2007

Articulāte Vol. XII

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Recommended Citation
Goff, Renee; Cyperski, Melissa; Toler, Emily; and Reynolds, Alison (2007) "Articulāte Vol. XII," Articulāte: Vol. 12, Article 1.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/articulate/vol12/iss1/1

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Articulāte
A Journal of Literary and Cultural Criticism

Spring 2007
Volume XII

*Articulāte is published under the auspices of the Denison University English Department*
Editorial Policy:

**Articulate** is published in the spring semester of each academic year and features student essays of literary and cultural criticism. **Articulate** will consider papers written by Denison undergraduates in any area of literary and cultural criticism and from any department or discipline.

Faculty members are encouraged to recommend particularly strong essays from their classes for publication in **Articulate**. As a special feature, **Articulate** publishes each year's winner of the Robert T. Wilson Award for Scholarly Writing.

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Submissions will be accepted throughout the academic year and should combine research with original insight. Submissions should not exceed fifteen typed, double-spaced pages, although essays of greater length, which are of exceptionally high quality will be considered for publication. Please use MLA documentation.

Initial submissions should be in hard copy. Those writers selected for publication will be asked to submit an electronic manuscript of their work. Please submit your essay with a cover sheet including your name and Slavier box. The journal accepts submissions at any time during the academic year.

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Start the paper. Introduction. Attention getting opening. It has to be good. If the first sentence of the paper doesn’t get the reader’s attention, he won’t keep reading. Keep the language high. Don’t use contractions. Use complete sentences. Use quotes. Explain the quotes. Keep it interesting. In my paper I will… The introduction should have an attention getting opening, the thesis statement, and the main points of the paper. But if all the main points are explained in the introduction, what is the point of reading the paper? And what exactly is an attention getting opening? A question, an interesting historical fact, an outright lie? If someone is reading a seminar paper, he is probably fairly boring to begin with. No, not boring: academic. Therefore, he (or she, for you can never be too politically correct these days) is reading the paper because he wants to, and it really doesn’t matter what the first sentence is. And if no one is willing to at least read the first paragraph and give the paper an honest chance, they have no right reading the paper anyway! Exclamation points should not be used in academic papers, best beloved. They are rarely used in novels either, except in England, who seem to love demonstrating excitement in books, which perhaps compensates for their reluctance to show excitement in the other areas of their lives…

"The Garden of Forking Paths" by Jorge Luis Borges uses the labyrinth to portray his idea of the relation between space, time, and reality. Well, he may not be presenting his idea, necessarily, for authors and narrators are different things, especially in postmodern fiction, but he presents an idea. What is a labyrinth, you ask? That, best beloved, is an excellent question. A labyrinth is a puzzle of sorts, a journey that one begins without knowing where it will end. According to the online Oxford English Dictionary (which we all know is the most authoritative source on anything), a labyrinth is "a structure consisting of a number of intercommunicating passages arranged in bewildering complexity, through which it is difficult or impossible to find one's way without guidance; a maze." There are several different types of labyrinths; spatial, temporal, and symbolic.

I, best beloved, went through a spatial labyrinth several years ago. It was in the hills of northern California. It was not a very big labyrinth and I could see the entire thing from on top of the hill. This labyrinth was more of a spiritual journey than an actual puzzle with varying ways to get in or

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1 Footnotes after a quote are used to source the material quoted.
out. I, however, was unaware of this spiritual element and was quite
cnfused why the other people I was with were so solemn and slow as we
followed this path in the dirt outlined with stones. I tried to maintain my
composure, but I am not one to remain silent (or still) for very long. It also
happened to be a very sunny day, I was in a new climate (It was my second
day in California), and I have terrible allergies. After about thirty minutes
(perhaps less, but it felt like an eternity), I was quite antsy and started
looking away from the labyrinth and up at the hills and the sunny sky. Then,
I felt a sneeze coming. I am a loud sneezer. I tried to control it, but not
terribly hard, for I was indeed bored and I have always felt that it is not good
to hold sneezes in. Your head might explode! Well, best beloved, my attempt
to hold it in only made it bigger, so after about thirty minutes of complete
silence (which the others of my group were relishing) I sneezed so loudly it
echoed off the hills! I looked at them sheepishly and they looked at each
other a moment, then we all burst out laughing. It was hilarious! Leave it to
me to ruin a good moment. Oh, but where was I? Remember, best beloved,
they relate to the actual topic at hand. (Why at hand? Why not at foot?)
Spatial labyrinths have been around for an incredibly long time, but,
according to critic Hendia Baker, there has recently been a revival in
postmodern fiction. What is post-modernism, best beloved? That is an
excellent question. Where do I begin? Where all good stories begin: at the
beginning. Once upon a time, dearly beloved, there was a form of literature
called the traditional novel. This novel had all the necessary aspects for a
novel, the characteristics children are taught in schools like plot, setting,
characters, point of view, etc. These
traditional novels were all the rage and read ferociously by anyone who had
the time to read such things. They told life not as it was, exactly, but how it
could be, how it should be. It presented characters like ourselves and
represented a world similar, but better than ours. But, after a time, some
people grew bored with the traditional novel. These people believed that it
held them captive under tradition and they needed to break free. So, they
created stories that did not behave as traditional novels. Sometimes time did
not work chronologically as it aught, but switched and flipped at the author's
discretion. Some of them were mostly inner dialogue, and might switch
points of view randomly in the middle of the tale. This escape has come to
be known as modernism.

Footnotes are used to include additional information to the topic at hand
that is not vital enough to place inside the paper. They should be as short as
possible and are rarely longer than a paragraph. I, as a good essay writer,
need to include background information on modernism and postmodernism,
but since it is not the main point of the paper, it shall go in a footnote.

John Barth explains modernism well in his essay The Literature of
Replenishment:

The ground motive of modernism [...] was
criticism of the nineteenth-century bourgeois
social order and its worldview. Its artistic
strategy was the self-conscious overturning
of the conventions of bourgeois realism by
such tactics and devices as the substitution of
a "mythical" for a "realistic" method and the
"manipulation of conscious parallels between
temporaneity and antiquity [...] also the
radical disruption of the linear flow of
narrative, the frustration of conventional
expectations concerning unity and coherence
of plot and character and the cause-and-effect
"development" thereof, the deployment of
ironic and ambiguous juxtapositions to call
into question the moral and philosophical
"meaning" of literary action, the adoption of
a tone of epistemological self-mockery
aimed at the naïve pretensions of bourgeois
rationality, the opposition of inward
consciousness to rational, public, objective
discourse, and an inclination to subjective
distortion to point up the evanescence of the
objective social world of the nineteenth-
century bourgeoisie. (Barth 278)

I know, best beloved, that section includes an awful lot of big words. But it
is necessary in an academic paper to not only source the biggest names, but
get their main points into your paper. It will support your paper and make it
look more impressive if you include the big critical theorists. It's like name
dropping at a party; it makes you look more impressive and respected.
(Though, honestly, anyone can drop names, actually knowing what you are
talking about is what counts.) Basically, Barth repeats what I said above
about feeling bound by tradition and breaking out into something new. The
modernists were not as concerned with the language anymore, but with the
form of literature: "one cardinal preoccupation of the modernist was the
problematics, not simply of language, but of the medium of literature" (Barth
279).

Naturally, this caused quite a hullabalo. While some people
agreed and liked the change, there were some that preferred the traditional
style and felt that these authors were radicals. Critics were quite excited by
this change in style, for it gave them new material to criticize and analyze to
death. But who were these authors I speak of, best beloved? There are
several different opinions of who fits into their ill-defined category, but it is
Modernism was great fun for a while, but even that got old. Instead of using slang, best beloved, always use higher elevated language. Modernism was great fun for a while, but even that got tiresome. New authors came along and decided that modernism was not original enough for them, so they wrote even weirder stories which we currently call postmodern literature. This was even more complicated than modernism, fairly safe to say that Eliot, Joyce, and Kafka were modernists. Virginia Woolf, particularly her work “Mrs. Dalloway” was modernist. John Barth is regarded as a modernist and a postmodernist. Postmodernism? I know, you just learned what modernism was. But hang in there, best beloved. Modernism was great fun, but because society has changed so rapidly this century, literature must do its best to keep up. They tried modernism for a while, but got tired of those bonds as well. While modernism was “stable, aloof, [and] hieratic,” postmodernism is “playful, para-tactical, and deconstructionist” (Hassan 591). I know, best beloved, more big words. Let me explain further. Modernism focused on the problems of the form. Professor Hassan and his peer writers believe that postmodernists took what they did and stretched it till it was nearly unrecognizable: “postmodernist fiction merely emphasizes the “performing” self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness of modernism, in a spirit of cultural subversiveness and anarchy” (Barth 279). John Barth believes that this new development in literature should not replace modernism, but add to it with gentleness and respect. “My ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents” (283). They should take in what was already done and add to it, make it better. This is something to enhance the literary world, not condemn it. Modernists but also more fun. Jorge Luis Borges is a postmodern author and his piece “The Garden of Forking Paths” is a postmodernist piece of fiction. Did that explain everything clearly, best beloved? Good. Now, where was I? Oh yes, labyrinths. Hendia Baker thinks that there has been a revival of labyrinths in postmodern fiction. She writes, the labyrinth “has experienced a revival in postmodern literature, where the labyrinth is viewed as text, and the text as labyrinth” (Baker 297-8). This is not incredibly surprising given the nature of postmodern fiction and its themes, as Baker explains, “the labyrinth is connected with the main characteristics of postmodernism: uncertainty, fragmentation, indeterminacy, decentering, and meaninglessness” (298). Much postmodern fiction can be construed as a spatial labyrinth because it does not travel in a chronologically coherent manner, but is often fragmented and scattered. When a story alters the general view of time, however, it becomes a temporal labyrinth which, Baker writes, “is virtually uniquely twentieth century” (299). With spatial labyrinths, one can see the entire layout and the solution of the labyrinth if viewed from the outside. As I noted in my earlier story, I could see the entire labyrinth layout and solution from on top of the hill. The same should be true with temporal labyrinths, but how can one get outside time? Best beloved, you look confused. How can a work of fiction become a labyrinth in time? In our time, we have clear definitions of past, present, and future. But if a story is viewed from the outside, from the author’s perspective, the story is viewed from above (like me on top of the thought there might be a problem with the form of traditional narrative and questioned the rules. Postmodernism declares that there are no rules and discusses the no rules idea while breaking all the rules. Modernism questioned the method but still wrote for its readers. Postmodernism writes for itself: “postmodernist writers write a fiction that is more and more about itself and its processes, less and less about objective reality and life in the world” (Barth 279).

