the ideal as represented by this religion. Faced with oppression, not unlike the gay community, the Mormons fled towards a land of "milk and honey" (1:66) guided by a prophet. Once they arrived in Utah, they developed a strong sense of community, where the needs of the community were considered above those of the individual. Perhaps in the light of 1980s individualism, this is what Kushner proposes--family molded as a community. For at the end of the play, we see a diverse and needy community gathered together in hopes of being healed. This new family, created out of pain and love, must work together so that the "Great Work" can begin.

Works Cited


