



# The Channel

The McGill University  
Department of English Undergraduate Journal  
Volume 10 | 2016-2017

# The Channel

## "Subversion"

The McGill English Department Undergraduate Journal

Volume 10 | 2016-2017

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## Dear Reader,

What is subversive? How can art subvert social, cultural, and historical norms, and what are the effects when it does? This year's edition of *The Channel*, the undergraduate publication for McGill's English department, features six exemplary papers that explore the theme of subversion in literature, cinema, and theatre.

Students in Literature, Cultural Studies, and Drama write dozens of papers all year-round, and *The Channel* is proud to provide an exciting opportunity every year to share with the English Department works by our peers that intrigue, surprise, and delight. How does Séan O'Casey's challenge the voyeurism of sociological studies of the poor in Ireland? How did Valerie Solanas defy and confront Andy Warhol, both in life and in film? Why are there so many Lolitas in popular culture, and what did Nabokov's novel have that these iterations fail to capture? All of these questions and more are explored within the pages of this book.

This edition would not exist without the dedicated team of editors and writers at *The Channel* who worked to bring the tenth volume to life. I am also deeply indebted to DESA's Anne Dion for her constant and ready assistance and to Christina Dovolis for her matchless expertise in all things financial.

Please enjoy!

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If you'd like to contact us, please email [channelundergraduaterewiew@gmail.com](mailto:channelundergraduaterewiew@gmail.com), or visit our website at <http://englishjournal.mcgill.ca> to view previous issues.

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## Breaking Up (with) the Myth of Medusa: Valerie and Viva Cut Up (in) Warhol

Ariel Pickett

"A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. There's no room for her if she's not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter."

—Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*

Women make trouble in Warhol's cinematic world. Or rather, they are troubling. Appearing almost exclusively in the homosexual and homosocial cinematic and extra-cinematic spaces Warhol constructed and co-habitated, women often emerge as corporeal testaments to a female body "free from the regimes of visibility" that would otherwise designate and define them as sex object only (Doyle 86). Yet, this freedom often borders on a complete erasure of female subjectivity in the overwhelming presence of Warhol's homosociality, and does not eliminate the possibility of, or propensity for misogyny. Female presence and desire are still deliberately suppressed or attacked, articulated by Ed Hood when he tells Genevieve Charbon to get her "lascivious" eyes off his hustler in *My Hustler*. So how does one approach a feminist reading of women in Warhol's work? This is the question Jennifer Doyle asks in her essay "I Must Be Boring Someone: Women in Warhol's Films." She approaches an answer, in part, by giving Valerie Solanas' attempted murder of Andy Warhol in 1968 critical feminist attention.

Solanas offers an interesting entryway into feminist consciousness in Warhol's world. She proposes the annihilation of the male sex in her self-published *SCUM Manifesto* (*SCUM* serving as an acronym for "Society for Cutting Up Men"), which has been deemed by reviewers as the radical feminist "rantings of a lesbian lunatic" (New Statesman), and she tries to kill Andy Warhol, and yet she appears in a scene in Warhol's 1967 sexploitation film *I, a Man*. In spite of her macabre radicalism, what is most arresting about Valerie Solanas is her acerbic mastery of language, and her sense of humor. She is hilarious. And she has this in common with one of Warhol's superstars, Viva Hoffman. Both Valerie and Viva are sharp,

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cutting, and intimidating (as Doyle says, "[Viva] is genuinely scary"), due in part to their weaponization of language. And yet both deliberately elicit laughter. Diane Davis, in her essay "Breaking Up [At] Phallocracy: Postfeminism's Chortling Hammer," argues that laughter, in its ability to seize the subject, effectively "releases the 'feminine,' desire-in-language' from its binary bondage." She writes, "to laugh" her/him is to confuse and defy "the very category restrictions that make it possible to distinguish between subject and object" because "the laughter is both laughed and laughing" (136). Laughter "breaks up the Phallocratic Order by breaking up at it" (137). Both Valerie Solanas, through *SCUM Manifesto*, and her appearance in *I, a Man*, and Viva, in her appearance in another one of Warhol's 1967 sexploitation films, *Nude Restaurant*, exhibit a comic propensity for cutting (in, up, and out), and inspire feminist insight into the potentially subversive act of laughter.

Avital Ronell, in her essay "Deviant Payback: The Aims of Valerie Solanas," which serves as the introduction for the 2004 edition of *SCUM Manifesto*, writes that the titular "cutting up" is potent in that it "flourishes polysemically." Not only does it "conjure up castrative glee," she writes, "it also opens up other semantic possibilities of which Valerie was fond: laughter, montage, editing" (12). So this is where we find Valerie, in the penultimate scene in *I, a Man*, in a dark stairwell with actor Tom Baker. She's laughing in the midst of Warhol's montage, flashing a smile in between the flashes of a strobe cut. But I've cut ahead. Let's rewind. Warhol made *I, a Man* as a response to the erotic film *I, a Woman*, which came out the year before. Valerie's scene is the seventh in a series of eight of Baker's attempted seductions and sexual encounters with women. Baker and Solanas ascend a flight of stairs in a New York City apartment building, supposedly on their way to Solanas' apartment, while Solanas wonders out loud what prompted her to bring Baker back with her. "What am I doing with a finko like you?" she asks. The stairwell is shrouded in vertical shadows, like a "German Expressionist set" (Murphy 197), and certainly contributes to an ominous tone, especially in light of the anticipated attempted murder in 1968. The shadows simultaneously, perhaps serendipitously, offer a visual signification of another kind of "cutting up," streaking Solanas' and Baker's figures. "I can't figure it out, you're a fink," she continues. Baker laughs; she's already begun to cut him up. She recalls, in-between his assertions that they should go in her place, that she squeezed his ass in the elevator, that he got her at "a weak moment," because she's a "pushover for a squishy ass." In Doyle's words, she explains herself to herself. Their verbal sparring continues, though Solanas' wit so surpasses Baker's that it's not much of a duel. She decides she's not

longer interested, and hints that her sexual orientation contributes to this. "My roommate's very jealous. She's possessive," she attempts. He doesn't pick up on it. "She's a chick," he says.

Every so often time is sped up or eclipsed with Warhol's in-camera montage trick, allowing cuts to punctuate the scene. Through the strobe cuts, we catch glimpses of the characters. These are moments that themselves could have been cut out. Scrap material. In the midst of one of these strobe cuts, we see Solanas smiling at the camera, "flirtatiously," as Doyle suggests, as though the camera were in on her joke. Doyle sees this moment as significant in that it marks the distance between the "Solanas who shot Warhol and the Solanas who was shot by Warhol," supporting her assertion that "thinking about how a homophobic world might make gay men vulnerable [doesn't mean] we can't also think about how a patriarchal world (in which gay men sometimes participate) might make women crazy" (75). Yet its significance also lies in the intersection of cuts and laughter. After Baker more or less attempts to force himself on Solanas, and she "jokingly accuses him of rape" (Doyle 77), she is forced to explain the reasons for her refusal in language he can understand. "Your instincts tell you to chase chicks, right?" she asks. "Right," he says. She says, "My instincts tell me the same thing." He finally gets it. "Why should my standards be lower than yours?" she quips. He laughs in response. She cuts Baker up. The camera cuts her up. The shadowed lines cut them up. And this scene certainly cuts up the established precedence of heterosexual seduction. Solanas' final rebuttal in this scene is that she wants to go home and "beat [her] meat," an assertion rarely made by women in Warhol, and an assertion that Hélène Cixous, in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," associates with unleashing the flow of creative energy that has been so meticulously suppressed by the patriarchy.

There are a number of parallels between Cixous and Solanas' writing. Avital Ronell, in her introductory essay, draws the comparison between *SCUM Manifesto* and Cixous' essay. She writes, "echoing the laugh of the Medusa, [Solanas] not so much (or only) poses herself as the agent of man's demise" (13). Solanas simultaneously engenders the kind of language to which Cixous could be referring when she writes "The Laugh of the Medusa": Cixous' essay is a call to arms for the development of an *écriture féminine*, or the "feminine in language," that has been repressed by the patriarchal institutions that establish the Law and Language, just as it has denied women autonomy over their bodies. Cixous asserts that women writing through their bodies will ultimately rupture the Order that man has established, and the conventions he has made Law. "Women must

write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reverse-discourse" (886). And she likens this writing to masturbation. Cixous recalls being struck by a woman's description of "a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity," which Cixous describes as "a world of searching, an elaboration of knowledge... a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful" (876). It is through this familiarization with the fortitude of the female body and tongue that a proliferation of new languages, outside of the phallogocentric Language, can be heard. Cixous writes, "A woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor – once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction – will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language" (885). Solanas understood the relation of language and body, too.

As Ronell articulates, Solanas solicited the somatic aspect of Language, even as it simultaneously stifled her. "Valerie Solanas found herself disabled by the very fact of language, by its phallic lures and political usages," yet "at the same time...[she] took pleasure in the injurious effects of language and, with Lacanian precision, understood that words are bodies that can be hurled at the other, they can land in the psyche and explode in the soma" (5). Solanas writes, "The male likes death – it excites him sexually, and, already dead inside, he wants to die" (66). Acerbic "aphorisms" like this one define *SCUM Manifesto*, and have the power to, as Ronell writes, "summon up any number of somatic responses [or] physical collapses" (5). Some may feel pained reading the dry morbidity of such a statement, others may erupt into laughter. Yet Solanas is not alone in her corporeal postulation. Cixous writes, similarly, that "Men say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex. That's because they need femininity to be associated with death; it's the jitters that gives them a hard-on" (885). While Cixous asserts "I-woman am going to blow up the Law: an explosion henceforth possible and ineluctable; let it be done, right now, in language" (887), Solanas "punctuates her transmissions with laughter, breaking up totalities, bursting established social systems with the disruptive laugh that she calls *SCUM Manifesto*" (Ronell 13). Both Cixous and Solanas write with a deliberate determination to assert a feminine presence. Cixous punctuates her assertion that the erogenous "elaboration of knowledge" creates "something beautiful" with the line, "Beauty will no longer be forbidden" (876). Solanas' statement that "the

female function is to explore, discover, invent, solve problems crack jokes, make music – all with love. In other words, create a magic world” (49) mirrors Cixous’. The two statements are semantically similar, though what differentiates them is punctuation. Or rather, its absence. Between the phrases, “solve problems” and “crack jokes,” Solanas polysemically omits punctuation. She has created a crack in formal grammar in the midst of her assertion that part of the female function is to crack jokes. As Ronell writes, Solanas was “through all sort of detours and grammatical aberrations...bent on showing through her writings and actions that the presumed unity of man was a dangerous fiction” (6). Her sometimes intentional “slippages” (Ronell 8) in language crack man-made structures. And her witticisms crack up the reader.

In *I, a Man*, we see Solanas navigate the “corruption of male-marked colonizations of language” (Ronell 8) in a discursive duel with Baker. He acts as the pillar of heterosexual masculinity, while Solanas must act as “sexual pedagogue who leads the ostensibly already liberated Baker through a dialogue on sex and identity toward insight...[which] is, for Baker, into the nature of their difference, (ironically articulated by Solanas as a shared instinct)” (Doyle 80). In other words, lesbian subjectivity still has to define itself in patriarchal terms, because the patriarchy can’t recognize it as a distinct identity. Solanas is forced to draw false equivalences between her sexuality and Baker’s in order to present herself “as [a] subject with a command over the discursive system that sets them at odds with each other.” “I’m like you,” Solanas is forced to say. As Doyle argues, Mulvey’s assertion that female spectatorship must consist of an identification with the masculine negates a space for lesbian desire and identification. “I, [am] a Man,” becomes, however momentarily, the only way in which lesbian desire can articulate itself. “Her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine,” Cixous writes (880-881). Solanas must use another language, comic or cinematic, and “collaborate with the camera,” (Doyle 80) with a wave and smile, to disrupt Baker’s performance of masculine heterosexuality. As Doyle notes, Solanas is significantly not cut off mid-sentence in the film, though that is standard practice in many of Warhol’s anti-denouements. Rather, she decides the end (80). She has asserted some dominance, or harnessed some power, through her quick wit and humor. Baker is left, momentarily defeated, to smoke alone, having conquered nothing.

Viva Hoffman, Warhol superstar often cast for her impregnable force of linguistic propensity, produces a logorrheic stream of chaotic speech in *Nude Restaurant*. The film stars Viva Hoffman and underground film actor Taylor

Mead, and is set in a Greenwich Village restaurant where Viva ostensibly works as a waitress (though this is not made apparent until halfway through the film). Everyone is, unsurprisingly, naked. The scene opens on a medium close-up of Viva, mid-sentence, and mid-story. Taylor Mead is glimpsed occasionally, sitting next to Viva, listening, though distracted and bored. Viva weaves through different narratives, her speech spastic, and her logic cut up by Warhol’s montage. Sometimes we can’t hear her when the sound cuts out, so we’re forced to catch up with her story. “Making trouble again, all you models do is make trouble,” she says, recalling an incident in her modeling days, during which she attempted to sue a hair stylist for “scorching” her hair. Despite her chaotic chatter, disrupted by various Warholian cuts, one is able to follow her stories fairly easily. And I am reminded of Cixous’ interpretation of what women do when they speak publicly. “It’s with her body that she vitally supports the ‘logic’ of her speech,” Cixous writes. “Her speech, even when ‘theoretical’ or political, is never simple or linear or ‘objectified,’ generalized: she draws her story into history” (881). Here, Viva is naked, and the stories she tells are all based on her story, her history. Yet her bare body remains visually intact, uncut by Warhol’s camera tricks, and functions as a physical cohesion that grounds her chaotic speech, which embellishes his-story with hers. “You know the scorched earth policy in Vietnam? Well, that was my hair – scorched earth policy,” she says, drawing the tribulations of her modeling days into the narrative of the Vietnam War. Of course, she is saying this in jest, and, like those who chuckle off-screen, I find the comparison very funny.