So what should you expect from postmodernist pieces of fiction? Well, it “veers toward open, playful, optative, provisional (open in time as well as in structure or space), disjunctive, or indeterminate forms, a discourse of ironies and fragments, a ‘white ideology’ of absences and fractures, a desire of diffractions, an invocation of complex, articulate silences” (Hassan 593). Perhaps it would be best to give some examples of postmodern authors. Kafka, Beckett, Borges, Nabokov, and Gombrowicz are all considered postmodern by Hassan (589). Gabriel Garcia Marquez (One Hundred Years of Solitude) is often considered postmodern as well (Barth 278). Barth also mentions Donald Barthelme, Saul Bellow, and Stanley Elkin (279-80). I think Lydia Davis, Anne Carson, Robert Coover, and Alan Lightman should also be considered as such. Their work defies the traditional forms and questions narrative itself.
Ethan Weed agrees that only the one inside the labyrinth, the reader currently reading the piece of fiction, believes in past and future. He says, “To move through a labyrinth is to explore an unknown space. In this sense, reading any narrative text could be thought of as the exploration of a labyrinth” (Weed 162). The author is the maker of the labyrinth and the reader is placed inside it and must find a way out by reading. Perhaps this would be made clearer with direct text references. It is advisable to always bring the paper back to textual evidence, for without the text we are simply spouting nonsense. What, best beloved? I haven’t used any textual evidence as of yet? And it is already page six?! (Never use more than one item of ending punctuation at the end of a sentence in a scholarly work. It is even frowned upon in fiction but sometimes they let it slide.) I am such a terrible essay-writer!!! “The Garden of Forking Paths” begins with a citation from a history book explaining that a particular attack in World War I was delayed due to weather conditions. A newly revealed statement by Dr. Yu Tsun, however, suggests an alternate explanation. Tsun’s statement is then given, but without the first two pages. So, the reader is given a brief introduction and thrown into the middle of a work (Dr. Tsun’s statement) with very little information. It is common for the reader to forget this initial paragraph and believe that she is reading only the story about Tsun. But this story that is “Dr. Tsun’s partial statement” is inside “The History of the World War” text by Liddell Hart which is still inside “The Garden of Forking Paths” text by the all supreme author Jorge Luis Borges. Remember, best beloved, what Weed said; we readers are exploring an unknown text; therefore, we are inside a labyrinth. But what kind of labyrinth is this? Though Tsun’s statement was not complete, it did start relatively near the beginning and appears to move chronologically; therefore, I do not think it is a spatial labyrinth. Baker says that “time becomes a labyrinth where characters travel in different directions and eventually meet,” but we have not yet been given enough characters with actions to positively declare this story is a temporal labyrinth (Baker 302). The only kind left is a symbolic labyrinth. Language, writing in general, is a system of symbols with arbitrary meaning strung together in the attempt to convey meaning. Remember, best beloved, Weed said that “to move through a labyrinth is to explore an unknown space. In this sense, reading any narrative text could be thought of as the exploration of a labyrinth” (Weed 162). If text is nothing but symbols, then fiction is a labyrinth of symbols. But what do we do with a labyrinth of symbols? Can this really exist? Weed explains that “unlike a physical labyrinth, a labyrinth of symbols, of ideas, doesn’t exist until the reader explores it. And how does one explore a labyrinth of symbols and ideas? By reading, of course” (Weed 169). All fiction is a labyrinth of symbols. Postmodern fiction adds spatial and temporal labyrinth layers to the work, as Borges does in his tale of Dr. Tsun.

The statement begins with Dr. Yu Tsun realizing that his role as a spy in the war has been discovered and he must somehow complete his mission before he is caught by Captain Richard Madden. While contemplating his situation, Tsun says that he “reflected that all things happen to oneself, and happen precisely, precisely now. Century follows century, yet events occur only in the present; countless men in the air, on the land and sea, yet everything that truly happens, happens to me…” (Borges 120). Tsun explains that everything occurring in the past, present, and future feels like it is happening to him right now. The characters from those events are colliding with him now in the present. Baker said that “time becomes a labyrinth where characters travel in different directions and eventually meet” (Baker 302). Therefore, this story has just become a temporal labyrinth as well as a symbolic labyrinth. I know that probably confuses and frightens you, best beloved, but the only thing you can do is try to make your way through the passages and hope to find the way out. I will try to explain this concept more clearly. Tsun feels like everything in the past and future is happening to him in the present. There are a few explanations of how this can occur. Firstly, this is a past-tense retrospective narration. Tsun’s statement was written after the events occurred, outside the time of the experience. Tsun can see all parts of the story at the same time because everything has already happened; he is outside the labyrinth. All events are occurring at the same time inside his memory and, as he said, they all feel like they are happening in the present. Century after century has existed, but we can only ever feel the present while it is occurring, happening to us. For example, when I remember my own labyrinth story, I know that it happened several years ago, in the past. But when I remember it and feel the emotions that I felt then, the event feels like it is happening now, in the present. So, the event can be in the past but feel like it is happening in the present. The events of Tsun’s tale are all in the past, but as he remembers them to write his statement, it feels like all of them are happening in the present at that moment.

On the next page, the reader learns that Tsun is the great grandson of Ts’ui Pen, a man who “renounced all temporal power in order to write a novel containing more characters than the Hung Lu Meng and construct a labyrinth in which all men would lose their way” (Borges 122). He spent thirteen years constructing this novel, but “the hand of a foreigner murdered him and his novel made no sense and no one ever found the labyrinth” (Borges 122).3 Tsun takes a moment to ponder the lost labyrinth and imagines it as “a labyrinth of labyrinths […] that contained both past and future” (Borges 122). Tsun imagines that his great grandfather created a

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3 Interesting sidenote: I find it curious that Dr. Albert, the one who solved and recreated Ts’ui Pen’s labyrinth, was murdered by the hand of a foreigner and no one knew the labyrinth explanation of the murder until Tsun wrote it in his statement which is now shared (and solved?) with us.
labyrinth that contained past and future. This sounds grandiose, but Tsun is constructing such a labyrinth with his statement because it is written in the future describing events from the past and both past and future are within the tale. (Actually, all authors construct a labyrinth of symbols that contains both past and future.) But now the idea of getting lost in such a labyrinth has been added to the conglomeration, though not dwelled upon. Tsun continues his journey until he reaches the house of Dr. Stephen Albert. Ironically, Dr. Albert is a Sinologist who has studied Tsun’s great grandfather Ts’ui Pen extensively. They discuss the novel, which Tsun exclaims is “a contradictory jumble of irresolute drafts” because “in the third chapter the hero dies, yet in the fourth he is alive again” (Borges 124). Tsun believes that for this reason (and other similar reasons) the book is a complete and embarrassing failure of a great man who lost his sense of reality. Dr. Albert reassures him that this is not the case:

“Here is the Labyrinth,” Albert said, gesturing towards a tall lacquered writing cabinet.


“A labyrinth of symbols,” he corrected me. “An invisible labyrinth of time.” (Borges 124)

Dr. Albert corrects Tsun, revealing that the labyrinth of symbols, which is the labyrinth of the great Ts’ui Pen, is not physical as Tsun believed, but a symbolic labyrinth of language: his novel. They are one in the same: “book and labyrinth were one and the same” (Borges 124). This reinforces my earlier statement that all fiction is labyrinths of symbols. But how does this knowledge explain the contradictions Tsun despises so fervently?

In a letter left by Ts’ui Pen, he wrote “I leave to several futures (not to all) my garden of the forking paths” (Borges 125). Albert explains that the title of this novel “The Garden of Forking Paths” suggested to him that the character chooses—simultaneously—all of them. He creates, thereby, ‘several futures,’ several times, which themselves proliferate and fork” (Borges 125). Therefore, the novel does not have contradictions, necessarily, but multiple futures/presents existing at the same time. Why would someone create such a labyrinth, best beloved? Tsun asks the same question, to which Dr. Albert responds, “your ancestor did not believe in a uniform and absolute time; he believed in an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times” (Borges 127). Albert continues to explain that these divergent strands of time contain all possibilities, many futures. That is why Ts’ui Pen left this novel to several futures but not to all. He believed that his own reality, not just the
before the release of this statement the government did not know about Tsun killing Albert merely because of his name; therefore, Madden would not have thought to stop Tsun to protect Dr. Albert. If Captain Madden did not know that Tsun was going to kill Dr. Albert to pass information to the Germans (which it appears he did not until the release of this statement) there is no way he could have known where Tsun was going on the train. His arrival there at all does not make sense unless there was a collision of another time where Captain Madden had more information to follow. All of this is merely my hypothesis, but it must be true in at least one dimension. My goodness this is a long paragraph! It is most important, best beloved, that your essay paragraphs are of similar length, about half to three-quarters of a page long. Never have a paragraph that is more than a page.

Alright, best beloved, let’s recap. As I have explained, “The Garden of Forking Paths” by Ts’ui Pen is a labyrinth. “The Garden of Forking Paths” by Borges is a labyrinth. Language is a labyrinth of symbols. Therefore, we have a labyrinth within a labyrinth within a labyrinth. “The Garden of Forking Paths” by Ts’ui Pen is a labyrinth inside the labyrinth of “The Garden of Forking Paths” by Borges and both are inside the labyrinth of symbols that is language. But what does all this labyrinth stuff have to do with anything? Why am I wasting all this time? I think that Borges is doing more with his labyrinth than exemplifying the themes of postmodernism. I think Borges is using his labyrinth as a symbol for something even greater: something called Metafiction.

What is Metafiction, best beloved? It is, in a nutshell, a story about a story. What? you reclaim, outraged in your confusion. Now, best beloved, be nice; Metafiction is very self-conscious. It often has the narrator’s internal dialogue on the page. I, as a good essay writer, cannot talk about Metafiction without bringing up Linda Hutcheon, who is one of, if not the, leading critic on Metafiction. In her essay “Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox”, she discusses the mimesis of process and product. Now mimesis, best beloved, it simply a fancy word for mimic, imitate, or that it is or could be real, the fiction is an excellent mimesis of product. There are literary tricks to help accomplish this feat like an invisible narrator. If a narrator is not present, the reader can forget that she is being told a story. Metafiction refuses to follow these guidelines. Hutcheon says that “Metafictions, on the contrary, bare the conventions, disrupt the codes that now have to be acknowledged. The reader must accept responsibility for the act of decoding, the act of reading” (39). The reader must accept the role as “reader” who establishes not only the meaning of literature but proves its existence.

But this is not all that Metafictions do, best beloved. They also have mimesis of process. When a reader reads a text, she can (and often does) forget that there is a process behind this book. For months, years, an author toiled behind these pages determining what actions characters would take, what effect each action had on the characters and the piece of fiction as a whole. As I mentioned earlier, Metafictions often have the author’s internal dialogue on the page either along with the characters or overpowering the characters who are normally the main focus of the work. This mimesis of process, Hutcheon explains, “now demands that he [the reader] be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking, for it is the reader, who, in Ingarden’s terms, “concretizes” the work of art and gives it life (39). The reader is finally exposed to all the toil and turmoil a writer must endure to create a finished piece of fiction. Writers finally get some release and don’t have to hide behind the curtain playing wizard. We can be real people! And once authors are given this liberty, it often becomes the essential driving force of the work, as Hutcheon explains, “in Metafiction, the reader or the act of reading itself often become thematized parts of the narrative situation, acknowledged as having a co-producing function” (Hutcheon 37). Now that the author can have a little fun, the reader has to take on more responsibility: “the act of reading, then, is itself, like the act of writing, the creative function to which the text draws attention” (Hutcheon 39). This opens us an entire new area of critical theory called reader-response, but I’m not going to get into that here.

Alright, now breathe, breathe. I know this is a lot to take in at once, best beloved, but it will all be made clear with time. Yes, Metafiction is still fiction, it just has a different focus. It has simply “expanded to include the creative role” (41). For the role has always been there, the reader just didn’t know he was doing it: “Of course, he has always been the one to activate the latent universe of the novel or short story; Metafiction merely makes this fact conscious and functional by revealing the conventions that “traditional realism” sought to conceal, or even deny” (Hutcheon 41). No more disguises; everyone can be exactly and no more than who he is, writer and reader alike.

Now, while Borges’ piece “The Garden of Forking Paths” is not Metafictional, I believe he was using the symbol of the labyrinth in his tale as a metaphor for Metafiction. “Why?” you ask. Because Metafiction is a
labyrinth, just like his story. Don't worry, best beloved, I'll prove it to you. Remember what I said about only understanding a labyrinth from the outside. Think of "The Garden of Forking Paths" as an entity below you. You are supreme, God-like, and looking down on it from above. Can you see it, best beloved? There is the story "The Garden of Forking Paths" by the great Ts'ui Pen. To Tsun and everyone else who read it (aside from Dr. Albert, of course) it was complete nonsense, a maze no one could find their way through. But one person knew the way out of that labyrinth. Do you know who? Now look outside that and see "The Garden of Forking Paths" by Jorge Luis Borges. Do you see it? This story also feels like a labyrinth (especially if you've only read it once). But one person knows his way out of that maze with his eyes closed. Do you know who? Now look a little wider and see the entire thing encompassed in the labyrinth of language. It's a mess, isn't it? But here you are looking at it from above and (almost) making sense of it. So, who can see the entire labyrinth from the outside and the way out?

When an essay writer is explaining a particularly tricky point, best beloved, it is often wise to include examples. Since I have already included examples from Borges, to help illustrate and support my point further, I will use another text. "Lost in the Funhouse" by John Barth is an excellent example of the point I am describing. In this Metafictional short story, there are a few characters present in the story: Ambrose, Peter and Magda (Ambrose's mother and Uncle are mentioned as well). These would be viewed as the main characters, but they do not drive this short story. There is a second story overlaid with it: Barth's story. If I want to be extremely technical (and I suppose, as a good essay writer, I ought to) there is the layer of narrator AND the layer of John Barth the author who are separate and different. (Already there are three layers to this maze.) The narrator interjects quite frequently and explains the various writing techniques used in the story. For example, the narrator first describes the characters: "...and Magda G____, age fourteen, a pretty girl and(d) exquisite young lady, who lived not far from them on B____ Street in the town of D____, Maryland" (Funhouse 72-73). In the very next sentence, the narrator (or Barth, depending on which way you look at it) explains to the reader why the underlines were used: "Initials, blanks, or both were often substituted for proper names in nineteenth-century fiction to enhance the illusion of reality. It is as if the author felt it necessary to delete the name for reasons of tact or legal liability" (Funhouse 73). This additional information is not in a footnote or in parentheses (where it might be a little more acceptable) but right along in the story without any altering feature to differentiate it from the "real" story. The short story is packed with such examples (but you will simply have to read it best beloved, for I have no time to include more here).

Barth also included the theory of multiple dimensions, all choices being made at all times in some futures but not all, within the tale of his characters. Upon first reading, I thought that these instances were simply contradictory statements to annoy and frustrate the reader. It is possible that that is simply what they are. After reading Borges, however, and pondering the multiple versions of reality explained in "The Garden of Forking Paths" and realizing its relation to postmodernism and Metafiction, I questioned my earlier opinion. What if, when presented with option A and B, instead of choosing one or the other, Barth (and therefore the characters) chose both? Now, both (and all) storylines exist simultaneously. For example, the narrator first reveals, "Naturally he [Ambrose] didn't have nerve enough to ask Magda to go through the funhouse with him" (Funhouse 90). There is nothing odd about this statement; it is perfectly in line with Ambrose's character. But the sentence is immediately followed by, "With incredible nerve and to everyone's surprise he invited Magda, quietly and politely, to go through the funhouse with him" (Funhouse 90). What? I exclaimed upon reading for the first time. He can't do both! Ah, but he can, best beloved. Multiple storylines can exist simultaneously; Borges showed us that. The narrator continues and provides multiple endings to the story:

He died telling stories to himself in the dark; years later, when that cast unsuspected area of the funhouse came to light, the first expedition found his skeleton in one of its labyrinthine corridors and mistook it for part of the entertainment. He died of starvation telling himself stories in the dark; but unbeknownst unbeknownst to him, an assistant operator of the funhouse, happening to overhear his crouched just behind the plywood partition and wrote down his every word. [...] The family's going home. Mother sits between Father and Uncle Karl, who teases him good-naturally who chuckles over the fact that the comrade with whom he'd fought his way shoulder to shoulder through the funhouse had turned out to be a blind Negro girl—to their mutual discomfort, as they'd opened their souls.

(Funhouse 95, 97)

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7 The great Ts'ui Pen
8 Jorge Luis Borges
9 YOU
simply revising his story as he writes, which can lead to contradictory statements and actions. But considering that they are lost in a funhouse (which is certainly a labyrinth of sorts) and Barth is a postmodern and Metafictional author who is undoubtedly aware of Borges and the claims his stories make, I think the theory that the multiple endings to "Lost in the Funhouse" are actually multiple futures existing simultaneously is certainly an option to consider. Gracious this is a long sentence! Best beloved, I would keep your sentences no longer than two lines. You want to make sure that the reader can follow your train of thought and doesn’t lose sight of the point.

Whether or not you believe that representing multiple dimensions was Barth’s original intention, his story is an example of what is meant by multiple dimensions existing within fiction at the same time. Now I know what you’re thinking, best beloved. Multiple dimensions? That’s the stuff of science fiction, not reality. Do you doubt me, best beloved? Would I lead you astray? Science has proven multiple dimensions for years: "Einstein and others have shown that time is just another dimension, and that the concept of space-time should replace a separate time and space” (Baker 304). This is difficult for us to visualize because we are ourselves lost in spacetime and can only see straight ahead. Baker explains that, "Like someone trapped in a spatial labyrinth who only knows his/her immediate environs, a person trapped in a temporal labyrinth has access to only one lifetime of spacetime” (304). I said at the beginning that to see the whole labyrinth and the way out, one must view it from the outside, from above and beyond. As a reader (especially one who has already read it), this is possible: “Such an eternal state is a state similar to that of the author and reader who stand outside the fictional world” (Baker 304). Visualize Barth’s piece from the outside. His story is about a funhouse. Not only does it describe a funhouse, it is packed with unusual things (like fragments and incorrect grammar) that make the reader feel like she is in Barth’s narrative funhouse as well as lost in the funhouse with Ambrose. A funhouse is a type of labyrinth, and Barth even uses ‘labyrinth’ to describe the confusing and interlocking passageways within the funhouse. Therefore, Barth’s story is a labyrinth. Barth’s story is also a Metafictional piece. Since his story, a Metafictional work, is a labyrinth, perhaps Metafiction is the labyrinth. One might even conclude, given this information, that the labyrinth is used as a metaphor or symbol of Metafiction.

But all of fiction is a labyrinth; Metafiction simply reveals it for what it is. At the beginning, the author is in the middle of the labyrinth. He has to write a story, find his way through the labyrinth and out. Some people believe that this process is simple. With Metafiction, the processes are laid bare. Trust me, it’s a maze. But some people believe that fiction is merely a line with choices.

When an author is presented with choices, he simply makes the choice and all the options that are not pursued simply die. One story line continues and reaches a single final “real” conclusion. This is the form of the traditional novel, but not postmodern fiction and certainly not Metafiction. Remember what Ts’ui Pen believed about time: "he believed in an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. That fabric of times that approach one another, fork, are snipped off, or are simply unknown for centuries, contains all possibilities” (Borges 127). Metafiction, in its simplest form, is a story about a story. In all Metafictions there are at least two stories progressing simultaneously. More often than not, there are more. There is the author (1) writing a story (2) about a story (3) AND there is the reader reading this story (4). If the author, instead of making a choice between option A and B chooses to pursue both, that adds another dimension (5). If a character in his story decides not to choose option A or B but both, that adds another (6). What if there are multiple readers (7, 8, 9)? All exist in the maze that is fiction. They are all encompassed in the symbolic labyrinth that is language, in the spatial labyrinth that is this particular piece of fiction, and are all in the temporal labyrinth that surrounds it because fiction encompasses past, present, and future at all times. In addition, all time an author spends in the text, all time that surrounds the characters, and all time the readers spend in the text are part of the temporal labyrinth of this particular piece of Metafiction. It’s enormous. I think that this is true of all fiction, because all fiction has these elements, it just hides behind the conventions of traditional narrative. Metafiction exposes the traditions by breaking them.

The conclusion, or the ending of the paper, is placed at the end. It should wrap up the paper neatly with a nice neat bow. Make sure that you don’t say the same word too frequently in close vicinity. Be creative and vary usage. In your conclusion, best beloved, you should restate the main points made in the paper without copying the introduction word for word. You do not want to make any new points or add any new information, but it is nice to relate to the points made in the paper to a larger scheme. For example, if the entire essay were about a Shakespearean play, in the conclusion you can add your opinions as to why this play is still studied today and what studying Shakespeare today can add to society. It is nice to have a catchy ending, but this is not fiction or poetry; therefore, it is better to wrap up your points and simply stop than have a corny ending that makes the reader discard any valid points you made above in the paper itself. It is also nice alright to have a conclusion that is short and sweet. If everything needed to be said is said, don’t keep going until it is as long as your other paragraphs; simply stop. Many people are afraid of conclusions,
but there is really no need. Though, I certainly recommend doing it last. For how can you write a conclusion without a paper to conclude?