Viva cuts to another story, an entertaining account of a one-legged millionaire from Switzerland, and “Taylor breaks into a huge grin, and his whole body reacts, as if he has heard this story before” (Murphy 211). In response to his noticeable physical response, “Viva becomes very animated in recounting the story...and, in the process, [allows] her naked breasts to be seen...[and] bears them to the camera as she gesticulates.” Laughter can be heard from off screen as she speaks. Viva’s verbal vivacity persists until she eventually notices Taylor losing interest. “Getting bored?” she asks. He responds light-heartedly, grinning, “I like to listen to parts of conversations...Somebody mumbling...I think you get almost as much.” He laughs at his own joke. She gets angry. His attention has shifted away from her loquacity, towards himself and his own humor. Viva looks at the camera. “Can we turn it off for a minute?” And Warhol’s camera acquiesces. This concession is rare for Warhol’s camera, which has continued rolling in spite of desperate outcries on more than one occasion. She has, in this moment, discursive power over the camera, and when it cuts to her a few moments later,

she has regained her confidence and complacency. She talks about various kinds of sexual abuse she's pursued and experienced, casually articulating her own philosophy, which is that "the heterosexual bag is just simply sadomasochism." "Forget it," she says, "I'd rather be a lesbian." Laughter is heard off-screen. Viva is vindicated.

Cixous writes, "Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn't thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble" (876). Yet Valerie and Viva forcibly resist the notion of shame. Certainly both cause trouble, in their stories or through their writing. Neither Valerie nor Viva are afraid to pursue this "funny desire," whether it's sexual, creative, comic, cutting, or fatal. Both have the impetus to write, or to speak, ebulliently and aggressively, and in this way they are resisting a form of death, resisting the oppression, exploitation, erasure and subjugation that would otherwise define their presence in Warhol's world, or the world at large. Their persistent insistence functions as a flight from passivity, or complicity, and proves nearly fatal itself. "Everywhere I go, I'm getting beaten up by men. I'd like to give a little pain," Viva says. And women can wield apparatuses when their jokes aren't taken seriously. Viva turns the camera off, and Solanas grabs a gun. Their violent drives interrupt the homocentric economy. "Her libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think," Cixous writes (882). Viva's dominating will can command the camera and capture the spectator's attention, and Valerie's dominating wit can disrupt the "heterosexual bag," which crumbles when female sexual drive turns exclusively towards women, or towards the self. "I want to go home, I want to beat my meat," she says. Both women produce radical effects with "co(s)mic" force, as Diane Davis would say.

In response to Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa," and through a critical examination of the case of Lorena Bobbitt, Davis explores the disruptive potential of what she calls the "kairotic" nature of laughter. Lorena Bobbitt, famous for cutting off her abusive husband's penis, and then throwing it out the window of her car, has become synonymous with castration anxiety. Yet Davis considers hers a celebratory act, "not because she cuts it off, not because she keeps it – but because she pitches it." It is by throwing the severed member out the window that Lorena "dis/covers a way out of the binary system all together, and so a way out of phallogocentrism" (127). Davis argues that Lorena, in "pitching" the phallus, is moved by an "illogical, irrepressible force of 'kairos,'" (127) by which she means

a "Gorgian... interpretation of the term as a moment of illogical and controllable 'inspiration':... a moment in which the subject is seized/possessed by a force linked to physis rather than nomos" (137). Lorena, fleeing the scene of castration in her car, is "possessed by a kairotic yield of reason," while still firmly grasping "that mighty Erection of Reason itself." The contradiction, Davis writes, "is too much, and Lorena finds herself convulsed by a spontaneous generation of laughter" (129). This scene of cutting up and casting out establishes the titular aim of Davis's essay: to break up (at) Phallogocentrism. Davis writes about Cixous's *écriture féminine*, or "bisexual writing" ("which is not an oppositional bisexuality but a bisexuality that would be otherwise, that would make a space for the Other [Davis 133]), as a "form of discursive laughter that keeps things shaken up, refuses to let thing settle and be made into ideology" (179). This laughter serves as a disruption to the "Phallogocentric Order." It "is co(s)mic and demands a purely bodily response that momentarily dispenses with meaning and memory." And this laughter moves you. If the subject is "laughed by this kairotic force of laughter," it is cast "into a dangerous space, unshielded by prefixed boundaries/binaries, by any kind of social norms (nomos)" (136).

When Valerie walks into Warhol's studio on June 3rd, 1968, she has, however momentarily, appropriated the phallus in order to wound Warhol. She doesn't toss Reason out the window, she opts to "keep it," as Davis would say. She wants to "give a little pain," too. So she welds the gun, whilst brandishing a sanitary napkin, as if to alleviate the heavy masculine signification and identification she has taken on in an attempt to cut up another man she sees as having "too much control over [her] life" (Doyle 73). Or perhaps she brings the "feminine hygiene product" as a sarcastic gesture, offering a means of absorbing the blood that would inevitably come out of Warhol's wound, in an attempt to further feminize he who is now penetrated and bleeding. It is certainly dark to find a stain of humor in this, of course, traumatic scene. But then again, *SCUM Manifesto* has moments of hilarity too. And there is something to this laughter being ob-scene, felt off-screen by the reader or the viewer. What is really obscene is the exposure, and subsequent expansion, of the subjects who (are) cut, on screen or off. "Laughs exude from all our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end," Cixous writes (878). This is perhaps a manifestation of a *corps féminine*, which renders external what has been tightly bound internally for all of his-story. Valerie usurps Warhol's role. She shoots him, and his insides come out. And she leaves with him the means with which women have historically cleaned themselves up,

or made themselves "sanitary." Because otherwise the disintegration that defines the laugh of the Medusa, whose horror lies in her ability to embody a "blurring of all categories," and represent "less a terror of castration, of lack or difference, than a terror of a *lack of difference*" (Foster 183), is too dirty. The disintegration that Solanas' almost fatal act incurs, that of masculine and feminine, of subject and object, of filmmaker and muse—who who shoots whom?—would be too messy. The hectic chaos in Viva's comic, yet logorrheic, speech is too filthy. The "excremental site to which Solanas relentlessly points and from which she speaks" is inevitably the gutter, covered in scum. Davis knows that "this is a slippery place to be, where difference [...] cannot be reduced to Sameness, where language can't be cleaned up and not only speaks us but speaks us wildly, in a fit of laughter" (136-137). To laugh with these women is not fatal. One need only break up (with) the myth of Medusa.

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## Cynicism and Sentimentalism in the Cave of Montesinos

By Michael Britt

Oscar Mandel begins his 1958 essay, "The Function of the Norm in Don Quixote," by summarizing the conflicting historical attitudes of readers toward Cervantes' ingenious gentleman<sup>1</sup>:

"From the first days in the eighteenth century when Don Quixote ceased to be regarded as a mere satire against romances of chivalry, students of the novel have tended to join one of two critical schools, depending on their interpretation of the role played by the knight. A 'soft' school regards Don Quixote as the hero as well as the protagonist of the novel [...] Hardheaded readers who distrust Schwärmerei have steadily opposed all these interpretations. Don Quixote remains for them, in spite of his nobility, the butt of the satire." (Mandel 154)

From this conflict—between a sentimental reading on the one hand and a cynical one on the other—emerges a central problem of Cervantes' magnum opus: Don Quixote is simultaneously adored and disdained by the reader, the characters around him, and even the narrator himself. As the novel progresses, each party's perception of Don Quixote evolves. In Part One, the narrator's farcical treatment of the ingenious gentleman makes it difficult for the reader and the other characters of the novel to view him as anything but a mad fool deserving of the comical misfortunes that befall him. In Part Two, however, attitudes change drastically. The narrator's treatment of Don Quixote moves from farcical to abusive, and the characters who take advantage of him become more and more malicious in their assaults and deceptions. The reader cannot help but pity Don Quixote and fear that he may lose faith in his fantastical narrative. Finally, as he lays dying at the end of the novel, all three parties unite in mourning his disillusionment. One moment in particular, the episode of the Cave of Montesinos, serves as the major narrative and symbolic turning point

<sup>1</sup>The tongue-in-cheek title Cervantes' narrator uses to refer to Don Quixote.

of the novel. In the episode of the cave, Don Quixote's faith in chivalric fantasy suddenly becomes 'real,' leaving the reader alienated from the narrator and the characters who abuse him and conflicted about his or her prior participation in that abuse.

Before I move to the Montesinos episode, it is necessary to give a fuller account of the evolving relatability of Cervantes' titular character. As John J. Allen notes, "the range of reader attitudes toward Don Quixote seems to include derisive laughter, identification, pity, and admiration" (5). Reactions to the novel run the gamut, which would seem to complicate Mandel's binary understanding of readerly attitudes. Indeed, it seems unlikely that any one reader finishes Don Quixote solidly "for" or "against" the knight. Rather, Cervantes subtly manipulates his readers' identification with Don Quixote throughout the novel, at first tempting us to join him and the other characters in derisive laughter at his egocentric delusions and physical blunders, only to later make us realize our own brutality. As the abuse becomes more pernicious and Don Quixote becomes more relatable, it becomes difficult to laugh without a twinge of guilt. By the episode of the Cave of Montesinos, Don Quixote has been rendered so sympathetic that it is impossible to discern whether or not he is telling the truth about his dreamlike experience. Finally, as Don Quixote renounces his fantasy on his deathbed, even the narrator, who had formerly sat in Mandel's "hardheaded" camp, cannot help but reclaim the ingenious gentleman as a creation of his own.

For simplicity's sake, let us imagine that these politics of empathy play out among four entities: the reader, the narrator, Don Quixote, and the other characters such as Sancho Panza<sup>2</sup>. At any point in the novel, the reader might identify most with the narrator, Don Quixote, or Sancho Panza and the other characters against whom the protagonist is set. Until the end of the novel, to identify with the narrator is to place oneself in what Mandel calls the "hardheaded" school of thought; it is to consider Don Quixote, "in spite of his nobility, the butt of the satire." On the other hand, to identify with Don Quixote—to consider him "the hero as well as the protagonist of the novel" is to side with the "soft" school (Mandel 154). The narrator of Don Quixote is a complex topic in and of itself, deserving of a longer treatment than this analysis can offer, but suffice to say the he is a composite

<sup>2</sup>Of course, this is an oversimplification and there are some extra levels of stratification. For instance, we might consider Sancho Panza separate from the horde of tertiary characters who joke at Don Quixote's expense. We might even break that up further to consider tertiary characters from different points as different entities. These extra levels are unnecessary for this analysis, however, so I've chosen to keep to the four main entities.

of several fictional chroniclers: Cide Hamete Benengeli, the unnamed Moorish translator, and a fictional version of Cervantes himself. The identity of the actual speaking narrator is this fictional Cervantes. It is him who, at the beginning of the novel, presents Don Quixote as an example of the dangerous absurdity of the chivalric romance, yet at the end of the novel claims that "the two of us alone are one" (939). All the characters of the novel, apart from Don Quixote himself, make up another piece of the politics of empathy. Their attitudes, like those of the reader, range from derisive laughter to admiration.

It is not the slapstick comedy or lighthearted wordplay which make Part One a more comedic experience than its sequel—the second part is full of physical gaffes and puns from Sancho Panza—but rather the shocking egotism of Don Quixote's self-delusion. Particularly through the first ten chapters, our knight is pretentious, high-minded, and totally oblivious to the world around him. In his eyes an old nag becomes the impressive Rocinante, and a regular farm girl becomes the illustrious Lady Dulcinea of Toboso. Indeed, the outrageous extent of his delusion alone elicits laughter. When he walks into the inn in Chapter III, he sees a castle. The prostitutes become maidens, the innkeeper a virtuous lord who might dub him a knight. The muleteers become malicious tricksters against whom he must defend his castle and his possessions, when really he is only interrupting their work. What is most alienating about the Don Quixote of Part One, however, is his total confidence, his undying faith in the chivalric fantasy that he constructs. Why do we laugh derisively when the innkeeper knights him in a mock ceremony? Why do we cheer when he is plucked up and tossed away by the windmill he calls a giant? Because his egotistical assurance in his own worldview is annoying. We want to see him taken down a peg, and Cervantes grants our wish with a generous helping of beatings and blunders.