The Garden of Forking Paths” by Jorge Luis Borges is a postmodern short story that uses the labyrinth as a metaphor for Metafiction. In Metafiction, there are always at least three layers involved in the story: author, story, and reader. The author begins at the center of the labyrinth and moves outward as he creates his story. Once the story is completed he knows his way in and out freely, unless of course he gets lost in his own tale. The reader is placed in the middle of the labyrinth when she begins the piece, and discovers her way by reading. Once she has read the piece it can be seen clearly from the outside and she is free to roam in and out at will (assuming she did not get lost on her way). But is it the goal to solve the labyrinth of fiction? I’ve been in it for so long best beloved, it has grown rather cozy (or I’m lost, which is a distinct possibility). And even if we know that we are living in a labyrinth, there is nothing we can do about it, for we feel all time in the present. In fiction, everything is always happening to the characters at all times (for the entire work exists at all times) but to us it all happens in the present, in the now that we read it. There is no escaping the labyrinth. It is timeless and eternal. Baker says that “space-time is a timeless, eternal labyrinth of simultaneously, existing interlinked present moments” (Baker 306). I know, best beloved, this is still rather confusing, but Baker insists that “temporal labyrinths and the labyrinth in time will become more intelligible the moment we accept the implications of the notion that space-time is relative, and only comprehensible from the outside” (311). Readers can only ever hope to understand the piece of fiction after it is read and the reader can view it from the outside. While we are reading the story, we are still inside the labyrinth and do not know the way out.

But do we really want to leave? Does Borges want us to leave? Sharon Sieber thinks that “For Borges, the labyrinth is a symbol of a system in which there are two simultaneous goals: emerging from the labyrinth and immersing oneself completely in the labyrinth” (Sieber 208). Remember, best beloved, Borges is a postmodernist. He has a reason behind all this madness. Sieber says in regard to Borges, “Using order to subvert order and reader expectation, he completely “undoes” or deconstructs the literal understanding of language as a system of representation and therefore also deconstructs the notion of time” (208). If you are feeling confused by this whole labyrinth nonsense, you are exactly where he wants you. A general rule to keep in mind when reading postmodern literature, best beloved; When you are feeling frustrated, are you supposed to feel that way? Borges wants the reader to doubt his explanations of reality. Sieber says that “This is the high play in which Borges engages readers, luring them into the inherent ambiguity of the linguistic maze of pure form and geometry, not only to admire the creation, but also to feel “hoodwinked” by their own perceptions and false reasonings within the symmetry of time and space” (208). But don’t feel like you’ve been cheated, best beloved. It was the intention to get wrapped up in the labyrinth of Borges, but that is simply what he does. This is what all authors do, for all operate the labyrinth of language, not to mention the labyrinth of fiction and their own particular pieces: “language gives the author the ultimate power to deconstruct one tradition and impose a greater play of traditions in the labyrinth. Every event is connected for Borges. Every reader is connected, as is every reading” (Sieber 210). We are all another layer of the labyrinth, the “infinite series of times, a growing dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times” (Borges 127). We are lost in it, adding layer upon layer. We may escape the labyrinth of particular fictional pieces, but there is no way to escape the labyrinth of language. Even while you are reading this essay you are trapped in the labyrinth that contains authors, critics, and readers who will forever be contributing to this thing called literature. There is no avoiding it, no escape. Even though you will finish it and move on, will you ever truly escape? What? This is completely ridiculous... So far fetched... rubbish!

This is such a terrible paper. Why did I ever think that writing about a labyrinth would be a good idea? I’m sorry, best beloved. I’m sure you’re furious with me. You put your trust in me as narrator to lead you through this maze without deceiving or abandoning you. I do apologize, best beloved. Even authors get lost in their own pieces sometimes. Did you think this would be a good paper? Did you expect it to make sense? How can I expose the conventions by breaking them and expect the paper to be understood? I wanted to be experimental... radical... revolutionary. But the true experimental writers don’t need that “A” in their Senior Seminar class to boost their cumulative GPA. Academic papers are supposed to be clear, concise... This paper should have ended ages ago. It has gone on and on and never had a clear direction. Maybe that is the problem. Did I even start with the introduction? God, this sucks. Perhaps I will simply start over.

Postmodernism, the after-thought of modernism, has been causing havoc and uproar through critics’ dinner parties and readers’ homes for some time now. The author is tired of hiding behind the “invisible narrator” curtain and displaying an all powerful wizard to the mass reading audience. The reader has always partnered with the author to make a story come alive, and it is about time he knew of it. This labyrinth that is language and fiction, with multiple layers all on top of the other, is growing larger and more dangerous. People need to be aware of its strength and power. Many are getting lost in the labyrinth of fiction and never coming out again. Is this so bad? No, best beloved, not at all, but the risks need to be posted on a sign or something. Metafiction has tried to do just that. Metafiction, which by definition is a story about a story, reveals to the reader that he is a crucial element to fiction, for without the reader there would not be fiction. Does a story exist if no one reads it? Jorge Luis Borges, a postmodern author, wrote “The Garden of Forking Paths,” a story about a labyrinth, and is itself a

11 Boy, that’s contentious!
labyrinth of sorts. He presents an alternate view of space, time, and reality that can be used as a metaphor for Metafiction. In this paper, I will argue that Borges uses his labyrinth as a symbol for Metafiction. Background information on postmodern with an explanation of Metafiction will be provided. I will also explain labyrinths and why fiction is a labyrinth, as well as how Borges’ particular story “The Garden of Forking Paths” is a labyrinth text. “Lost in the Funhouse” by John Barth will also be used to strengthen my point. I might prepare some bread crumbs or smooth stones, best beloved. I don’t want to lose you this time...

Works Cited


Heart and Music: The Songs of _Twelfth Night_

Melissa Cyperski '10

John Case once said, “The human soul is nothing but a kind of sweet harmony: therefore, because of this similitude and sympathy, the soul is excited, softened, or stirred by the sound of vocal or instrumental music more than by the phantasms and shadows of other senses” (qtd. in Iselin 98). Originally used to glorify God, music has always been an intangible pleasure, touching the human soul to indescribable depths. It was only a matter of time before music reached the secular world and mortals attempted to harness its power. William Shakespeare is one such mortal, though his stage music has proven to be immortal as his plays are read and performed throughout the world on a daily basis. His music has endured the test of time and transcended into solo pieces, choral arrangements, orchestral compositions, cinema soundtracks, and operas. Several of Shakespeare’s most famous songs are found within the fan-favorite _Twelfth Night_, or _What You Will_. Shakespeare draws on Feste the Clown as something of a minstrel who uses his musical devices to enhance the love-laden themes of the text. Feste is also engaged to appeal to the hearts of the Elizabethan audience by providing the audience with their beloved music while concurrently questioning their notions of romantic love.

In many ways, the science of music was still very primitive during Shakespeare’s days. While several musical instruments were in existence, they were frequently poorly constructed, such as the lute’s strings, which were merely attached with glue; however, this is not to say that music was not a cherished and evolved art form. Musical terminology that was established during the Renaissance is still utilized today, both directly and circuitously. When learning music theory in the modern age, one is still taught strains and phrases that truncate the music into sections consisting of several measures, or as the Elizabethans referred to them, “semibreves.”

The notion of keeping time and a steady tempo was very important in both the realm of public interest and on the Shakespearean stage, as evident in _The Tragedy of King Richard the Second_. The definition of musical “time” today is the same as it was during the 16th century; however, it has now modulated into simpler categories. Today, music is composed in patterns of twos or threes, whereas in the Renaissance, proportions of time were categorized as dupla, tripla, quadruple, sesquialtera, or sesquitertia (Naylor 6).

Time signatures are just one example of how music was far more sophisticated during the Renaissance and can be attributed to society’s high appreciation and practice of the art. All classes were exposed to music on a daily basis albeit with differing locations and stipulations. After dinner, in the homes of the nobility, scores of music were passed around and guests were invited to sing their respective alto, tenor, or bass part. These eruptions of song were frequent, but nearly always sight-read, requiring acute ability and skill as well as a strong ear for music. The very way in which music was performed exemplifies society’s stress on musical education. Nearly all songs were sung in three part harmony, unaccompanied, often with an additional extemporaneous descant line. Young boys enrolled in the universities spent their afternoons harmonizing _a cappella_ vocal selections; those who could not “take a part” were ridiculed and chastised since music lessons were a symbol of education and wealth (Naylor 7).

The enjoyment of music was not just for the nobility, however. The lower classes habitually sang catches, or choric, polyphonic works that were sung out of amusement and love for the art. The lower and middle classes also frequented tavern performances, as well as barbershops, where men waiting in line to be shaved would assume an instrument to facilitate the passing of time (Naylor 17). Yet, this was a clear denotation of social rank for it was taboo for men and women of noble blood to sing in public (von Ende 49) which is one explanation as to why the secondary characters most frequently performed Shakespeare’s songs.

Elizabethans were consumed by their love for music, and William Shakespeare never failed to deliver what his audience wanted. Songs and musical allusions were directly written into nearly every one of Shakespeare’s thirty-seven plays while no less than thirty-six contain stage directions for musical cues (Naylor 3). Music was most commonly referred to in Shakespeare’s comedies and, as G. H. Cowling notes, “it cannot be a coincidence that the two plays whose titles imply that he was giving [the audience] what it wanted contain the most songs. _As You Like It_ and _Twelfth Night_, or _What You Will_ contain no fewer than six songs each” (qtd. in Boyd 191).

Including song within his works only made sense; all peoples adored the art form, but it also buffered the occasionally deficient performance. Lacking the technology of the modern stage, Shakespeare employed stage music to signify the beginnings and endings of acts or scenes as is the function of a present-day curtain, but music also covered extraneous back-stage noise (von Ende 48). Theater music of the Elizabethan era morphed into a jack of all trades: depicting scenery, light, weather, passage of time, characterization, and so much more (Boyd 192).

In attempting to convey so much, Shakespeare had to carefully construct each musical strain so the message would be aptly received by the audience; most notably is Shakespeare’s choice of instruments. For instance, whenever the audience heard a trumpet fanfare, it was widely accepted that a character of gentle birth would enter the scene. Likewise, drums often implied war, specifically foot-soldiers, being of a lesser social status. Stringed instruments offered an ethereal peace or spirituality; woodwinds signified masculinity. Of these instruments, those that were directly referenced within Shakespearean texts include primitive pianofortes, reed
ultimately find themselves bitter and alone, awake in the wee hours of the night, admitting to the fact they "care not for good life" (II.iii.35). Thus, the song opens with a sweet commentary on love and was performed, as composed by Sir Thomas Morley, as a light and pretty waltz (Duffm 286).