How, then, does the reader move from an "attitude of derision, delighting in one deflation after another, to increased respect, sympathy, even admiration, in the progress of Part II" (Allen 83)? In *Don Quixote: Hero or Fool?*, Allen argues that a potent combination of subtle manipulations on the part of Cervantes lead the reader to identify with the ingenious gentleman and thus feel guilty about having participated in his abuse. These manipulations are, according to Allen, "Don Quixote's increasing cognizance of reality, his loss of control over events, and the increase in deception practiced upon him, the element of self-doubt, and the shift from reliance upon physical prowess to reliance upon strength of spirit" (83). Suddenly, at the beginning of Part Two, the characters around Don

Quixote become more pernicious in their deceptions. The duke and duchess are perhaps the best example of this, though all of the incidental characters along the way are rendered more threatening in the second part. Perhaps this is because, at the same time, Don Quixote both begins to lose control over events and, subsequently, begins to doubt himself. As I have noted, his total confidence in Part One is a major contributing factor in our alienation from him, and thus in our ability to ridicule him. In this sense, Don Quixote's progressive loss of confidence over the course of Part Two is the linchpin in our identification with him: we want to witness his fall from the top of his castle of fantasies, yet we do not want him to fall so hard that he loses his faith. It is a delicate balance that puts the reader in an uncomfortable position. We want to remain alienated from him in order to laugh, yet, when things start to turn rough, we cannot deny our intense identification with and sympathy for him. The narrator thus wields a huge amount of power: his ability to make Don Quixote sympathetic keeps the reader on his or her toes, often catching themselves suddenly, guiltily, laughing at a man whom they pity and even admire.

At the center of this conflict of identification is the episode of the Cave of Montesinos, in which Sancho Panza and another man lower Don Quixote into the cavern and pull him back up an hour later, only to learn that, from the knight's perspective, three whole days and nights had passed. The story, which Don Quixote tells to Sancho, goes like this: when he got down into the cavern he "was overcome by a profound sleep," and rested in a crevice for a while (605). When he awoke, he concluded by the accuracy of his sense that he could not be in a dream. Then, suddenly, the figure of an old man appeared in the "two large doors" of the crystal palace at the center of the cave. Hailing him, the ancient Montesinos (the wizard who enchanted the cave and appeared before Don Quixote in the guise of an old man) took Don Quixote into the palace to meet the zombie-like Durandarte, named after the sword of Roland, and one of the most legendary knights of chivalric romance. The three conversed, and the ancient men told Don Quixote the tale of Durandarte's death: how he promised his lady Belerma to have Montesinos cut out his heart at the hour of his death and bring it to her. Then Belerma appeared, and Montesinos told Don Quixote of how Merlin had enchanted the cave so that its denizens could not age, and how they have lived there, just as they are, for centuries.

The episode is, Allen notes, the only one in the novel in which the narrator remains totally in the dark. Of course, there are other moments where the

narrator's omniscience becomes limited—mostly in instances where the fictional manuscripts of Cide Hamete lacked information, or the translations were faulty. In the case of the cave, however, the narrator is unable to reveal, for the entirety of the novel, what really happened. All of the information about the Don Quixote's dive into the cave is given in dialogue. Sancho tells Don Quixote that he was only down there for an hour; Don Quixote tells Sancho that it was three days. There is no historical account from Cide Hamete or Cervantes to confirm either way. Thus, part way through Part Two, just as Don Quixote is beginning to become a truly sympathetic character, the reader is suddenly confronted with a conflict that the narrator cannot resolve: do we believe Don Quixote's fantastical account of his three days in the crystal Cave of Montesinos, or do we side with Sancho in thinking Don Quixote a mad old fool?

The journey into the cave is a journey into the underworld, into "a mystical realm in the unconscious mind of Don Quixote where he can come in contact with the souls of his fallen brethren and the chivalric heroes from an age regrettably now past" (Abraham 51). In this sense, the cave makes literal the central thematic clash of the novel: the clash between, and ultimate merging of, subjective and objective reality. It is Don Quixote's fantasy come 'true,' in the sense that it is, for once, outside of the control of the narrator. We might imagine, like Sancho, that Don Quixote has yet again made the whole thing up, yet this time we have no voice of narratorial authority to debunk his ostensibly faulty idealism. Again, the question is not "what is true," for we cannot know, but rather, "with whom does the reader identify?" How can the reader, who was so ready to laugh at every blunder in Part One, now have the potential to actually believe Don Quixote's most outlandish story?

John J. Allen proposes that, above all of Cervantes' other manipulations—Don Quixote's progressive recognition of reality, his increasingly pernicious abusers, and his loss of confidence—it is the inclusion of Part One of the novel in the diegesis of Part Two that allows the reader to register Don Quixote, by the episode of the cave, as the 'real' Don Quixote. Throughout Part Two, the characters encounter the story of Part One. Indeed, people all throughout La Mancha, having read the narrator's novel, recognize the now-famous Don Quixote and his amusing squire Sancho Panza. The duke and the duchess, for instance, only know that the two are fools because they have read the farcical account of them published ten years before the beginning of Part Two. With the inclusion of Part One as a plot device in Part Two, Cervantes allows the reader a higher "level

of fiction." That is, we see Don Quixote see himself misrepresented (at least in his mind), as a fool. This allows "the reader and the characters, knowing that Don Quixote is the subject of an obviously fictitious book, [to] accept his 'flesh and blood' presence on their 'level of reality'" (El Saffar 270). As we enter the same "level of reality," Don Quixote becomes real to us, and we are sucked into the insanity of his world—to such an extent that we might just believe that his tale of the Cave of Montesinos is true.

The cave, however, is not simply a convenient and random plot point over which the reader begins to identify with Don Quixote, but a complex set of sexual and religious symbolism with its own, independent meaning. Don Quixote tells Sancho Panza and the cousin of Basilio his story in chapter XXIII of Part Two, the chapter directly following the actual event of his entrance and exit from the cave. Yet, the account of the descent in chapter XXII lacks any indication of the mystical events which Don Quixote speaks of: the entire descent into and return from the underworld takes place in the span of a page. Indeed, the physical logistics of lowering Don Quixote seem inconsequential next to the fantastical story he tells us in the next chapter. From those minor physical details, however, emerge a wealth of metaphorical meaning.

The lowering of Don Quixote on the rope invokes two important images: that of baptism and that of penetration. With the quick, page-long narration, it's almost as if Sancho and the cousin dip Don Quixote into the cave, pulling him up quickly afterwards. Like a priest with his palm on the back of the head, Sancho and the cousin purify Don Quixote by submerging him in the waters of his subconscious. Here, the subterranean and the submarine—both of which are classic metaphors for what lies hidden in the mind, for what would come to be known as the subconscious and the dream work by Freud's time—merge. The journey into the underworld, classically a journey into Hell in the Hero Narrative, is here a journey into a heavenly dreamworld. This dreamworld is pure, safe from the cynical clutches of a narrator who would seek to destroy its magic with derisive reason.

In its purity, the descent and return also invoke imagery of the womb. Cervantes even includes some crass innuendos by surrounding the opening (the vaginal orifice, if the womb metaphor holds) with "brambles and box thorn," forcing Don Quixote to hack his way through in order to penetrate the cavern. Often, the sword is a phallic metaphor, and hacking is only second to stabbing in the realm of obvious sexual innuendos. Yet, however crass the innuendos might

be, their implication is holy: in returning to the womb and then emerging again, Don Quixote undergoes an immaculate conception. What's more, the fact that Don Quixote believes himself to have been in the cave for three days and three nights is an obvious nod to Christ himself. In this way, his descent and return is not only an immaculate conception but also an actual death and rebirth. In the imagery of baptism, immaculate conception, death, and rebirth, Don Quixote undergoes a dual spiritual and physical rebirth.

Thus, as both a pivotal moment in the conflict of identification with the reader and a comprehensive metaphor of rebirth, the Cave of Montesinos episode constitutes a critical shift in the novel. It is, for all intents and purposes, the major narrative and symbolic turning point in the novel's evolving conflict of identification. The temporary escape from narratorial omniscience allows the reader's identification with Don Quixote, which, prior to the episode, had been growing anyway, to make a full leap into the "level of reality" in which Don Quixote lives. Because the Don Quixote of Part Two juxtaposes himself against the account of himself in that "obviously fictitious book," the reader comes to "accept his 'flesh and blood' presence on their 'level of reality'" (El Saffar 270). The cave episode is also a rebirth for Don Quixote himself, who, prior to it, had begun, ever so slowly, to lose faith. Indeed, his conviction of the veracity of his experience carries him all the way to the end of the novel, through all the obstacles of cynicism which only intensify in the latter half of Part Two.

Beyond Don Quixote's spiritual and physical rebirth, the episode of the Cave of Montesinos also indicates a third rebirth: a rebirth in the eyes of the reader, who, suddenly, identifies with or even admires the ingenious gentleman's faith. With this in place, Cervantes has prepared us for the end of the novel, in which all parties—the reader, the narrator, and the other characters—unite in mourning the loss of Don Quixote's faith in fantasy. In the final pages, after his defeat to Sanson Carrasco disguised as the Knight of the White Moon, Don Quixote throws off his assumed title and declares himself, yet again, to be "Alonso Quixano, once called the Good because of my virtuous life" (935). This is the death of Don Quixote, figuratively and literally. In shedding the persona of Don Quixote, the man underneath, Alonso Quixano, dies too. Why? Because the man had become his persona: Alonso Quixano no longer exists by the end of the novel; there is only Don Quixote, and thus to wilfully destroy Don Quixote is to wilfully die. For all the abuse and derisive laughter at Don Quixote's expense, for all Cervantes' claims that the objective of Don Quixote is to decry the chivalric romance, the final scene

celebrates that very chivalric ideal that one can become an idea, that the objective world can be warded off and a person can live happily in a dreamworld of his or her own creation. In the end, even the coldhearted narrator cannot help but reclaim Don Quixote, writing: "For me alone was Don Quixote born, and I for him; he knew how to act, and I to write; the two of us alone are one" (939). In the end, the narrator is just like Don Quixote, living through a persona, fortifying himself against the cynicism of the "real" world by creating a glorious alter-ego.

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## Saturday White Fever: The Racial and Sexual Politics of Whitewashing Disco

By Luke Sarabia

In John Badham's 1977 film *Saturday Night Fever*, a working class 19-year-old Brooklynite by the name of Tony Manero is the king of the dance floor. Tony spends much of his week working full-time at a paint store and dealing with his troubled family. However, each Saturday night, he and his friends regularly attend 2001 Odyssey, a Brooklyn discotheque where they drink, dance, and try to sleep with other clubgoers. The film was a box office smash, and has been regarded in popular memory as the moment when disco music and culture broke into the mainstream, leading to its widespread cultural dominance in the late 1970s. Before John Travolta's hips endeared it to the masses, however, disco existed on its own terms as a subculture primarily populated by black and Latino gay men in Philadelphia and New York City beginning in the early 1970s. It was founded upon a need for refuge from persecution by dominant hetero-patriarchal powers as well as an opposition to mainstream white musical culture. *Saturday Night Fever* ignores this aspect of disco's history and presents it as heterosexual, white, and hypermasculine. It therefore loses much of its original subversive power. Cindy Patton's "Embodying Subaltern Memory: Kinesthesia & the Problematics of Genre & Race" presents a methodology for understanding how even as a mainstream text appropriates a subcultural practice out of its original context, some of the alternative or subversive values of the practice can still be articulated to mainstream audiences. *Saturday Night Fever*, understood through this lens, can be seen to appropriate disco music, dancing, and culture from the underground, yet it does so in a way that presents the alternative values of disco, specifically its viability as a means of escape from aspects of dominant society and a solution to the problems of the white working class. Thus, some of disco culture's original values are still expressed to the mainstream.

Before exploring how *Saturday Night Fever* both appropriates disco and presents some of its values to the mainstream, Patton's methodological framework in "Embodying Subaltern Memory" must be explained. Patton examines how Madonna's "Vogue" music video co-opts a dance called voguing from its original

context of drag queen balls in minority communities within New York City, yet still manages to articulate some of its original subversiveness to mainstream audiences. Vogueing is a dance move that imitates the poses of fashion magazine models. The dance mocks bourgeois white femininity and the assumptions of naturalness behind this gender role, and behind race and gender roles in general. However, Patton argues that Madonna's video, in taking vogueing out of its original text, loses much of this criticism. The video's black and white lighting, for example, blurs the racial identity of the background dancers, and thus strips away the racial dimension of vogueing's original criticism (Patton 96). The appearance of vogueing subtly references gay culture without relating its actual history or the history of the dance. This allows viewers to "learn without remembering" (Patton 94), meaning to appreciate the aesthetic elements of gay culture while depoliticizing it. Patton argues that despite this, there is still a muted critique of race and gender that reaches the mainstream (96). The physical movement of vogueing, originally a subversive practice, remains intact in the video. Even if its history is distorted by this process of appropriation, vogueing is brought to the forefront of mainstream culture, and those who could have interpreted it for its original meaning watched as the innately critical practice spread as a chic dance form (Patton, 98). Thus, it can be understood how even as Madonna co-opted a subcultural practice that doesn't belong to her, she brought at least some of its original subversiveness to a mainstream audience.

The subculture of disco, as it evolved in the early 1970's, served both as a point of unity for gay blacks and Latinos through opposition to dominant white culture and as a refuge from the oppression faced in their public lives. Discotheques, dancing, and fashion, as seen in *Saturday Night Fever*, had their roots in private or "underground" loft parties, notably in New York and Philadelphia. These underground parties became popular in the gay community as their privacy and exclusivity protected their patrons from public harassment and legal persecution. Thus, discotheques became associated with a sense of sexual freedom and freedom of identity from widespread homophobic and hetero-patriarchal oppression. As Richard Dyer writes in "In Defense of Disco," "everyday banality, work, domesticity, ordinary sexism and racism, are rooted in the structures of class and gender of this society, the flight from that banality can be seen as ... a flight from capitalism and patriarchy themselves as lived experiences" (23). The liberation and acceptance of various sexualities and identities became one of disco culture's most significant values as it grew in popularity, with the discotheque considered a haven from

commonplace or violent oppression.