Feste sings:

O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O, stay and hear! your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low.
Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know (II.iii.40-45).

However, as the first stanza is a loveable ditty, it yet implores the men to stop searching for love and cherish that which they do find. While it is often suggested that Feste refers to the Viola plot and gender bending roles by referencing those who "sing both high and low," Shakespeare may be commenting on homosexuality and pleading to the audiences' hearts through the only means which they can bear so delicate a subject: song. The nature of music is pleasant and memorable yet somewhat transient as located amidst the text; therefore, Shakespeare had more freedom to challenge society's accepted norms of true love.

He also had more leeway to blatantly criticize Sir Toby and Sir Andrew since the second stanza further heightens the attack and serves as a commentary on morality and the establishment of a passionate life.

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure:
In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure (II.iii.48-53).

Feste suggests that time is of the essence and one must seize the day — carpe diem — while there is still life and breath to be had. As life after death is yet unknown, love must be enjoyed in the present with the delay of such enjoyment yielding great loss. Thus, cast away worries and apprehensions and love who or what you will; very fools, sons of wise men, do know of the importance of love so why waste time being drunken and slovenly? Find a pretty, young woman and love her for, as the Duke soon suggests, a woman's beauty falls every day as petals do from the rose. The men then rouse up, affected — as the spirit of the music is contagious — and join Feste for a catch of merriment.

After several interjections of song among the lower class men, the Duke is next to entreat Feste for a performance. While Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are drunkards, Orsino is egotistical, melancholy, and patriarchal. This is evident within the music he patronizes as well as the commentary previous to the song, where he insists that a woman's beauty and significance wane with every hour that passes. Requested by the Duke
Orsino is "Come Away, Come Away," a song regarding the innocence and romance of love, but the lyrical content of Feste’s performance instead suggests sexual oppression, self-love, and grief: descriptions of the Duke’s psyche. When Orsino is first introduced within the work, he is quick to describe his deep-seated love for the fair Olivia. "O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first, / Me thought she purg’d the air of pestilence; / That instant was I turn’d into a hart, / And my desires, like feel and cruel hounds, / E’er since pursue me” (I.i.19-23). This description of love contains two Renaissance taboos: trusting the eyes and admitting to desire. The eyes were deceitful and by the mere mention of love at first sight, the audience was immediately alerted of love’s falsity. This mistake is acceptable at first as immature puppy love; however, the Duke continues to state that he has ever since pursued his desires: a term used almost entirely to imply fornication.

Clearly, the song later requested by the Duke Orsino denotes strong sexual undertones with the opening lines being:

Come away, come away death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fie away, fie away breath,
I am slain by a fair cruel maid (II.iv.51-4).

Thus, with the Renaissance euphemism of death as orgasm and the double-entendre of “come,” Feste begins the song with a strong implication that Orsino lusts for fair maidens and thus loves them not. This suggestion is a continuation of the play’s theme of the quest for true love and attempting to reconcile the many different formations love may assume. The Clown continues singing, “My part of death, no one so true / Did share it” (II.iv.57-8) which is translated plainly to “I am truer to love than any other has been or ever will be.” The question is, however, who does Orsino indeed love? The lyrics continue to mention that “[n]ot a flower, not a flower sweet” (II.iv.60) will be cast upon his deathbed, a direct reference to the comparison of women to flowers but a few lines prior. By substituting orgasm for death and henceforth a bed for a coffin, Feste’s lyrics suggest that a woman does not fulfill the Duke, either sexually or romantically. This is, again, a comment on the Renaissance view of homosexuality albeit a confused one since he who would satisfy the Duke is Cesario, Viola in disguise.

The song’s final lines represent Feste’s interpretation of the Duke’s character as a lustful, sex-driven knave asking to not be so completely in love that those whom he loved – or rather made love to – will weep when he is gone. The song concludes with: “Lay me, O, where / Sad true lover never find my grave, / To weep there” (II.iv.64-6). The romance of dying consumed by love and thus shielding the grave in the attempt to protect the significant other from the pain of grief is completely undercut by the haughty assumption that the given lover would horribly mourn the loss at all. Furthermore, Orsino’s severe loneliness and depression is palpable as he has no such true love who would mourn for him. This is yet but an unrequited dream for those whom he seeks, Cesario and Olivia, since they will not be had. Feste is also quick to remind Malvolio of his unrequited love for Olivia in the song "Ah, Robin" (IV.ii.72-82). Throughout the song’s brief duration, Malvolio is imprisoned and discomfited, crying out to the Fool for assistance. Feste then appears harsh and unforgiving in his wit as he thrusts the man further into madness.

Clown. Hey, Robin, jolly Robin,
Tell me how thy lady does.
Mal. Fool!
Clown. My lady is unkind, perdie!
Mal. Fool!
Clown. Alas, why is she so?
Mal. Fool, I say!

Clown. She loves another (IV.ii.72-82).

The song refers to the pain that ensues when love is unreciprocated, specifically the psychological effects when another lover is preferred over one’s self. Within the context of Twelfth Night, Malvolio is the neglected love, Viola the “other,” and Olivia the woman of their affections. The text for this popular song derives from a poem of the same title by Sir Thomas Wyatt and was arranged into a round by William Cornish in 1523 (Duffin 48). Shakespeare’s audience would have been very familiar with this song and regarding the allusion, there are several key stanzas that contribute to the play. Wyatt writes:

My lady is unkind, perdie,
alack, why is she so?
She lov’th another better than me
and yet she will say no. Ah, Robin...
I find no such doubleness
I find women true;
My lady loveth me doubtless;
and will change for no new. Ah, Robin...
Thou art happy while that doth last
but I say as I find,
That women’s love is but a blast
and turneth like the wind. Ah, Robin...

(Duffin 48-9).

The first stanza listed is almost verbatim what Shakespeare included in the play, but with a slight variance commenting that the other lover is better than the self. The poem continues to say that the speaker trusts women to be both true to themselves and true to their lovers. However, that very love and trust
is soon to be betrayed and falters in the wind. Love, like life, is subject to
ebb and flow, to tests of strength, to hope of enduring through the storm.
One of the longest and most famous of all the Shakespearean songs, "When That I Was," is used to conclude the play and takes upon it the same
notion of toils and perils. Some experts theorize that the song was not
Shakespeare's pen at all, but rather the composition of a player who merely
wanted to appease the groundlings and to showcase his own musical talents
(Seng 123-4). However, the song appears to be intentional and premeditated
by Shakespeare as it does have contextual merit, especially in comparison
with the other songs of Twelfth Night, and also because it is referenced again
in King Lear.
The translation can be interpreted as the life cycle containing many
ups and downs. The song begins as a jovial, joyous tone where a boy is
consumed by the innocence of youth and disregards those things which
pleasure him not; however, as he grows to become a man, no longer does he
find such pleasure for humans are judgmental, critical, and unaccepting. As
the man continues to age, his follies dwindle still and he fails to thrive and
enjoy the things society warrants he should, such as love. Life must then be
escaped, one such route being alcohol. Now at the infirmary of old age,
death is upon him; moments are fleeting and yet the wind still blows and the
rain does fall. It is no matter now, however, for life has ceased, but there is a
quasi-rebirth since the youth of the world still have the opportunity to enjoy
life. Thus, he shall strive for excellence and aid the youth in seizing every
moment.
It is also suggested that the lyrics are the protocol for a
Shakespearean romantic comedy. While this may be true, in examining the
interpretations of the other songs in Twelfth Night, this particular song is
more than likely an invitation for carpe diem. Shakespeare is urging
memento mori and while man is but mere mortal, life should be lived fully.
In this sense, "When That I Was" is very reminiscent of "O Mistress Mine."
More than likely, carpe diem was encouraged via song in order to
impress upon the minds of the audience. A simple melody, especially when
performed for five verses, is ingrained in the mind and may be called upon at
any given moment. Ending the play with a long song also brought down the
house, as they say, for, in the Elizabethan Era, love, music, and especially
the love of music conquered all.
William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, or What You Will is surely a
play of great literary
merit; however, it is so much more than another face in the throng. At a time
when Shakespeare
was truly coming in to his own as the greatest playwright in history, Twelfth
Night delivered the extra zest necessary for assured adoration. The
Elizabethans loved escaping the pains of reality and sought to do so by any
and all means possible; two of their favorite pastimes, however, were,
variably, music and theater. Shakespeare's meticulous use of stage music
to develop the romantic plot line as well as to combine the beloved art forms
of theater and music accounted for the play's wild success during the
Elizabethan Era and still today in the Modern age. As Orsino perfectly
illustrates within the very first line of the play, "If music be the food of love,
play on,
/ Give me excess of it" (I.1.1-2). After all, as the modern Broadway musical
A New Brain boasts, "Stories of passion, stories of friendship, and tales of
how romance survives - I have so many songs . . . Heart and music get
along."
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American Christians are suffering an identity crisis. As the major forces shaping the religion's public face become increasingly conservative, they are alienating the tradition's young adults who have been raised as much on the gospel of MTV as the gospel of Matthew, forcing them to choose between these two worlds. In an attempt to confront this choice, many of these 18- to 34-year-olds reject traditional ways of being Christian but remain profoundly interested in being spiritual. Even though fewer than half of them read the Bible more than once a year, 60% still believe it is relevant to their lives (Grossman). Although this young adult demographic's anxieties are well known among advertisers and publishers alike, until Relevant magazine began to circulate in 2003, no publication had specifically targeted its spiritually-attuned subset. To address these readers' needs and desires, Relevant magazine faced a unique challenge: to negotiate the boundary between living a life as a Christian and consumer and to alleviate the tension that accompanies this task. Although Relevant claims to bridge the gulf between the secular and the sacred, the magazine actually exploits the anxieties that this division creates, simultaneously encouraging readers both to reject pop-culture commercialism in favor of a more "spiritual" ethos and to obey the materialist impulse to buy.

Given Jesus' less-than-genial relations with the Roman majority and its moneylenders, it's hardly a stretch to associate him with rebellion. Relevant cleverly employs this common anti-establishment motif to reach its specific demographic: the "hipster, forward-thinking, spiritually attuned twentiesomthing" ("Who We Are"). It's difficult to imagine a narrower marketing niche, and editor Cameron Strang's choice to pursue it certainly represents a leap of faith. But, because taking a chance without the data to support it is all but suicidal in the world of print publication, Strang and his coworkers did the research to define their readers—and their readers' anxieties—carefully.