Although the musicians were not necessarily gay, there were several reasons why disco music became the centre of this mostly gay subculture. Disco stood in a number of ways in opposition to rock, music's biggest genre at the time. The music and culture of disco had an element of stylistic excess that directly opposed certain conservative aspects of rock culture. For instance, men's disco fashion, when it didn't involve drag, often meant expensive and colourful shirts and leisure suits with bell-bottom pants, and women's often meant flowing sheer dresses or tight bodysuits. This flamboyant sense of style rejected the conservatism and machismo of rock and punk style, embodied by leather jackets, jeans, and t-shirts. Musically, disco makes much more extensive use of rhythm and opts for a more open and repetitive musical form than rock. Dyer argues that rock focuses on raw power and melody over rhythm, and thus its sense of eroticism comes from its sonic evocations of grinding and thrusting, which caters to a phallic sexuality, whereas disco's aforementioned rhythmic focus and formal openness "restores eroticism to the whole of the body, and for both sexes, not just confining it to the penis" (22). Thus, disco's music was appealing both because it could easily be translated to a much more sexually diverse and sexually liberated audience, and because it opposed the dominance of the hetero-patriarchal sexual status quo exhibited by rock. While rock was highly stylistically indebted to black artists, it was dominated by and certainly much more profitable for whites. As disco became well-known in minority communities, it was viewed as a repositioning of black music for black audiences. By creating a culture that both existed independently from the white hetero-patriarchal dominated mainstream and stood in opposition to it stylistically, disco showed microcosmically that there was potential for a world beyond racial and sexual discrimination while also actively criticizing the forces that held such a world at bay.

*Saturday Night Fever's* producers largely fail to convey the alternative and subversive aspects of disco culture in their appropriation of it to the mainstream by creating a film that is white-dominated, heterosexual, and hypermasculine. The film's main plot revolves around Tony's preparation for an upcoming dance competition at 2001 Odyssey. However, an equal amount of focus is placed on his family, work, and social life in Brooklyn. Both spheres of action almost exclusively include white characters: for instance, the scenes at 2001 Odyssey feature shots of large, almost entirely white crowds dancing, save for a token black couple or two. Not a single black character has a speaking line in the film, and the only Hispanic

characters who speak are unnamed and extremely peripheral. All of Tony's friends are white, both of his potential love interests are white, and the DJs at the disco are white. Despite the fact that the vast majority of disco music at the time was produced by black artists, even the artists on the soundtrack are largely white. The filmmakers commissioned the Bee Gees, an Australian-English group that had existed for years as a non-disco act, to write songs for the film which are played during most of its key scenes.

In addition to the film's visible exclusion of minorities, several characters are actively racist, homophobic, and sexist. Tony and his friends refer to Hispanics and blacks several times as "spicks" and "niggers". In one scene, Tony's friend Joey refers to David Bowie as a "faggot" before Double J corrects him, saying, "He's a half-faggot man", meaning that he is bisexual. There are also several blatantly misogynistic moments in the film that go unquestioned. On several occasions, Tony asks Annette whether she considers herself "a nice girl or a cunt"; in other words, whether or not she'll have sex with him. The film makes cursory attempts to address racial issues. Before the film's climactic dance battle, there is a fruitless back-and-forth exchange of violence between a Latino gang and Tony and his friends, which puts one of Tony's gang in the hospital. That night, a Puerto Rican couple clearly out-dances Tony and his partner, yet they still only win second place. Tony realizes this is a result of the club's racial bias, and gives the Puerto Ricans the prize money before storming out in a vague rant about his newfound frustration with racism and racial violence. Contemporary white audiences may have viewed this as a significant acknowledgement of the urban racial tensions of the era. However, these minor teaching points are eclipsed by the film's appropriation without credit of a culture created by and for gay people of colour, as well as by its explicit racism, homophobia, and sexism. The film's co-optation of disco culture to the mainstream thus mostly robs it of its subversive criticism of dominant white hetero-patriarchal culture. *Saturday Night Fever* allows viewers to enjoy the aesthetics of disco only after it is removed from its original context and made politically meaningless.

Despite the numerous ways in which *Saturday Night Fever* robs disco culture of its subversiveness, it also manages to present at least some of its alternative value as a means of escape from aspects of dominant society to the mainstream. In the same way that disco was initially conceived as a point of refuge for gay people of colour, *Saturday Night Fever* presents disco as a point of refuge for white working-class males. Much of the film focuses on the way that dancing at clubs serves as

an escape from Tony's otherwise frustrating working-class experience. Tony earns low wages at a paint store and yearns to do something more meaningful with his life. He constantly clashes with his parents, with whom he lives, over employment and over the family's devout Catholicism. Tony's room features posters of Rocky Balboa and Al Pacino, two working-class American heroes who were able to escape their blue collar lifestyles and achieve personal success. The film's main theme, "Stayin' Alive" by the Bee Gees, repeats the lyrics "I'm going nowhere/somebody help me," reminding us of Tony's desperation with his tedious lifestyle (Gibb). Despite whatever difficulties Tony faces during the week, his exceptional talent as a dancer brings him a kind of celebrity status at the discotheque every weekend. Whereas his family constantly fails to appreciate him at home, he is showered with praise at the disco, where girls beg him for dances and sex. For instance, in one scene, a girl whom Tony doesn't know asks if she can wipe the sweat from his forehead. In the same way that disco originally acted as an escape from the hetero-patriarchy for gay people of colour, *Saturday Night Fever* presents disco as an escape from the socio-economic frustrations of the working class. Tony initially has trouble romantically pursuing Stephanie, his second dance partner, as she feels his working class background is below her. However, when disco music plays, class identities are forgotten; they become partners, and eventually kiss for the first time while competing together. Although the film's overt whiteness as well as its explicit sexism, racism, and homophobia present a version of disco culture devoid of its original subversive criticism of mainstream white culture, disco is still suggested as a meaningful escape from oppression, though the source of oppression has changed. Therefore, it can be understood how *Saturday Night Fever's* co-optation of disco culture still presents some of disco's alternative values to the mainstream in a muted form, in the same way Patton argues Madonna's "Vogue" does with voguing. However, the film's aforementioned bigotry would alienate working class women, people of colour, and homosexuals from this message. As a result, it only manages to present disco's alternative values to the white, male, working-class members of its audience, significantly muting disco's original cultural significance.

Cindy Patton argues in "Embodying Subaltern Memory" that even as a subcultural practice is appropriated by the mainstream, its subversive or alternative values are still translated to its new audience in a diminished form. Disco was initially defined both by its opposition to hetero-patriarchal systems of power and culture, and as a means of refuge from such systems. *Saturday Night*

*Fever*, in its appropriation of disco culture, largely loses its alternative meaning by recreating disco as white, heterosexual, and masculine, however much this presentation of disco makes for an aesthetically attractive film. However, it still manages to present disco as a place of refuge, as it was originally. It merely changes those offered this refuge from gay people of colour to white, working-class men, a category kept narrow by the film's several explicit expressions of bigotry. The film's juxtaposition of tedious working-class life with the excitement of discotheques raises issues of class consciousness and suggests disco as an escape from such difficulties. However, just as Patton suggests, disco's power as an alternative movement is significantly muted by the limitations of the mainstream. *Saturday Night Fever* effectively appropriates disco in a fashion that caters only to white working-class men, and thus presents disco's original subversiveness in a form palatable only to this select group.

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## Losing Lolita: *Lolita* in Popular Culture

By Emily Arndt, Laurissa Cebryk, Hattie Coleman,  
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From Kubrik's 1962 film adaptation of the novel, to the lyrics of Lana Del Rey's "Off to the Races," popular culture has reproduced Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* in a variety of different forms. In mass media, the titular *Lolita* has typically been represented precociously, placed in erotic environments and often alongside sexually suggestive objects. Although the novel embraces the taboo topic of pedophilia, mass media has subtly normalized the hypersexual image of *Lolita*. In doing so, popular culture has ignored Nabokov's artistry of writing a book that, because it is purely from the perspective of a pedophile, plays with the reader's emotions and is a "first-rate work of fiction [in which] the real clash is not between the characters but between the author and the world" (*Speak, Memory* 214). Nabokov's linguistic puzzle within *Lolita* has subsequently been lost in translation. In popular culture, *Lolita* has prompted a hypersexualization of girlhood with the construction of a voyeuristic "imaginative pedophilia,"<sup>1</sup> which emphasizes *Lolita*'s sexuality rather than appreciating the novel's aesthetic bliss, revealing that mass media has all the characteristics of Nabokov's definition of a "bad reader."<sup>2</sup>

The 1962 film poster for Kubrik's movie adaptation of Nabokov's *Lolita* unveiled the very first image ever seen of *Lolita*, one that was far removed from the innocent twelve-year-old victim in the novel; instead, she was now infamously depicted as a sex object adorned with the suggestive lollipop and heart-shaped sunglasses that have "become a 'loose trademark' that signify a young, sexually available girl" (Bertram 17). Once Kubrick had bought the rights to *Lolita*, he asked Nabokov to write the screenplay, but his attempt was so ambitious that it allegedly would have required a seven-hour film (Nastasi). Therefore, although Nabokov's input had been requested, Kubrick had the final say, and it was his visual

<sup>1</sup>This "imaginative pedophilia" is the image of *Lolita* that is propagated in popular culture, an image that misses Nabokov's point concerning "artistry."

<sup>2</sup>"For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" (*Lolita* 314-5).

interpretation that the world first witnessed. Despite Nabokov's involvement in the creation of the extra-textual version of his novel, he had always remained adamantly opposed "to any kind of representation of the little girl" (Arons). As Ira Wells notes, from the moment the world first glimpsed that movie poster, "the merely textual *Lolita* ha[d] been lost to us forever" (Wells).

This new image of *Lolita*, as first displayed on movie posters, was accompanied by the contentious question: "how did they ever make a film of *Lolita*?" (Kubrik). With reference to the controversy surrounding the casting and ultimate portrayal of *Lolita*, producer James Harris stated that "we knew we must make her a sex object – she couldn't be childlike. If we [make] her a sex object ... It's gonna work" (Nastasi). This change from the girl with "long-toed, monkey-ish feet" (*Lolita* 51) and "thin, knobby wrist[s]" (58) to Kubrik's presentation of *Lolita* as a sexualized adolescent—Sue Lyon was fourteen at the time, playing a *Lolita* who was in her mid-teens instead of being twelve—was distracted by the fact that society could not handle a pedophilic relationship on screen. Instead, the age discrepancy within this relationship had to be reframed through the creation of a safer imaginary space established by the use of a seductive, older girl. This imaginary pedophilia is the awareness that the actress presented seems to be of legal age, thereby allowing the viewers to indulge in the fantasy that she is under age without being forced to face the discomfort of witnessing true pedophilia. In so doing, the story line shifted away from true pedophilia in order to create a seemingly sympathetic understanding of one man's desire to be with a sexually attractive young woman, instead of emphasizing the discomforting feeling of committing a crime against an innocent victim. *Lolita* appears throughout Kubrick's film in poses that show off her womanly curves and suggest that she knows more about life and sexuality than the twelve-year-old girl of the novel. In effect, the combined use of imaginary pedophilia and the objectification of *Lolita*, paired with the first extra-textual image of her character, contributed to the new, false portrayal of *Lolita* that pop culture has embraced.

Due to the strict censorship of the 1960s, there is another aspect to popular culture's image of *Lolita* that is not completely encapsulated within Kubrick's conception of her. Lacking in his version of the character is the dimension of the "sexually precocious young girl," as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary—this would later be introduced by Adrian Lyne in the 1997 adaptation of the novel. Although Lyne's movie arguably follows the storyline more closely than does Kubrick's, Dominique Swaine, the actress cast for the role, was again fourteen,

unlike the textual Lolita. Despite having her first appear as a childlike figure, she quickly takes on the role of seductress and is portrayed as instigating her sexual relationship with Humbert. Throughout the film, the cinematography features close-ups of Lolita's curves, and she is often associated with phallic imagery that appears sexually suggestive to the viewer. Lolita is shown sucking on, rather than eating, a banana in the front seat of the car, an unnecessary and sexually laden aspect to her character.

In both Kubrick and Lyne's adaptations of *Lolita*, the titular Lolita deviates from the linguistic puzzle Nabokov creates for the reader by objectifying the Lolita character. Portraying Lolita as a hypersexualized character in film undermines the aesthetic bliss of Nabokov's novel in that viewers no longer have the chance to think, dissect, and understand the various dynamics that are laid into Nabokov's works. These aspects demonstrate how challenging it can be to translate aesthetic bliss to different mediums. Instead, viewers merely take the relationship at face value and shift the blame of the perverse relationship from the pedophilic Humbert Humbert to Lolita in order to alleviate the guilt they feel at playing witness to his crimes. In film, she becomes a manipulator with clearly devious intentions, instead of an innocent victim subjected to the whims of an older man in a position of power.

Lolita's transformation into a sex object initiated the filmic motif of the sexually precocious girl. With this concept in mind, more recent movies like *Labyrinth* (1986), *Stoker* (2013), and *Fish Tank* (2009) employ the trend of the objective sexualization of young women and imaginative pedophilia, although the characters in these films are, again, much older. Perhaps the best demonstration of how popular culture has skewed the aesthetics of the textual Lolita in favor of a safer pedophilic imaginary space comes from the description of the main character in a 2014 film entitled *Ask Me Anything* (Burnett). This film depicts a young woman named Katie Kampenfelt in a gap year between high school and college, who blogs about her relations with older men. Katie is described as "an archetypal version of Lolita—a seductive, attractive, dishonest underage girl" (Ferrugia). These attributes are those which Nabokov expressly did not want to be represented in any representation of Lolita, hence the reason the original 1955 publication of the novel was accompanied by a plain green jacket without any accompanying pictorial representation. Nabokov's Lolita was never portrayed as being seductive, nor were nymphets necessarily attractive; in the novel *Lolita*, she is described as having "gooseberry fuzz [on] her shin" (*Lolita* 43), a girl who "should

wash her hair once in awhile" (45). The aforementioned description of Katie as an archetype of Lolita reveals the extent to which the Hollywood film industry has distorted the textual image of Lolita.

The "Lolita Effect"—that that is, the sexualization of younger girls in order to create imaginary pedophilia—can be seen in many television programs today, particularly in the popular ABC Family show *Pretty Little Liars* (Goldsmith), which normalizes the hypersexualization of young, prepubescent girls. The show, which has been on air since 2010, revolves around a clique of high school-aged teens who often find themselves in taboo relationships with older men (Glennon). For instance, one of the show's longest lasting couples is that of Aria (played by Lucy Hale), a teenage student, and the local high school English teacher, Ezra (played by Ian Harding). Furthermore, the show also includes direct allusions to *Lolita* through one of the girls', Alison's, obsession with the novel. Alison (Sasha Pieterse) has a dark-haired alter ego named Vivian Darkbloom, which is not only an anagram for Vladimir Nabokov, but also a character who makes cameo appearances in a few of his works, including *Lolita* (*Lolita* 221). A parallel to Humbert's relationship with Lolita, Alison is said to have had a secret relationship with her step-father, Byron, who also happens to be an English professor. Whereas many of the other actresses in the show are years older than the characters they portray, Pieterse was only fourteen years old when she first started playing the seventeen-year-old Alison, who soon becomes involved with older men. The sexualization of her younger features above all other characters in the show, combined with direct allusions to Nabokov's novel in the naming and characterization of her figure, all seem to play off of the allure of the "Lolita Effect" created by popular culture.

In its general sexualization of young girls alongside a lack of imaginary pedophilia, the "Lolita Effect" is especially prevalent in child beauty pageants and competitions like those featured in *Dance Moms* and *Toddlers in Tiaras*, where girls ranging from infants to tweens are subject to conventional sexualized beauty standards in competition. These girls are augmented into sexual objects with excessive makeup, fake teeth, fake eyelashes, fake tans, and even fake breasts, as is particularly the case in *Toddlers and Tiaras* (Mirabello), which has featured routines of toddlers impersonating sex symbols such as Julia Roberts' prostitute character in *Pretty Woman* (Hernandez 163). The disturbing reality of these child beauty pageants is satirized in the 2006 film *Little Miss Sunshine* (Arndt), in which a family drives their seven-year-old daughter, Olive, to the *Little Miss Sunshine* beauty pageant. Her routine for the talent portion of the contest consists of an

overly sexualized stripper act choreographed by Olive's grandfather, which draws attention to everything that is wrong with the "Lolita Effect" in pageantry. Pop culture's tendency to sexualize increasingly younger girls far below the legal age of consent exposes the problem of the "Lolita Effect" when not justified by imaginary pedophilia, in that it takes away the safe space of having girls be of legal age.

The influence of *Lolita* in the sexualization and objectification of teenage girls is also witnessed in numerous advertising campaigns. These campaigns mostly feature Caucasian women above the age of consent, wearing scandalous outfits while placed in environments typically associated with pre-teens. The argument can once again be made that this type of advertising promotes imaginative pedophilia since the use of coverage models allowed the viewer to justify the sexualization of childhood and the children involved. One of the most famous advertising campaigns that perpetuates the "Lolita Effect" is a Calvin Klein jeans campaign released in 1980, which features a young Brooke Shields. The actress is depicted in positions that were regarded as sexually provocative at the time, and was doubly controversial since Shields had become famous two years prior for her role as a child prostitute in the film *Pretty Baby*. In the decades following this campaign, this type of child sexualization became increasingly prevalent: examples of this include Britney Spears posing provocatively on the cover of a 1999 Rolling Stone issue clad in lingerie in a child's bedroom, and Russian supermodel Natalia Vodianova being featured in Vogue Japan suggestively holding a teddy bear between her thighs as she gazes seductively into the camera. Even models like Kate Moss have been unable to shy away from this disturbing trend, with her feature spread in Italian Vogue in 1992 entitled "Charming Lolita," which depicts her with shoulder-length curls and red sunglasses, reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's representation of Nabokov's protagonist. As such, it can be argued that the "Lolita Effect" made its entrance into mainstream advertising campaigns in the early 1980s through to the 1990s.

In more recent years, the hypersexual Lolita has continued to appear in pop culture. In 2011, Marc Jacobs made use of the "Lolita Effect" in its campaign for the new fragrance "Oh, Lola." Jacobs justified his choice of seventeen-year-old Dakota Fanning as the poster girl by stating that she was a "contemporary Lolita," describing the perfume itself as "more of a Lolita than a Lola ... Oh, Lola' is sensual, but she's sweeter" (Whitelocks 4). The campaign sparked a large amount of controversy, and was subsequently banned in multiple countries

due to the fact that Dakota looked younger than her seventeen years, as well as because of the sexually provocative placement of the perfume bottle held between her thighs. American Apparel has similarly come under attack for its back-to-school ad campaign that displays provocative images of women dressed in schoolgirl attire. The fashion line in question, which featured "Lolita" branded skirts and shirts (e.g. the "Lolita mini skirt"), was eventually banned in the United Kingdom. One particularly controversial image shows a girl in a plaid skirt—an image traditionally associated with teenage pornography—bending over into a car, reminiscent of the road trip in Nabokov's novel. Coupled with the fact that this shot was rumoured to have been taken without the initial consent of the model, it was seen to promote sexually predatory behaviour (Srivats 2013).

These types of advertising campaigns and media depictions of Lolita have reduced Nabokov's heroine from an emotionally complex character to a mere body with hypersexualized physical traits. This is one major aspect of popular culture's coopting of Lolita: in the novel, Humbert Humbert considers personality an important factor in determining a girl's "nymphet potential," as when he explains, "[w]hat drives me insane is the twofold nature of this nymphet - of every nymphet, perhaps; this mixture in my Lolita of tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity, stemming from the snub-nosed cuteness of ads and magazine pictures" (*Lolita* 44). Indeed, given that "Nabokov insisted that there should be no little girl at all on the book's cover because he was in the business of writing about subjective rapture, not objective sexualization," it seems that Nabokov would disapprove of the Lolita that has emerged through advertising (Graham 44).

What is interesting in these commercial campaigns is that they have always chosen to focus on Lolita as opposed to Humbert, the narrator and arguable "protagonist" of the novel. Such an omission brings to light the contradiction between the audience's willingness to vilify Humbert's pedophilic activities while simultaneously indulging in and perpetuating them. This omission is no doubt due to the fact that including Humbert in such images of the sexualized Lolita would destroy their romanticism; however, by removing Humbert, the photographer entices the viewer instead to play the role of the pedophilic voyeur.

Lolita's legacy is also evident in the branding of musicians where women are encouraged to sexualize girlhood in their outfits and hairstyles. As discussed above, Britney Spears' controversial 1999 Rolling Stone cover was not the only such depiction of her. In fact, it became part of her brand to dress like a "sexy" girl, predominantly in the 1990s at the beginning of her career. One example of this

can be seen in Britney Spears' music video "Hit Me Baby One More Time," in which she is presented as a girl in school wearing a uniform that is obviously altered to expose more skin (Dick). Though Britney's brand eventually focused more on her sexuality rather than the concept of girlhood, by no means did this general trend cease. For example, Katy Perry also brands herself as childlike despite being twenty-six and clearly having the bodily proportions of an older woman (Wells). In Perry's promotional art for her song and music video "Teenage Dream," Perry poses on a lawn and imitates Lyne's Lolita, wearing similar high-waisted shorts and suggestively holding a pair of sunglasses in her mouth. The song's lyrics also express the idea of vestigial childlikeness paired with hypersexuality, explaining that Perry "got a motel / built a fort out of sheets" and intends to "go all the way tonight" (Perry and McKee 2010). This sexualization of girlhood is a similar invitation to the imaginative pedophilia that disturbed readers about Humbert Humbert; though the readers knew that Lolita did not literally exist in the physical world, there was nevertheless something disturbing in Humbert's insistence that the readers should collaborate with him in recollecting the rape of a child (Wells). The ethical questions that are evident in Nabokov's *Lolita* do not translate to this type of hypersexual branding of musicians, since the viewer implicitly accepts this sexualization by continuing to support the performer because the viewer knows that said performer, regardless of her outfit, is of legal age.

The Veronicas, a pop rock duo, also allude to Lolita in their music by presenting an empowering portrait of relationships between young women and older men in their songs. In 2012, the Veronicas released a single entitled "Lolita" in which the singers explore the powerplay inherent in intimate relationships between people who differ in age and sex. The duo presents this sort of relationship as empowering, stating that "I'm your Lolita, La Femme Nikita, / When we're together, you'll love me forever / You're my possession, I'm your obsession" (Origliasso and Origliasso 2012). The allusion to the French film *La Femme Nikita*, which concerns a female criminal who becomes a secret spy-cum-assassin, as well as the repeated use of imagery of women holding weapons in the music video, reveals The Veronicas' interpretation of the main girl as being empowered by her relationship with an older man. Such references to the empowerment of Lolita prompts one to forget that, in the original novel, Humbert is the "author" of the story, meaning that throughout the text her voice is filtered through him. Moreover, by opting to emphasize Lolita's autonomy and power throughout the song, the singers undermine the moments in the text where Humbert's control of

the narrative slips and he admits to Lolita's suffering by describing her in tears. In sum, the Veronicas depict Lolita not as she is in Nabokov's novel, but as the young girl depicted in film who instigates the relationship and has become an object of sexual attraction.

Similarly, Lana Del Rey alludes to Lolita in her 2012 album *Born To Die*, which idealizes the relationship between a girl and a father figure. Del Rey's album explores the innocence possessed by young girls in conjunction with their relationships with older men; and, like The Veronicas, she too idealizes this coupling. Explicitly, the album references *Lolita* in her song entitled "Lolita," and again in her song "Carmen" – a nickname given to Lolita by Humbert that was itself inspired by a song. Furthermore, in the song "Cola," she references Lolita and Humbert leaving for the road when she sings: "Come on Baby, let's ride / We can escape to the great sunshine / I know your wife that she won't mind" (Del Rey 2012). Similar to Lyne's film adaptation, "Cola" presents Lolita as the instigator of her relationship with Humbert without questioning his intentions in the act. Both lyrical depictions of the character Lolita fail to see the complexity of the situation she is faced with – namely, the question of rape – and choose, instead, to fetishize childhood as an appropriate age to begin relationships.

In order to understand why *Lolita* is misrepresented in popular culture, Nabokov's intentions in his novel must be examined and compared with popular culture's interpretation of his work. Nabokov's "aesthetic bliss," according to the Nabokovian scholar James McDonald, "plays an exquisite and enchanting game with his readers" (352). Aesthetic bliss is thus geared towards the "good reader" who looks for the patterns, themes, play on words, and allusions that are prevalent throughout a given novel. On the other hand, popular culture focuses solely on the titillating representation of Lolita developed by mass media, ignoring the aesthetic complexities central to Nabokov's text. Popular culture has misinterpreted Lolita by hypersexualizing her rather than attempting to solve Nabokov's intricate puzzle. Although the hypersexualization of Lolita may not perfectly fall into what Nabokov deems "topical trash," popular culture's representation of Lolita is similar to Nabokov's definition of it – that is, as "huge blocks of plaster" (Lolita 315). This plaster-like quality gives off the notion of being an inauthentic representation of the original, much as popular culture's representation of Lolita is a sham of the novel itself. Since popular culture focuses most on Lolita's sexuality, it has invariably distanced itself from the novel's emphasis on aesthetic bliss.

Popular culture acts as a "bad reader" of Nabokov's novel by overlooking

the intricate complexities of *Lolita*. Nabokov explains that being a bad reader is "more boring or more unfair to the author than starting to read, say, Madame Bovary, with the preconceived notion that it is a denunciation of the bourgeoisie" ("Good Readers and Good Writers" 1). Because the central character of *Lolita* has become a symbol of sexuality, its representation in popular culture has made *Lolita* seem like a novel solely about pedophilia and hypersexuality rather than one that emphasizes aesthetic bliss. In the afterword to *Lolita*, Nabokov remarks upon these preconceptions when he writes about first sending the books to publishers: "they [the readers] expected the rising succession of erotic scenes; when these stopped, the readers stopped, too, and felt bored and let down" (*Lolita* 314). By anticipating the reader's reactions, Nabokov isolates the 'bad readers' from the 'good' by showing that the former readers only follow the sexual aspects of the book, while ignoring the chess-like patterning involved in the creation of aesthetic bliss.

The translation of Nabokov's *Lolita* into popular culture has ultimately resulted in the loss of its meaning. Popular culture has continued to propagate a sexually precocious notion of Lolita through advertising, fashion, film, and music; as these forms of mass media continue to practice "bad reading" through the hypersexualized representation of Lolita, the aesthetic bliss exemplified in Nabokov's novel will eventually be replaced by an overly sexualized image of girlhood. While the novel carries the sense of "art for art's sake," film or musical adaptations are deeply influenced by the continued hypersexualization of Lolita and a sense of discomfort associated with the topic of pedophilia. Through its translation into pop culture today, the complex nuances and complexities developed in Nabokov's text have been forgotten.