In the materials that potential advertisers receive, Relevant makes it clear that, while its audience may be forward-thinking and rebellious, its financial goals are firmly mainstream. Even though the magazine is willing to take chances on its readership, there is no evidence of risky business when it comes to generating revenue; after all, according to the "Who We Are" statement published on its website, Relevant is "a self-contained, for-profit business not affiliated with any other companies, denominations, or organizations." As such, the magazine relies, at least in part, on revenue generated by paid advertisements. Because the pool of advertisers interested
in a magazine with such a specific demographic is likely to be smaller than the one available to its competitors. Relevant uses its Media Kit to convince potential advertisers that even the spiritual seeker has very deep pockets.

The data that Relevant has collected to support these claims about its readers are impressive—and tempting for advertisers. Boasting an average income of almost $60,000 annually and an average net worth of $184,382 (“Reader Demographics”), the Relevant reader clearly has the financial means to make major purchases. Simply that this reader has so much money at his disposal does not, however, necessarily mean that he will spend it—or does it? Relevant is certainly justified in thinking so, as its research indicates that these consumers purchase two CDs every month, buy thirty books every year, and listen to almost thirty hours of music every week. In short, the reader is “gear- and status-oriented, and always up-to-date on the latest gadgets, clothing and cars” (“Who We Are”)—that is, he has a wide variety of ways and reasons to spend his cash. It shouldn’t be surprising to hear a publication speaking so patronizingly about its readership’s concerns; in fact, pinpointing these specific status anxieties that plague the Relevant reader is an effective way for the magazine to generate revenue. Because the financial realities of the competitive world of print publishing apply to everyone—even Relevant, whose Media Kit ultimately reveals that it targets the “18-34 age bracket because they buy a lot of stuff”—it’s difficult to blame the magazine for catering to its readers’ materialist sensibilities—at least until we realize that fueling this gimme impetus directly contradicts the other messages that Relevant proposes.

Michelle Bearden’s 2003 article, published in the Tampa Tribune, observes that editor Cameron Strang hopes to use his magazine to “[bridge] the gap between sacred and secular” and “challenge our generation about their faith, not tell them how to live it.” These aspirations, heartwarming though they may be, seem almost diametrically opposed to the content of the articles that Relevant actually publishes. For example, a spread featuring soul singer/songwriter India. Arie graces pages 60-61 of the July-August 2006 issue, offering insight into the artist’s psychological, spiritual, and fashionable development. Fully half the article’s content is devoted not to a discussion of her music—although the titles of her hit singles and records are mentioned frequently, lest the reader miss an opportunity to spend—but to her changing sense of style and supposed rebellion against the same commercializing economy that supports her. (Pointing out the obvious irony of, for example, her denouncing the fashion industry but still accepting awards from Vogue seems unnecessary.) While reserving ample space for a discussion of India. Arie’s personal (and imitable!) wardrobe choices, the article lists her upcoming projects, all of which will be available for the buying: a book, a line of handbags, and a clothing and jewelry line. This relentless emphasis on commodities might not seem to be a problem until we consider the title of the subsection in which it appears: “strength, courage, &
their spiritual and secular priorities. This process of commodification culminates on page 26, when Relevant fully abandons its spiritual guise in favor of a decidedly materialistic one, encouraging its readers to "save on gas so you can buy a PS3." If there are any lingering doubts about the extent to which Relevant is a product of the very commercial society its contributors decry, the inclusion of such features as "The Scene" and "Slices" should certainly dispel them.

Manipulating readers like this is hardly a novel tactic in the world of magazine publishing. The problem, however, is that by exploiting its readers' anxieties about how to define themselves, Relevant is engaging in the very practices it denounces. By directing its readers to reject materialism, the magazine suggests that they should oppose the widespread culture of consumption, but by bombarding them with advertisements and instructions about how to be cool, the magazine suggests that they should embrace it. This contradiction obviously baffles the reader; what's the spiritually- and status-hungry twentysomething to do? Read Relevant, of course! Indeed, the main reason that Relevant perpetuates this dichotomy is to prey on the characteristic anxieties of young adults and thereby ensure that its readers will keep coming back. For all its allusions to "progressive culture," the magazine's most appropriate motto may be a much older one: Ye shall know Relevant, and Relevant shall set ye free.

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True Manhood and Manly Boys: Boys' Adventure Stories, Imperialism, and the Titanic

Alison Reynolds '07

Many of the boys on the Titanic, ages eight through nineteen, were trapped in a limbo between childhood and adulthood, making it unclear which role they should assume as the ship sank. Some were placed on the lifeboats by their parents, some decided to stay with their fathers as the ship sank, and others found that the crew made it difficult for them to get on lifeboats because of contrasting class concepts of childhood. In more than one instance, the sailors and crew refused to let boys as young as eleven on the lifeboats, and it was only through the intervention of their fathers or by being disguised as females that these boys were allowed on. Many of the boys who did survive describe their experiences in terms that make them sound more adult-like and courageous. Those who did not survive are honored by their families and by newspapers for their heroism, bravery, and manly actions.

By assuming these adult roles, the boys were attempting to fulfill the codes of behavior encouraged by popular boys' stories and novels printed in magazines and newspapers of the time. These codes of behavior worked to decrease the growing problem of “Britain’s imperial power and British masculinity in equal decline” (Hugill 326). In fulfilling these codes, the boys showed a kind of bravery, loyalty, and manliness that signified the superiority of Western countries, encouraging militarism and support for imperialism and averring the global dominance. The use of this rhetoric shows that there was an increasing need for young boys to be perceived as more adult-like so they could grow up to become brave, strong, ultra-masculine men who would continue to support imperialism and assert the moral and physical superiority of Western countries and races during a time when support for these foreign wars was declining.

During the Edwardian period and for several years leading up to it, a genre of juvenile novels and stories aimed at an audience of boys were very popular throughout England and America. These stories depicted young boys, teenagers, and young men performing heroic acts and encouraged boys to adhere to specific codes of behavior in order to be good citizens. According to Robert H. MacDonald in the article, “Reproducing the Middle-class Boy: From Purity to Patriotism in the Boys’ Magazines, 1892-1914,” “The newspaper [Pall Mall Gazette] interprets the function of The Captain [a boys’ magazine] and its rivals as educative and social; their role [is] to promote morality and patriotism, [and] to ‘help make good lads and brave lads’ of their readers,” suggesting that these stories played a large role in influencing codes of behavior for boys (519). In this morally-based code, “the manly boy was pure, courageous and unselfish; he never sneak[ed], he tell[ed] the truth,” and also had “physical pluck” and “moral courage” (MacDonald 522). During the sinking of the Titanic, each of these virtues is illustrated through the actions of a Western boy, suggesting that these values had become culturally ingrained and accepted in Edwardian society.

By the early twentieth century, the most important virtues for boys to uphold included being “manly and polite, [protecting] the weak, [being] kind to dumb animals, [abstaining] from bad language and smoking, and [striving] to be a bright British boy: always a patriot and lover of his country,” along with the previously stressed codes of morality (MacDonald 525). By displaying these moral qualities and civic duties, the boys showed their patriotism and loyalty to their countries. These concepts in boys’ stories soon acquired imperialist rhetoric, encouraging boys to enlist in the military when they were old enough and to support imperialistic wars as a display of their citizenship and manliness. According to MacDonald, the pictures on the magazine covers reflected these changing attitudes. He writes,

The heading of each number, behind a drawing of a boy reading and a boy with a sports kit, showed a Union Jack; in March 1908, the flag was replaced with a mounted boy bugler sounding the alarm. The illustrations on the title-pages...also dramatized the empire, particularly the excitement and adventure of the frontier. These title-pages also made the progression towards more explicit imperialist ideology from, in the early years, heroic rescues by firemen and Indian attacks on the US mailcoach, to, by the turn of the century, imperial frontiersman in Africa, big game hunters in India, soldiers dynamiting the gates of a fort, or scenes from a military tattoo. (529)

These changes on magazine covers virtues reflect a more militant turn that suggests a need for a more masculine younger generation of boys who will be prepared to step into the roles of soldiers, roles that will help their countries maintain global dominance over those with “inferior” sets of morals and social behaviors.

By 1912, the year of the Titanic disaster, these magazines focused largely on depicting Western nations as militant countries who were far stronger, both morally and physically, than the countries they had under imperialist control. In the article “Imperialism and Manliness in Edwardian Boys’ Novels,” Peter J. Hugill writes, “the theme of Britain and America together in an Anglo-Saxon compact against those who would destroy their trade and reputation in the world is consistent across much of the work of...imperial romance.” This union of the Western Anglo-Saxon countries against non-Western cultures is an idea that is consistent with the heroic behaviors of the white, Western boys on the Titanic (333). Additionally,
some boys on the Titanic displayed militaristic qualities through the sacrifice of their lives and through their physical dexterity, mimicking the actions of a soldier in the battlefield.

Even though these ideas of morality and good citizenship were based on traditionally middle-class values, many magazines had an audience of both upper and lower-classes, although a few focused only on upper and middle-classes. Those that had only an audience of upper and middle-class boys "praised the gentleman, truth and honour, perseverance, friendship, courage, loyalty, duty, glory, [and] resolution," while at the same time insinuating that working class boys were inferior for not fulfilling these virtues (MacDonald 524-525). On the other hand, magazines aimed at lower-class boys still depicted the same set of middle-class morals, however, they also suggested that by following the described codes of behavior, along with "hard work, persistence, and luck," lower-class boys could climb the social ladder and join the middle-class (MacDonald 525). This belief might have been a factor in the large number of lower-class boys on the Titanic who opted to remain on the sinking ship even when offered a chance to get on a lifeboat.

Imperialism also played a large role in increasing a lower-class boy's chances at climbing the social ladder. Hugill writes, "The origin of the boys' adventure story and its close linkage to the romance of individual advancement in Britain lies in its imperialism... A plucky lad could always 'rise' through hard work and devotion to the imperial cause," devotion that was shown through bravery and loyalty to the Western ideals emphasized by these stories (320). Through this lens, the behavior of the lower-class boys on the Titanic can be seen as an attempt to jump social classes through a show of middle-class morality and adherence to civic duty that would make them seem more masculine, and thus of a superior social class.

In addition to an increasing emphasis on militarism, stories and adventures of the Boys Scouts became very popular during the Edwardian period. These Scouts were depicted as "little soldiers," and "became members of a national organization working with the authorities...[They] were more than good citizens, they were agents of law and order (MacDonald 531). Many of their actions became highly militarized, encouraging boys to become physically stronger, more patriotic, and join in support of imperialism as a way to show loyalty and pride and display themselves as courageous representatives for their entire country. In these stories, the ideal Boy Scout would perform actions unrealistic for boys of any age, single-handedly "catching spies, thwarting invasions and preparing to take up arms to save their country" (MacDonald 534). With role models such as these to live up to, it becomes easier to understand why the boys on the Titanic described their actions in such heroic terms.