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## The Future Is History: Negotiating Tragedy in Mark Ravenhill and David Hare

By Anna Lytvynova

In the influential article-turned-book "The End of History?," Francis Fukuyama argues that the Western world we live in has come to an end of "history as such" (2). He proposes that society is witnessing "the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (2). Using Hegelian philosophy, Fukuyama establishes that, conceptually, modern liberal capitalism is the pinnacle of social development. He boldly asserts that "it is not necessary that all societies become successful liberal societies, merely that they end their ideological pretensions of representing different and higher forms of human society" (18). While "the victory of liberalism has occurred primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world [...] it is the ideal that will govern the material world *in the long run*" (2). While Fukuyama does not claim that significant events will cease to exist, he does believe that, ideologically, the human society has come to a plateau and there is no further advancement to be made in the sociocultural evolution. How do the narratives of our past get incorporated in such a stance? Does it mean that there are no significant contemporary tragedies? If so, is there no possibility for significant progress either in the present or the future? Fukuyama's assertions raise these heavy societal questions.

The view of history as complete and sealed leaves an unsettling place for the position of the individual in society. If society has reached its ideal endpoint, the individual and the society must coexist in harmony. The world Mark Ravenhill paints in *Shopping and Fucking* and the world of David Hare's *Plenty*, however, refute such assertions. Ravenhill's play presents a world that in many ways mimics what Fukuyama suggests in his article: a world removed from history; a world of capitalism that does not have a conscious relationship with its past. In Hare's play, the characters, especially the protagonist Susan, are aware of and connected to their personal and social past. Though the two playwrights treat history differently, they both make the necessary link between the individual's relationship with society, and the way history entwines individuals and their society—whether the

characters acknowledge this or not.

In *Plenty*, Susan is acutely aware of her history and it is the past that gives her a narrative. Yet, inevitably and tragically, she becomes part of the same society she desperately tries to get away from. *Shopping and Fucking* is a story in a post-historic world of marginalized individuals that nevertheless includes traces of historical meta-narratives. This essay will examine the ways in which, when getting away from society, the characters necessarily exist within their same society. The notion of individual tragedy will be discussed in both plays. To render one's story as tragic is to define the individual as extraordinary. Neither of the plays give a hopeful or even a clear ending to the characters' stories. Nor do the endings offer a conclusion. It is not closure but the characters' continuous effort to change their situation, and the vitality present in these stories, that refute Fukuyama's assertion that the grand socio-historical narratives of the past are complete. The tragedies of these marginal and extraordinary characters and the ambiguity of the endings of their stories indicate that history, far from being complete, is in the making, it is something that exists in the now. The presence of meta-narratives in the plays and the reading of the characters as tragic will be examined in this light. Ultimately, it is the interplay of the social and the individual that is both tragic and hopeful in terms of negotiating individual and societal relationships to history.

In Hare's *Plenty*, Susan desperately wants to get away from her society. She fails to find a sustainable role for herself in the present society, which is reflected in her constantly changing occupations. Susan criticizes the Englishness of the English but at the same time remains part of that same Englishness. Her friend Alice's very first line summarises this crudely "I don't know why anybody lives in this country. No wonder everyone has colds all the time. Even what they call passion, it still comes at you down a blocked nose... The loveless English" (Hare 377). Immediately, the idea that one's environment stifles and emotionally inhibits them is introduced. Throughout the play, the audience meets characters that are out of touch with their emotions and passions. Even in Susan and Lazar's relationship, which seems to be the most genuine and passionate of all Susan's fleeting interactions, there is a sense of repression. By longing for a connection, the two are nevertheless separating themselves from each other and from their society. While trying to get away from their society, societal conformity and lack of passion is nevertheless integral to them. The individual and the social are thus at a conflict in this play, and yet are intertwined.

Susan is not, however, a heroic pro-war leftist; her stance against her society is

more nuanced. As Raymond Williams articulates in "The Making of Liberal Tragedy," if an individual takes a stance against their situation or society, they realize they are part of it in some way. Even in the antagonising of her society, Susan belongs to that same society. Feeling stuck in her environment, she says "I'd like to change everything but I don't know how" (404). There is something familiar and enveloping in the feeling of being stuck. Alice, while painting a nude portrait (an act that expresses her liberty), notes that if men actually leave their wives for their true lovers "perhaps the whole sport would die. For all of us" (424). There is something positive, or at least comforting, in the stability, however negative, of one's environment. There is also something tragic in that stability. In the words of Williams, "the original liberal impulse, of complete self-fulfillment, becomes inevitably tragic" (105). In the world of *Plenty*, trusting the system is what guarantees survival; one must belong to a structure for the system to function, even if belonging is personally stifling. Even Susan frames her life by a system during the war and cannot escape doing so afterwards. In an interview she remarks, "You believed in the organisation. You had to. If you didn't, you would die" (452). In trying to separate from society and engage in genuine relationships, the characters cannot get away from their fixed Englishness embedded within them. Furthermore, they do not entirely want to do so as the system they belong to offers a framework, a sort of comfort in the "for all of us" that frames an individual's life. When society cannot be escaped and there is some comfort in belonging to it, when there is "identification of the false society as part of one's own desires," then "liberal tragedy has ended, in its won deadlock" (Williams 105). This is a profound tragedy the characters of *Plenty* constantly negotiate.

In addition to telling the particular stories of the individuals in *Shopping and Fucking*, Ravenhill also paints a picture of the hollow social fabric in their world. During the scene where Lulu tells the story of witnessing an assault in a grocery store, for example, the audience sees a society where nobody comes to help a victim and people act based on their own safety and interest. Similarly, when Gary reveals his experience with sexual abuse to the nurse, he receives an incoherent response from her. The play therefore questions the kind of social fabric that is left, and whether it exists at all, in such a post-historic consumerist world. In this way, Ravenhill re-directs the audience's attention towards the larger social and post-historical context of in-er-face theatre.

Upon first glance, *Shopping and Fucking*—a post-historical society—shows its audience a world that represents the "end" of society that Fukuyama describes

in the sense that the world of the play is removed from its history and frozen in a constant state. The play presents a world that in many ways can be identified as post-Marxist. It is world where not only is there no connection to history but the idea of a post-capitalist or perfect society does not exist. Yet it is not the dead end that the play suggests, but a powerful opposition to the society Fukuyama labels as final and ideal. At the end of the play, Brian is introduced as the new social morale. Through the story he tells, he teaches the other three characters the value of work, offering work as a way of shaping one's own destiny. The value of this work, however, still goes back to capitalist financial gain. It is valuable "just as long as we keep on making the money" (Ravenhill 357). As an alternative, Brian creates a way to escape the meaningless and painful everyday world that Robbie, Lulu, and Mark live in, yet at the same time takes them back to the same consumerism they want to discard. Brian, and the lesson he gives, are a response to the world of the play that both belong to it and do not. Their alternative is both satisfying and deeply frustrating. Nevertheless, rather than ending with a dead end, the characters' stories end openly, with another perspective, another morale being introduced by Brian, refusing to put an end to the story of the other three characters. The history of these people is thus not over: there is an opportunity for new possibilities and views being introduced. These might not be grandiose, but the promise of the future is presently alive.

There is no synthesis or analysis to the ending of the play. This is, however, not futile but deliberate. The alternative morale is not good or bad; it is simply present. In the words of Elizabeth Kuti, "Ravenhill's work examines 'the contemporary absence of values' but in a way that is not 'framed' ideologically" (459). The play ends with an image of Lulu, Robbie, and Mark feeding each other. The ambiguity of this ending, that appears simultaneously hopeful and tragic, reinforces the complexity of the alternative morale. There is both supportive nourishment and materialistic consumerism present in this image. Neither conclusive nor a dead end, the ending is one that holds within it an energy, due to its unresolved and dialectic nature, for more struggles and possible resolutions to unfold. The multiple levels of interpretation the image creates prevents the audience from identifying the characters' state at the end of the play as final and, by extension, the state of their society as final. There is still energy and the possibility of something happening. They do not know what that something is, whether it will be good or bad, but that something is present. The fact that the characters are still unable to get away from their consumerist past, even as a



possibility of the future is introduced, supports the fact that history is not over and that it necessarily informs the future.

The structure of *Plenty* reinforces the ambiguity of its, also unresolved, ending. Kuti, bridging together tragedy and in-her-face theatre, remarks that "by looking beyond surface content, and focusing instead on deeper underlying structures of form and plot, the aim is to question the labels of 'verbatim' and 'in your face' theatre and the consequent misleading categorization of plays into political versus nonpolitical, public versus private, big versus little stories" (458). The play's sporadic narrative, transcending such genre labels, highlights the very nature of struggle. The episodic structure of the play in itself refuses to see Susan's story as one coherent narrative that moves towards a definitive and clear ending. Instead, it is a story of several attempts, of different kinds of struggles, of multiple snippets, rather than one progression. The structure of the play in itself therefore reinforces the play's rejection of a possibility of conclusion. In its place the play offers a series of unresolved struggles. Instead of a singular narrative, what is constant in the play is an energy, a recurring effort that fuels the scenes. The fragmented form of *Plenty* does not allow for engagement in a psychological analysis of the characters. In each of the scenes, the audience sees Susan attempting to get away from the society she rejects to achieve the life she wants, yet that goal is never successfully actualized. This constant, fragmented struggle of a marginal character is tragic. It also, like Kuti suggests, troubles the categorization of the play; the play instead forces its audience to acknowledge the uncomfortable lack of a satisfying straightforward narrative or an ending.

Such a structure suggests that tragedy is not something that is complete. This is reminiscent of the way Williams describes tragedy as something that is in need of constant renewal. For him, revolution "against human alienation produces, in real historical circumstances, its own new kinds of alienation, which it must struggle to overcome, if it is to remain revolutionary" (Williams 82). What happens in this constant energy is that "the struggle to end alienation produces its own kinds of alienation" (83). This is what is reflected in the episodic structure of the play. Susan's inability to keep the same job, with the same person, in the same location, which the fragmented structure of the play emphasizes, reflects the essential tragic nature of the revolutionary struggles against alienation. Her struggle to remove herself from society is never realized and is constantly renewed. It results in a fragmented and cyclical struggle of alienation of an individual. Susan's struggle to get away from her society takes her into the past.

Her attempts at such alienation are fractured, which is underlined by the very structure of the play. As a result, the play refuses to bracket off history and an individual's tragic alienation as complete and antique.

It is important not to neglect the stories of the other characters in the plays. In *Plenty*, Alice tries to focus her energy on activities that help society, and in this way integrates herself into society. This fails to fulfil her. The people in her social circle are involved in important current societal movements, yet she remains distanced from them. While it may seem like she is harmonised with her environment because of her connections to it, Alice nevertheless remains slightly at a distance from her society by not engaging fully. In this way, Alice too is a tragic figure unable to resolve her relationship with society. Darwin is someone who also believes in "good faith," taking a righteous stance on the Suez Canal crisis and rejecting the hollowness and greed of the modern world. He ardently believes in this moral stance, no matter how impractical it may be. Yet his beliefs are tragic as he is ultimately unable to realize his views in action. His morality ends at the level of his thoughts and language, and he continues to work within the system his heart rejects. Unable to take consequential action, he is helpless in the face of the larger social stance of "bad faith". Again, the individual and the social coexist in the play but with an unsatisfying tension in their relationship that fails to find its harmony.

While all characters in these plays have significant stories to tell and differing relationships with tragedy, identifying a tragic hero is difficult and, moreover, misleading. In the case of *Shopping and Fucking*, doing so is also counterproductive to appreciating the play as a tragedy. All characters in this work can be seen as tragic heroes in their inability to reconcile their relationship with their society and find their happiness. Mark is the only one who attempts to actively subvert the consumerist norms of his society, yet this attempt is not successful. Kuti argues that there is a "clear hero/protagonist in Mark" (460) but this is not necessarily so. Mark tries to leave the world of consumerism and the unsatisfying sexual triangle of Robbie, Lulu, and himself behind. Yet this attempt only brings him back to them. The only person he is able to love, Gary, ironically, is also preoccupied with materialist goals and is unable to return affection. Gary can also be a tragic hero but of a different kind. He does not try to surpass the norms of his society but, on the contrary, find satisfaction by existing in them. However, this leads to his direst desire being the re-enactment of his childhood abuse, which, ironically, kills him. His story is therefore tragic, but this kind of tragedy

stems from the other side of the individual-society relationship. Gary embodies a person who, in opposition to the other three, stays within social norms rather than opposing them. Yet this alternative leads to the same tragic lack of fulfillment the attempt to escape society does for Mark. All these characters' stories are tragic and the common element of their tragedies stems from their inability to in some way negotiate a relationship with their society and their own histories. Yet the fact that neither Susan in Hare's work nor the characters in Ravenhill's play are made heroes is important as it accentuates the complex and dialectic nature of tragedy. In addition, the multitude of these stories also points to the fact that there are other stories that are not a singular story of one protagonist, there are a multitude of tragedies out there.

*Shopping and Fucking* as a whole is both part of a tradition of tragedy and exists outside of it. It presents tragic stories but in itself has no dialect, and does not provide synthesis or analysis. It stages no substantial character development. Rather than presenting a clear morale or a complex dialectic, the play refuses to do either. It is this refusal, however, that does not allow the experiences of the characters in the play to be labeled as belonging to an established dramatic tradition and thus explained in their entirety. If it were possible to clearly identify the play as a tragedy, there would have been a danger in writing off their experiences as belonging to a specific and complete convention and, consequently, reduce the value of their individual stories. Instead, the play allows its readers and audiences to dive into the particular stories of these individuals, with their ambiguities and difficulties, rather than presenting a story as a rendition of a generic narrative. Again, as Williams articulates, "to generalize this particular contradiction as an absolute fact of human existence is to fix and finally suppress the relation and tension, so that tragedy becomes not an action but a dreadlock" (58). The potency of tragedy lies precisely in its ability to vitalise tensions. Far from being dead and absolute, these tensions in turn emphasize the complex, contingent, and immediately bustling nature of the particular lived experiences.

Neither of the relationships to history presented in these plays—the post-historical world of *Shopping and Fucking* or Susan's attachment to the past in *Plenty*—is a successful or fulfilling attitude for their characters. This consumerist society of *Shopping and Fucking* is the only world that is present in the play, despite its references to historical narratives. Even Mark, who attempts to escape such a world, only gets caught up in it again; and Gary, an outsider to the trio

asserts "I'm not after love. I want to be owned. I want someone to look after me. And I want him to fuck me," thus reinforcing the hollowness and lack of genuine connection Mark and other characters suffer from (Ravenhill 325). Notably, Gary is younger than the other characters, which suggests that the younger generation is further caught up in the consumerist and pleasure-seeking world than the adults. The play does not present its characters or its audiences with an alternative society, in a way mimicking what Fukuyama describes as the only possible society. If this is so, it is tragic. Tragic not only for the individual characters we encounter but for the society at large that cannot move beyond the world of shopping and immediate physical desires. Yet the other alternative that is presented in *Plenty*—staying in touch with history and its metanarratives—does not seem to lead to any more optimistic results. Susan often goes to the past in her thoughts and longings for a different kind of world, a world she tasted in her war-filled youth. John Su refers to Susan's worldview as "troubled nostalgia" (Su 23). To him, "the promise of social equality and national renewal with the war's end presented as the final memory of a fragmenting psyche" (23). This fragmented psyche is reflected in Susan's constant movement from one chapter of her life to the next and reinforced by the episodic structure of the play, as discussed earlier. The nostalgia is troubled as it does not lead to a holistic, reconciled life. Neither option of staying too attached to history or creating a society completely removed from it—represented in *Plenty* and *Shopping and Fucking*, respectively—is a productive way of incorporating history in a society. History exists within and continues to affect society's present, but both extremes of negotiating the relationship between history and the self lead to tragic individual narratives and overall social dismay. In their different ways, the social structures presented in these two plays point at the importance of a society acknowledging and finding a healthy relationship to its history. At the same time, they fail to show an effective way of doing so. Tragically, they do not offer a clear solution. On an elemental but significant level, all the plays can do is emphasize the enormous presence of history in the now of a society.

The role meta-narratives play in this resistance to resolutions and clarity is also important. While Ravenhill makes references to *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Lion King*, *The Bible*, and Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, these narratives are just alluded to and not overwritten. The weaving of these stories into characterization provides some background to the characters of Lulu, Robbie, and Mark, and establishes them as having privileged backgrounds. However, these meta-narratives fail

to serve as substantial tragic narratives that could frame the stories of these characters. The story Brian tells at the end, for example, is a capitalistic perversion of the meta-narrative of *The Lion King*, which is in turn based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The story he tells is at first glance a dialectical and liberating one, as it presents one's work as an opportunity to make one's own destiny. Yet that destiny is that we must "make the money," so that "Shopping, Television" is "the future, isn't it?" (Ravenhill 357). The incorporation of meta-narratives that are supposed to ground the characters do nothing but work within the shallow consumerism of the play. The particular story of these characters becomes drastically distinct from the grand social narratives it mirrors. The meta-narratives fail to serve individual lives or encompass their experience. At the same time, as Kuti observes, "Ravenhill's plays seem to pose the question of how, in our McWorld of shopping centres, where the only gods are economic forces, in which one of our elected leaders told us there was no such thing as society, do we continue to understand and engage with 'big stories'?" (460). Ravenhill offers no satisfying answer to such a question. The world these characters live in is therefore both conditioned by grand societal meta-narratives and is at the same time failed by them. Yet the meta-narratives continue to exist. Even as the characters get away from or twist them, they nevertheless cannot (and do not actively attempt to) altogether surpass or get rid of them.

Meta-narratives in *Plenty* are present largely in the form of significant historical events, mainly WWII and the Suez Canal crisis. Susan's relationship to this is that of nostalgia. She tries to get away from her society by going into the past, which does not help her do so. As Su points out, Susan cannot find a means in her past to orient herself to the future. Hare's characters "seek something sacred in the past, something eminently worth defending in the here and now" and instead "become enraptured with the past rather than finding in it a good with which to orient themselves" (Su 27). Susan does seek an orientation for the future: she is not entirely consumed by her relationship to the past. Yet her attempts to find some kind of a satisfying orientation for the future are tragically intertwined with her attachment to the past, and Susan fails again and again. She is unable to let go from her experience in WWII and is surrounded by people involved in the Suez Crisis. These two large narratives of the British past continue to condition her life. Although without a clear alternative, the idea that history is something that belongs to the past is strongly challenged. Instead, history demands to be

recognized in the present. While history thus spills into present, there is tragedy in the individual's inability to incorporate it in a satisfying, or at least productive, way. Susan is unable to find a healthy relationship with her past because that is not a viable solution in the present society she finds herself in. Yet again, the particular (the individual) and the grand social (the historical meta-narratives) coexist in the play. Just like Susan is part of the society she desperately tries to escape, Ravenhill's marginal individuals are part of the same social historical narratives that they twist and alter. This combination of past and present, both on social and individual levels, establishes the two plays as valid tragedies, since "it is one of the functions of tragic form to bring together, through plot, the little and the big story, and to insist upon the connection" (Kuti 465).

Despite their failures, both Susan in *Plenty* and the characters in *Shopping and Fucking* keep trying to achieve what they want. They keep going. This is what Williams enunciates in his ideas on the liberal tragedy: desire is always valid, and de-alienation attempts are necessary, even if its fruits are not always evident. *Plenty* thus becomes a tragedy, but not a narrative of doom. As Su points out, "Susan never succeeds in performing a good act, but until the end of the play denies a sense of futility, maintaining her commitment to the postwar promise" (33). Such a commitment is suggested to be, like some of Williams' hopeful views of tragedy, naïve and futile. Su asserts that "Hare's enraptured characters participate in an anti-mystical experience—deriving erotic satisfaction not from uniting with a transcendent moral structuring principle (the Divine), but from the embrace of nihilism [...] and the helpless freedom it offers" (34).

However, such tragic but whole-hearted devotion is also what fuels Susan's commitment to her project of alienation from society and de-alienation from herself. Her relationship with the past may not be a healthy one, as she is indeed "paralyzed by situations in which apparently no choice allows for fidelity to the dream of the past: Susan must accept betrayal and corruption as the condition of her dream of 'Plenty' or abandon her constitutive nostalgia" (Su 30). What is significant, nevertheless, is that she does not abandon her dream. The tragedy lies in the idea that there is no catharsis, no ending to her struggle. Nevertheless, it is precisely the fact that her relationship with the past is "troubled" and therefore incomplete that refutes Fukuyama's assertion that history is something that is packed away and belongs to the past. For Susan, it is something that necessarily needs to exist in the present and be reconciled, over and over again. To reinforce

Williams' assertion, alienation will produce new kinds of alienation and it is this tragic continuous struggle that informs our existence.

Not only the play's structure but also the ambivalence of the final image of the play supports this. Susan tries to achieve personal liberation but does this through drug use, suggesting the impossibility of her goals in the real world without narcotic illusions. At the same time, however, this is also an image of promise. It is a prolonged gloss over the imagery of the play attempting to negotiate a tragic deadlock of being stifled. In the middle of such a deadlock, the play does not invalidate the desire to go beyond the reality of the present moment, even if it is needed to revert to drugs to do so. The play thus gives credit to Susan's ambitions. Just like in the ending of *Shopping and Fucking*, the ambivalence of the final image validates the characters' desires and does not reject a sense of, however troubled, promise. Susan's need to keep going, and her insistence on a relationship with the past as she does so, further reinforce the idea that history is something far from being locked away in an attic. It is something that lives in and affects the present, and it fuels an important struggle of alienation. The society's attitude towards its history shapes the individual and her ability to have a place in this society, even if the final product of such a struggle is left ambiguous.

In *Plenty*, Hare paints a world of an individual trying to negotiate her unsatisfying relationship with the past. Ravenhill presents the opposite, post-historical, world in his *Shopping and Fucking*. In both of these plays, the individual story is tragic because of the characters' inability to find a productive way of negotiating their sameness and difference within their societies. The societies in turn do not incorporate their past into the present in a way that would build a sustainable future. Perhaps Fukuyama raises an important point in one facet of his theory: the way the past has been historicized through metanarratives is no longer productive. As the plays discussed show, our present efforts of negotiating history lead to tragedy, in the form of either a futile nostalgia or hollow post-modern consumerism. What we need is not to do away with history and come to a single post-historical plateau like Fukuyama suggests but, on the contrary, find a productive way of negotiating and incorporating history in our present mentality and society in order to move forward into the future. The way every individual and society negotiates such a project is different and particular to them. Yet it is precisely one's relationship to history on the individual level, the "small" stories of Susan, Darwin, Brock, Lulu, Robbie, Mark, Brian, and Gary, that is not only affected by their societies but also sculpts the social fabric of the present and our collective

future.

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## Empowerment and Entrapment in Séan O'Casey's Tenement House

By Rosie Long Dectcr

At the turn of the 20th century, Ireland experienced a literary renaissance as poets and playwrights such as W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory championed Irish cultural heritage, paving the way for the nationalist movement that would lift off the stage and into the streets in 1916. These works are noted for their romantic portrayals of an idyllic, often rural Ireland, an image that would come to feature prominently in definitions of Irish identity (Duffy 75). What was missing from these stories was the reality of dire poverty taking place not only in Ireland's countryside but also in the urban centre of Dublin. In 1913, 25,000 families lived in Dublin tenement houses, buildings that had once been lavish homes for the Anglo-Irish elite and now housed up to 100 families at a time (Halpenny). Though excluded from literary narratives and public discourse, the hardships of the tenement houses were well documented at the time by government studies and reports – yet these reports, while factually in-depth, were "quite devoid of 'humanistic' insights to the daily life, struggle, and emotions of the dwellers themselves" (Kearns 9). Séan O'Casey, a lower middle class Dubliner and budding playwright, filled this void in the narrative of Irish identity. O'Casey, in his three Dublin plays *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Plough and the Stars*, depicts the tenement house as harbouring a vibrant community of diverse individuals united in shared poverty, but also as a site of political and economic entrapment due to that same poverty, thus humanizing and empowering tenement residents while simultaneously emphasizing just how powerless they were.

As Kevin Kearns explains in his book *Dublin Tenement Life*, the few portrayals of tenement residents that did exist in the early 20th century hardly painted a full picture of tenement life. Kearns, chronicling the history of Dublin's tenements through the voices of tenement dwellers themselves, claims that the reports of "Royal Commissions, Corporation surveys, Health Congresses, and other inquiry boards" were "essentially sterile, clinical reports based on observational conclusions," a claim best illustrated by the description of the tenements as "foul rookeries" (9). Ironically, Kearns himself veers dangerously

close to the dehumanizing language he criticizes: in describing tenement life, he writes that "impoverished families were huddled together [in tenements] thick as cockroaches amidst bestial squalor" (9), demonstrating that there is a fine line between exposing disgusting conditions and turning the people living in those conditions into figures of disgust themselves. O'Casey's work walks this line with finesse, writing against the dehumanizing reports by depicting the united multiplicity of the tenement house. He writes the tenement residents as individuals with diverse backgrounds and opinions (often in opposition to the dominant forces of the era) who are simultaneously united in a community defined not only by shared hardship but also song, laughter, and collective care.

In each of his tenement plays, O'Casey features an amusing cast of characters, each with their own distinct personalities and beliefs, humanizing the residents by differentiating them instead of presenting them as a homogenous 'urban poor. Tenement houses themselves were in fact extremely diverse, housing immigrant families of many different origins, religions, and lifestyles (Keane). Though O'Casey does not portray many immigrant experiences—his characters are generally Dubliners—he does give them varying religions and, most notably, political ideologies. O'Casey subverts dominant narratives of Irish national identity that celebrate the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, and the Civil War by allowing his characters to express varied opinions on these events, from the enthusiastic to the appalled. In *Plough*, for example, though characters like Fluther and Peter support the rebellion (in spirit), others disagree. The Covey, who believes "there's only one war worth havin: th' war for th' economic emancipation of th' proletariat" (191) is O'Casey's socialist voice. Bessie, a Protestant who supports British rule and believes that the Catholics should be more concerned about their brethren in Belgium (189), and Nora, who sees the rebellion primarily as the evil that took her husband (178), join him in opposition. In having these characters oppose the rebellion, O'Casey adds nuance to the historicization of the Easter Rising, demonstrating that those who were amongst the most oppressed under British colonialism—the urban working class—were not homogenous in their expressions of Irish identity, often opposing this nationalist movement that promised little in the way of liberation from poverty.