One such account comes from Marshall Drew, an eight-year-old English boy traveling in second-class. While recalling his story, he said, "It isn't likely I shall ever forget the screams of those people as they perished in the water said to be 28 degrees," but he himself did not show fear. He continued, "at this point in my life I was being brought up as a typical British kid. You were not allowed to cry. You were a 'little man.' So as a cool kid I lay down in the bottom of the lifeboat and went to sleep" (Tibballs 132). By not crying or showing fear, even in a perilous situation, Drew fulfilled the role of the honorable, resolute manly boy who would grow up into a loyal and patriotic citizen. Although a seemingly small act, Drew's lack of fear was representative of the ideal brave boy who stood as a symbol of future Western superiority because of his composure and emotional strength.

A similar situation occurred in the account of eight-year-old Arthur Olsen, a Norwegian boy who traveled in third-class. Olsen was placed in a lifeboat by his father, who did not survive the accident. In his account, Olsen says, "In our boat everybody was crying and sighing. I kept very quiet. One man got very crazy, then cried just like a little baby. Another man jumped right into the sea and he was gone" (Tibballs 275). Like Drew, he presents himself as brave, calm, and in control of his emotions, showing his adherence to the principles of being a "manly boy." Through Olsen's perspective, it is himself who acts more adult-like, displaying his own courage and composure compared to the weaknesses of the men who cried and jumped off the lifeboats. This suggests that his perception of masculinity does not revolve around age, but behavior. Because his behavior was manlier, according to teachings and depictions of manliness from boys' stories, he saw his own behavior as more adult-like and, therefore, superior to the older men.

Olsen's bravery and poise represented the increased masculinity of the next generation of Western boys, and worked to decrease fears of a widespread loss of masculinity. As a member of this generation, Olsen and the youths he represented were taught to be patriotic and to promote the superiority of the Western races through moral and physical strength, which were directly connected to a single idealized code of behavior. By following these codes of behavior, boys became representatives of their entire culture and helped assist in the preservation of the west as the globally dominant region.

Another boy who was saved by entering a lifeboat was Cervine Swensen, a fourteen-year-old third-class passenger from Sweden. According to an article in the Boston Post, "His mother... had told him when he kissed her goodbye in Sweden that if anything happened to run to the boats" (Tibballs 150). To this first statement, Swensen added that, "he hoped he didn't prevent some woman from being saved for he knew his mother would want to do that first in spite of what she had told him" (Tibballs 150). By citing obedience to his mother as his reason for getting on a lifeboat, Swensen fulfilled the role of the manly boy. According to boys' magazines, "True Manhood" lay in hard work, protecting the weak, pleasing Mother, and avoiding bad thoughts," suggesting that although boys were supposed to act like men, their mothers still had the ultimate authority. As long as the
boys remained in a state of childhood, their mothers remained in control of their lives, highly influential through their roles as nurturing parents. Once the boys grew into adults, they became independent from their mothers. Swensen was caught in a phase between childhood and adulthood in which he obeyed his mother as a child, but leaned toward the adult role by acknowledging that it would have been wrong for him to knowingly take a woman’s seat on a lifeboat. By saying this, Swensen shows his belief in the ideal of “protecting the weak,” in addition to obeying his mother. This emphasis on the importance of honor shows a move toward the independence of adulthood and displays the values of an upstanding Western boy whose respect and system of values work together to assert the superiority of the next generation of Westerners.

Not all survivors found their place on the lifeboat so easily, as described in an account from Edward Dorking, a nineteen-year-old English boy traveling third-class. Dorking jumped off the ship while it was sinking and was able to swim to a lifeboat. Before jumping, he explains how he and two other boys “knelt and prayed, then together... mounted the rail and plunged over,” all acts of moral courage endorsed by boys’ magazines as signs of a manly boy (“Boy’s Prayer for Life Answered”). Dorking’s survival, accomplished by swimming through freezing water, displayed physical prowess, making him a symbol of strength for the youth of Western countries. According to the rhetoric of these stories, his physical dexterity on the Titanic should be matched by all boys and later modeled on the battlefield in order to prove the superior strength and military power of Western countries. Additionally, his faith in Christianity displays another superior facet of Western culture. Since Christianity was the dominant religion of Western culture, it was believed that “inferior” cultures could benefit from its teachings, an example of “the white man’s burden; which advanced the idea that territorial imperialism was justified if it resulted in improving the lost of less fortunate races” (Hugill 330). Thus, something as simple as saying a prayer could be used publicly as a way to proclaim Western superiority and justification of imperialism through the heroic actions of one boy.

Although many boys were able to get onto lifeboats, there are several instances of crew members refusing to let some boys enter. John Ryerson, a thirteen-year-old American first-class passenger, started to get on a lifeboat, but the officer at the boat (who in some accounts was Lightoller) refused to let him on. It was not until the boy’s father said, “Of course that boy goes with his mother. He is only thirteen,” that Ryerson was allowed on the boat (Tibballs 171). William Carter II, an eleven-year-old American first-class passenger, tried to get on the same boat, but was refused until his mother put a woman’s hat on his head (“Master William Thornton Carter II”). There is also an account that says that John Jacob Astor placed an anonymous boy in a lifeboat wearing a woman’s hat and called him a girl after one of the crew refused to let the boy on the boat (“Astor Put Boy By Wife’s Side”).

Although there are no accounts from these boys about their reactions to these occurrences, the events do point towards certain beliefs of the crew members regarding childhood. Because the majority of the crew members were of a lower class than the first-class boys, their concepts of childhood and when it should end were different from the upper-class passengers. For the first and second-class passengers, adulthood began at a much later age than it did for the lower-class crew members, who were often forced to work or go to sea as young teenagers. Lightoller himself began his sea career at the age of thirteen, which helps to explain why he viewed Ryerson and Carter, as adults while their parents still believed them to be children. In terms of the empire, the majority of the foot soldiers were lower-class men who probably entered the wars at a very young age. Upper-class men, on the other hand, most likely entered war much older as officers. In the eyes of the crew, these boys were probably near the age to fight or begin working, so they would be expected to act as men, whereas in upper-class concepts of childhood, the boys were still in training towards becoming adults. The crewmen may have viewed the boys’ actions of getting onto the lifeboats as weaknesses, contributing to the problem rather than helping to alleviate fears about declining masculinity.

The idea of lower-class boys having shorter childhoods is exemplified by the Asplund family of three Swedish brothers: Filip, fourteen, Clarence, ten, and Carl, eight. These third-class boys who refused to leave their father in an attempt to fulfill a more adult-like role and perished with their father during the disaster. In their mother’s account, she recalled that the “three older boys clung to their father,” and called them, “my three grown boys...[who smiled] sweetly at me to the last” (Tibballs 149). Being lower-class, the boys may have preferred to identify themselves with their father, emphasizing their manliness and their status as adults, than remain with their mother, under whom they would remain in a state of childhood. Selma Asplund’s description of her sons as grown because they stayed on the sinking ship with their father suggests that she valued the same virtues of courage, honor, and sacrifice that were depicted in the boys’ stories. Her behavior also suggests that the virtues taught in boys’ magazines were cultural values that were not only learned by boys, but by much of the culture as well, creating a more widespread and prominent recognition of these values and the promotion of their importance to the younger generations. Exemplifying this idea, the Asplund brothers were praised for courageously acting as men by their mother and by newspapers, turning them into a symbol for the strength, moral courage, and manliness of young boys in the empire.

A similar tragedy occurred in the van Billiard family. Two English brothers traveling in third-class, James van Billiard, twelve, and Walter van Billiard, nine, were said to have “refused to leave their father on the doomed
ship and remained with him to the last" ("Van Billiard Boys May Have Stuck to Father"). By remaining with their father, it is possible that the boys were trying to fulfill an adult role, strengthened by following the example of their father. The general public respected the brothers for their bravery, again suggesting that not only boys, but much of the culture had adopted these codes of behavior as normal and acceptable. Both sets of brothers acted within the codes of "True Manhood" and encouraged boys of all classes to adopt these concepts of sacrifice and selflessness as soon as possible in order to be good representatives of their race.

William Johnson, a nineteen-year-old American is eulogized as a hero by his local newspaper for his role throughout the disaster. According to an article originally printed in the Paterson Morning Call, Johnson was fourth quartermaster on the S.S. Philadelphia and was originally supposed to sail home on the Olympic, but missed it and had his ticket changed to the Titanic ("Met Death Like a Hero").

As the ship was sinking, he quickly came to duty, assisting women and children with getting into the lifeboats. According to steward Frank Turnquist, Captain Smith told Johnson to get into the lifeboat, but Johnson replied, "I'll wait until the women and children are all off and other officers go," showing his courage and willingness to sacrifice himself to fulfill his moral and civic duty. His fearlessness on the Titanic was representative of how males of all Western races should behave, according to the magazines, and the strength and courage he displayed on the sinking ship could be compared to the strength and courage displayed on the battlefield. Because he aided in the rescue of women and children, Johnson acted as the ideal boy, a model of the Boy Scout who goes above and beyond others to achieve a heroic triumph for the glory of his country and his race.

Concerning Johnson's heroism, Turnquist also says, "some of those older officers could have saved him, as they all knew he deserved to have his life by the courage he showed when put to the test. In my eyes and in the eyes of others who saw the affair, Johnson was a hero" ("Met Death Like a Hero"). Turnquist's comment suggests that as a boy perfectly adhering to the ideals of "True Manhood," Johnson, had he survived, would have been a patriotic and loyal citizen who would promote this manliness to other boys, working to increase the strength and superiority of his race. His father is reported to have said, "he was sure his son had gone to his death as a true man should," and his sister, "I know Willie would be a man in a case like that and as mother has said, she knows he would not leave the vessel if there were still women and children aboard" ("Met Death Like a Hero"). He is represented as a perfect, virtuous hero by the newspaper and is praised for acting as a grown man by his family, both examples of how this rhetoric convinced not only boys, but those around them that the codes of behavior they promoted should be universal. His actions were admirable and suggest a masculinity and strength of character that all Western boys should strive for in order to show the superiority and the capability of the next generation, who were expected to continue the empire's legacy. His generosity in giving up his life for women and children is comparable to a soldier giving up his life for his country in a war, showing how both were seen as acts of bravery and selflessness that would represent the strength of the race as a whole, providing evidence of Western countries' superiority and masculinity, justifying their global dominance.

Although it is unlikely that every boy on the Titanic read these magazines, the ideas promoted by them transcended the written word to become a part of the cultural values concerning manliness in young boys. The behavior of many of the boys on the Titanic acts as a model for how boys should behave in all facets of life. Those who survived and those who did not both acted bravely in whatever capacity they could. The boys who died, no matter what their age, are characterized as being grown-up and manly and are turned into heroes by newspapers and their families for their acts of bravery. By behaving in this way, the boys were doing their civic and patriotic duty to their country and to their race as a whole. In showing the world the strength, courage, sense of morality, and adherence to manly, adult-like roles characterized by boys' novels and stories, the boys managed to act as symbols of the power of the younger generation. Taught to follow in the footsteps of the Boy Scouts they read about, it was hoped that these boys would grow up to be strong, militant soldiers, increasing their loyalty, duty, and patriotism as they grew older. In a way, the boys represent the rise in power of the younger generations, promising to continue to maintain Western countries' status as the most powerful culture and asserting and promising continued global dominance of their race.
Rethinking the Revolution: Duty, Domesticity, and Defiance in Mary E. Wilkins Freeman’s “The Revolt of ‘Mother’”

Emily Toler ’08

Sarah Penn, the protagonist of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman’s short story “The Revolt of ‘Mother’,” is a complicated character. The multidimensional nature of her personality—from her devotion to her domestic duties to her apparent revolt against her restricted role—makes her a fascinating subject for critical analysis, so it comes as no surprise that “[recent] criticism of Freeman’s writing has focused on her portrayal of women characters whose choices of autonomy and self-definition can be interpreted using feminist paradigms” (Cutter 280). This temptation to read Freeman’s work through that contemporary lens is certainly a strong one, as many of this story’s components—from its title to its conclusion—seem ideologically similar to a modern feminism in which the female character rebels against the patriarchal structures that confine her, ultimately seeking a total redefinition of traditional gender roles and social codes. Although Sarah Penn’s “revolt” certainly has its unconventional aspects, it should not be interpreted as a call for a revolution in that contemporary sense. Her exceptional behavior is not an allegorical rejection of the national patriarchy, and it is not revolutionary in the unqualified sense that the term, in modern feminist discourse, often implies. Instead of advocating an abandonment of traditional roles prescribed for women, Sarah’s actions represent Freeman’s call for a redefinition of those roles within the household and the family—a change in the domestic politics of late nineteenth-century New England.

It is clear from the beginning of the text that Sarah Penn is hardly an unconventional woman. She and her husband Adoniram live in an unremarkable New England town, where he makes an unremarkable living as a farmer and she leads an equally unremarkable life as a housewife. If Sarah is somehow exceptional, it is not because she is a revolutionary—it is because she is extraordinarily womanly. Her “mild and benevolent [forehead], smooth curves of gray hair, [and] meek downward lines about her nose and mouth” are common physical traits of the ideal wife. More importantly, these characteristics are not coincidental; Sarah has apparently chosen to exhibit them: “her eyes, fixed upon the old man, looked as if the meekness had been the result of her own will, never of the will of another” (733). That Sarah has elected to adopt a visage of meekness—that is, the countenance of the humble wife—certainly suggests that she is an unlikely vehicle through which Freeman might espouse a feminist revolution.
This adherence to traditional roles is evident in more than Sarah's physical appearance. Her conversations with her daughter demonstrate that she is keenly aware of the position she occupies: "we're womenfolks, Nanny Penn. [. . .] we know only what men-folks think we do, so far as any use of it goes, an' we'd ought to reckon men-folks in with Providence, an' not complain of what they do" (735). But this observation, even if it is slightly sarcastic, does not represent all of Sarah's opinions. Although she resents her dilapidated home—and her husband Adoniram's failure (or unwillingness) to replace it—she remains at least marginally grateful for what he has provided: "we've been pretty comfortable here, after all. The roof don't leak—an' never but once—that's one thing. Father's kept it shingled right up. [. . .] A good many girls don't have as good a place as this. Nobody's ever heard me complain" (735). Clearly, Sarah understands the realities of her status as a woman and wife, and she fulfills the duties that those roles prescribe with admirable efficiency: "she [is] a masterly keeper of her box of a house. Her one living-room never seemed to have in it any dust [. . .] until the dirt, to go before the broom. She [is] like an artist so perfect that he has apparently no art" (735). As Freeman's title implies, however, Sarah eventually revolts, ostensibly rejecting these traditional roles. Even so, this revolt is a complicated one, while, at least superficially, it might seem to represent a dramatic shift in the hierarchy of the home, her rebellion actually takes place firmly within the social and domestic structures in which she lives.

When Sarah Penn discovers that her husband has plans to build another barn instead of repairing their home, she is understandably angry, but her apparent powerlessness renders her incapable of changing Adoniram's mind. Because the only outlet she has to express her emotions is, appropriately enough, a traditionally domestic one—cooking—she immediately begins baking the "mince-pies [that] Adoniram [likes] better than any other kind" (736). That she is devoted to this wifely role, even in spite of her obvious frustrations, is made apparent in her willingness to serve her husband while wearing "that expression of meek vigor which might have characterized one of the New Testament saints" and in her admission that "however deep a resentment she might be forced to hold against her husband, she would never fail in sedulous attention to his wants" (736). Clearly, any bitterness that Sarah feels toward Adoniram remains hidden; her ability to act on her own feelings is subjugated to her female duties.

Indeed, even as Adoniram remains deaf to her requests and as the compounded frustrations of years of unrealized desires weigh more heavily on her shoulders, Sarah does not abandon her role. When the day of her revolt arrives, her obvious anticipation does not deter her from fulfilling her domestic duties: she continues making pies, "clapping the rolling-pin into the crust, although she was very pale, and her heart beat loudly," and she prepares her husband for his trip, "[laying out his] Sunday suit and his clean clothes, [getting] his shaving-water and razor ready, [and buttoning] his collar and [fastening] his black cravat" (739). Even after Adoniram's departure, Sarah does not immediately abandon her wifely responsibilities in favor of her rebellion; instead, she "[hurries] her baking [so that] at eleven o'clock, it was all done" (740), enabling herself to secure her family's position in the new barn. It is only after her tasks have been completed that Sarah allows herself to set her plan in motion, and even then, she clearly indicates that it is only "as long as father's gone [that she] ain't goin' to get a regular dinner" (740). Clearly, for Sarah, the relative importance of this rebellion is far from surpassing that of her wifely and motherly duties; it is barely even an interruption.

After Sarah moves her family into the barn, it becomes even more apparent that she has not designed this revolt to replace or redefine her role as wife. Instead, she is motivated by concern for her standing in society and for her family's welfare. Early in the story, she expresses anxieties about how her daughter's marriage will be perceived if it takes place in the dingy old house, concerned that "it's all the room Nanny's got to have her company in; an' there ain't one of her mates but what's got better. [. . .] It's all the room she'll have to be married in" (737). She is similarly frustrated with the low social status that her dilapidated home affords her, lamenting cosmetic problems such as "no carpet on the floor, an' the paper all dirty, an' droppin' off the walls" (737). It is no surprise, then, that Sarah is receptive to Nanny's playful suggestion that "[they] might have the wedding in the new barn" (738). Indeed, it is precisely this comment that ignites the rebellious spark in her.

While this social status is important to Sarah, it is primarily her concern for her family that motivates her. This domestic devotion is made plain when she explains her actions to Adoniram: "I ain't crazy. There ain't nothin' to be upset over. But we've come here to live, an' we're goin' to live here. [. . .] The house wa'n't fit for us any longer" (743). Similarly, the new barn better equips Sarah to fulfill her role as wife and mother.

Immediately after the move, it looks "almost as homelike as the abandoned house across the yard had ever done" (741), and it allows Sarah to have "brown-bread and baked beans and a custard pie, [. . .] the supper that Adoniram loved on a Saturday night" (742) ready for his return. Even her extraordinarily dense—and likely unpleasantly surprised—husband can't ignore the improvement in his family's situation; instead of demanding an explanation from his wife, he simply asks, "What is it smells like cookin'?" (743).

Thus, we see that Sarah Penn's rebellion, despite the implications that Freeman's title might carry in a contemporary context, is not a microcosmic representation of the author's call for widespread social change. The location may have changed, but the story remains largely the same: Sarah still cooks, cleans, looks after the family, and fulfills the traditional role of the wife—she simply does so in a new barn instead of an old house. The fact that her revolt is not necessarily meant to advance a
radical feminist agenda does not, however, mean that it is not revolutionary in other ways. Sarah's rebellion, in fact, is still a call for change, but it is a call for change at the domestic—not at the regional, national, or global—level.

It may initially seem that Sarah Penn's revolt changes nothing about her home's conjugal hierarchy; after all, upon Adoniram's return, she helps him bathe and prepares dinner for him and her family. But, importantly, she performs these same domestic duties in a very different context than before. Adoniram now "[seems] to lack the power" to take care of himself or the family, and can only "[look] dazedly at his plate" instead of offering the blessing—until, of course, Sarah intervenes, prompting (and implicitly allowing) him to speak: "Ain't you goin' to ask a blessin', father?" (743). Clearly, this represents an important shift in the power structure of the Penn household: instead of being relegated to "[a] powerless status that stems from her position in a patriarchal, frontier society [that] excludes feminine values" (Cutter 279), Sarah has renegotiated her place within that society. Her rebellion does more than simply modify the relationship between the wife and husband, however; it also changes the power dynamics between the father and the son. Young Sammy Penn, whose early contributions to the domestic conversation are only "[grunts] he had learned from his father," (739), finds the courage to stand up to Adoniram—"[stepping] suddenly forward [to stand] in front of Sarah [and speak,] his shrill voice [quavering] out bravely" (743)—only after his mother makes the first revolutionary move to the barn.

Clearly, "The Revolt of 'Mother'" is not a call for a revolution in modern feminist terms. The story does not advocate, either explicitly or implicitly, a total overhaul of society, and it does not disparage the traditional definitions of the roles of wife and mother. Freeman's work, however, does advocate a more subtle rebellion—one that works within the extant social hierarchy to provide the apparently powerless with some degree of power. The revolt that Freeman describes through Sarah Penn is ultimately a call for redefinition rather than for revolution—for manipulating the established social structures instead of destroying them. If Sarah's actions enable her to tear down the "fortress" of this microcosmic domestic patriarchy, it is only because "the right besieging tools were used" (744)—that is, because she works within the framework available to her. Sarah's revolt may not quite be a revolution, but it certainly represents the first step away from the dilapidated house of traditional familial power and toward the new barn of a more balanced domestic hierarchy—even if, at the end of the day, "brown-bread and baked beans" are still on the dinner table.

Works Cited