Though characters in the other two plays are somewhat more uniform in their views, each character has an individual perspective or background supporting his or her opinion. In *Shadow*, though many of the tenement residents support the War of Independence, this support varies in degree and authenticity, and the

principle characters of *Seumas* and *Davoren* are in fact critical of the war. Indeed, *Seumas* points out how the war harms the people it intends to liberate, stating: "it's the civilians that suffer; when there's an ambush they don't know where to run. Shot in the back to save the British Empire, an' shot in the breast to save the soul of Ireland" (40). By *Juno*, the last of the three plays with regard to setting, none of the characters are enthusiastic about the Civil War. They discuss how the war has torn apart tenement houses like their own, such as when Juno states: "hasn't the whole house, nearly, been massacred?" (117). Mrs. Madigan laments the lack of change that the years of violence have produced, telling the police: "You're the same as yous were under the British Government—never where yous are wanted!" (146). Even the nationalist fighters in this play—as opposed to Jack in *Plough*, who happily dies for his country—are frustrated with the state of things, as Johnny asks: "haven't I done enough for Ireland?" (120). These vocalizations of opposition are markedly different due to the varying perspectives of the characters: Juno speaks as a mother sick of watching children die, Johnny as a traumatized soldier, Mrs. Madigan as a concerned neighbour and a member of the tenement community who has watched the war take two of its own. In crafting these characters who respond critically to events in Irish independence, O'Casey may have been looking for a platform to express his own frustrations and varying thoughts on the harm of the wars. Yet by allowing these critiques to come forward from tenement residents, he is giving voice to the marginalized, thus humanizing the tenement residents by portraying them as individuals with insightful opinions that are crucial to understanding the impact of conflict in Irish history.

In addition to portraying the tenement as a site of diverse ideologies and oppositions, O'Casey also demonstrates how tenement residents formed an interdependent community. Kearns, in critiquing representations of tenement life, writes that what is most missing from the government reports is an acknowledgement of the "marvelously vibrant, close-knit social community in which the poor indisputably found great security and happiness" and argues that it is this sense of community that has always been left out of representations of the tenement house (11). O'Casey, however, brings this community to life on stage. The characters in his plays are not only diverse but also inextricably linked to one another, fighting with and relying on each other in the tenement house. Indeed, when Kearns writes that the tenement "was enlivened by a colourful cast of local characters, balladeers, and buffoons" (12), he could easily be describing any one of the three plays. O'Casey establishes this lively interconnectedness by

writing the first two acts of each play as a comedy, using humour to portray the tenement house as a site of bickering, gossiping, song, and dance and to introduce the relationships between the "colourful cast of local characters."

In *Plough*, for example, O'Casey uses comedic arguments between characters to illustrate the similarity between residents in a tenement house and members of a family. Much of the first act is taken up by the humorous back and forth disputes between the buffoons, Fluther, Peter, and The Covey, who fight like siblings, as when The Covey teases Peter about his clothes (164). Bessie and Mrs. Gogan also share a sibling-like relationship, almost coming to blows in the bar scene in act two (191). Nora, the head of house, acts as a mother to the squabbling siblings, breaking up their fights and feeding them dinner (166). And for all their fighting, the characters remain bonded together, eating and drinking and even looting as a group, demonstrating dysfunctional yet unquestionably strong allegiances to one another. The Abbey Theatre's recent production of *Plough* emphasized this connection between characters by having characters like Mollser and Nora stay on stage even when they were not in the scene; they were, themselves, part of the tenement setting. Even when in separate rooms of the tenement set, Mollser and Nora were thus implicated in whatever action was taking place centre-stage. The viewer, watching the action, while also aware of Mollser or Nora going about their activities in separate rooms on stage, thus understood that nothing here was happening in isolation - the individual characters were always part of a greater household.

Fintan O'Toole writes that the "tenement allows for the presentation of a self-contained community in the theatre," creating "an enclosed world where everything is known about everybody" (114). If the characters in *Plough* make up an "enclosed world," in *Shadow* that "enclosed world" is forced to open as it receives a new member. With the arrival of Davoren in the tenement house, residents begin to weave him into their communal web. Davoren learns quickly that this is indeed a place where "everything is known about everybody," as Seumas explains to him how the residents gossip about him: "sure they all think you're on the run. Mrs Henderson thinks it, Tommy Owens thinks it, Mrs an Mr Grigson think it, an' Minnie Powell thinks it too" (13). This list of residents makes up the cast of "characters and buffoons," from the over-eager Tommy Owens to the "massive" Mrs Henderson (22). In showing how these comedic "characters and buffoons" react to and gossip about the new member of the tenement house, O'Casey again depicts tenement residents as a close community where residents

are heavily invested in each others' lives.

In addition to fighting and gossiping, "impromptu singing" was "a major feature" of these vibrant tenement communities, according to Kearns (12). Such singing occurs in each play, as characters frequently burst into song. At times this "impromptu singing" is used for romance, such as when Jack serenades Nora in *Plough* (175). Often it is a means of expressing nationalism or religion, such as when Adolphus Grigson sings of his Protestant pride in *Shadow* (46). Each time singing occurs, though, it acts as an important way for the individuals in the house to connect with one another. This is most notable in the second act of *Juno*, when the characters all sing their solo songs to one another and thus participate in a communal activity in which they each get to be a performer and an audience member (112). As with O'Casey's use of humour, these recurring songs serve to reinforce the sense of full, often joyous lives being lived inside the tenement house while also deepening the connection between characters, suggesting that they share not only physical space, but laughter, conversation, and song: they are not just existing alongside one another, but living together. O'Casey thus fills these three plays with the "colourful" characters described by Kearns, crafting their complicated relationships and creating tenement families.

This community is not only apparent in jovial and comedic scenes, however - the tenement community also appears as a result of shared hardship and a means of support. Kearns states that "Dublin's tenement communities" had a "tradition of sharing and caring for one another," which constituted a "communal system of mutual dependency" (35). This support system was particularly important for women - the tenement house, after all, was their domestic sphere. Gertie Keane explains that many women were "recorded as the 'Head of Family' within the Census, both as widows and married" and notes that "this suggests a strong sense of community support existed between households, as women strived to manage and support their families and one another" (Keane). In the later acts of the plays, after the cast of "characters and buffoons" has been established, the political events consistently take a violent turn, and the tenement residents come together to help one another. In *Plough*, for example, Fluther goes out into the war torn city to find a doctor for Nora (204) and to make funeral arrangements for Mollser (237). The system of support between women noted by Keane is indeed present in *Plough*, such as when Mrs. Gogan thanks Bessie for having always looked out for Mollser (237), or when Bessie takes care of Nora, the fallen head of house. In *Juno*, there is less of a sense of "mutual dependency," given that the tenement

house is divided along the lines of the Civil War. Regardless, Mrs. Madigan still provides that support for Juno when Johnny is killed, chasing away the police who are hurrying Juno to identify the body (145). O'Casey connects these individual characters with diverse political opinions into a united community that takes care of itself. In doing so, he paints a picture of the tenement not only as a site of death and sadness, but also as a place of vibrant life and even resistance.

Despite carving out these spaces for resistance, O'Casey nonetheless depicts the tenement experience as one of intense economic and political marginalization, telling a narrative of urban oppression that had been hitherto left out of attempts to define Irish national identity. As Patrick Duffy writes, "the urban was elided in many of the idealisations of the rural from Yeats onwards" (74). This omission of "the urban" meant that stories of the dire conditions in the tenements did not feature prominently in nationalist identity. As Lawrence McCaffrey argues, though, the experience of these violent political events produced a new generation of writers who were less idealistic in their nationalist consciousness and who sought to address the "social and economic aspects of the Irish independence movement" (27). O'Casey is one of these writers who lived through the revolution and exposed its effect on those who had been left out of the nationalist narrative, using the tenement house as a device to bring urban political and economic marginalization onto the national stage.

O'Casey explores this urban political and economic marginalization by demonstrating the devastating effects of the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, and the Civil War on the tenement house, portraying tenement residents as victims of these events with little political agency of their own. Each play stages a gradual dismantling of the tenement community, even as it suggests the resistance and unity present in those communities. In *Plough*, Nora is distressed by the departure of her husband as he leaves to fight in the Rising, asking him: "Is General Connolly an th' Citizen Army gon' to be your only care? Is your home goin' to be only a place to rest in? Am I gon' to be only somethin' to provide merry-makin' at night for you? Your vanity'll be th' ruin of you and me yet..." (178). Here, O'Casey draws attention to the abandonment experienced by many who could not afford to fight and the isolation of those Dubliners, often women, who had to take care of their tenement families. O'Casey extends this sense of division to the whole tenement house in *Juno*, as residents are separated along the lines of the Civil War, with the loss of Mrs. Tancred's son weighing over the comedic first half of the play. In *Shadow*, though the house itself remains

relatively untouched for the majority of the play, O'Casey creates an atmosphere of terror underneath the comedic surface, as residents live in fear that a raid will be conducted. As Seumas says of the landlord: "he's afraid of a raid, and that his lovely property'll be destroyed" (13). Even before the tragic endings of each play, the audience glimpses these cracks in the tenement walls and sees the insidious pain caused by political events that the residents, though they may express their opinions, ultimately cannot control.

At the end of each play these cracks give way to complete destruction as each tenement house is wrenched apart with death and disaster. *Plough's* ending is arguably the most disastrous, as the British soldiers corral the men of the house, Nora descends into madness after her baby is stillborn, and Bessie meets an untimely death. Holmes' production of *Plough* emphasizes this destruction in the set change between acts three and four, as the scaffolding that has served as the tenement house throughout the whole play literally falls on its side to the ground. It is worth noting that *Plough* also features the most obviously connected, "mutually dependent" community of the three plays, demonstrating that even while O'Casey creates these communities he also suggests that they are no match for the political violence thrust upon them. To a lesser extent, violence similarly wrenches apart the tenement community in *Shadow*, as the fears of a raid come true and Minnie is killed, leaving the Grigsons, Seumas, and Davoren to mourn in horror. Both plays begin as comedies, as O'Casey portrays the communities that thrived within tenement walls, yet ultimately these lively families are torn apart by death, and the same walls that united them play host to their dissolution. The united community is no match for the external political forces that, by the end of both plays, have fully invaded the tenement house.

Interestingly, in *Juno*, Johnny's death almost serves to bring the tenement residents closer together, as Juno finally empathizes with Mrs. Tancred. Upon losing her own son, Juno realizes she should not have let the fact that Mrs. Tancred's boy was a "Die-hard" fighting against the adoption of the Anglo-Irish Treaty prevent her from mourning him: "Maybe I didn't feel sorry enough for Mrs Tancred when her poor son was found as Johnny's been found now - because he was a Die-hard! Ah, why didn't I remember that then he wasn't a Diehard or a Stater, but only a poor dead son!" (146). However, there is still no resolution for the tenement community in this play - instead, Juno and Mary choose to leave the tenement, pursuing a better life, while Captain Boyle is left behind in squalor. *Juno*, then, has the only hopeful ending of the three, and the hope lies in this



decision to leave the tenement, suggesting that to stay is to face destruction.

This suggestion is further underscored by the fates of the two unborn babies in *Juno* and *Plough*: Nora, who is abandoned by her husband and faces the violence of the Rising from within the tenement, has a stillborn baby, while Mary chooses to leave the tenement, promising a better life for her unborn child. Taken together, these two plays suggest that staying in the tenement means a stillborn future that is dead on arrival, while leaving provides the only possibility for a future free of the violence and hardship of the tenement home. Thus, O'Casey depicts the tenement as a site of political entrapment, where residents have little say in the political events shattering their own lives. O'Casey's characters are not in positions of power in these wars – even the two characters who are combatants, Johnny in *Juno* and Jack in *Plough*, are portrayed as being under the command of others and marked for death. O'Casey is not telling the story of the leaders who fought valiantly to free Ireland, but rather describing the toll that these fights took on those without political capital.

In addition to this political marginalization, O'Casey also depicts the tenement house as a site of economic entrapment where poverty means sickness and struggle. Mollser's tuberculosis—and the coughing that comes with it—is a recurring, haunting motif in *Plough*, as Mrs. Gogan struggles to take care of her daughter in the wake of her husband's death from the same illness. As The Covey says of Mollser's death, "Sure she never got any care. How could she get it, an' th' mother out day an' night lookin' for work, an' her consumptive husband leavin' her with a baby to be born before he died" (228). The Covey points out the direct link between economic marginalization and tuberculosis—not only do tenement residents get tuberculosis from living in unsanitary conditions of urban poverty, but they also cannot afford treatment. He goes on to note that "more die o' consumption than are killed in th' wars," claiming that "it's all because of th' system we're livin' undher" (235). Again, O'Casey allows his socialist principles to leak into the play through the voice of Covey, shedding light not only on the political violence in the tenement house but the economic violence that lives there in the form of tuberculosis.

Aside from tuberculosis, O'Casey also weaves concerns about money into the daily lives of tenement residents. In *Juno*, the acquisition of money through the death of an old relative is a major plot device, as money brings joy to the family and subsequently harms the household community, causing resentment and fights between Captain Boyle and the other residents when he is unable

to pay back those from whom he borrowed money (131). In *Shadow*, Seumas is portrayed as a struggling salesman who cannot afford to pay rent, and he fights with his landlord over the money he owes (13). O'Casey contrasts these depictions of the tenement residents' economic concerns with how non-tenement residents view them: in *Plough*, when the rebels see the tenement residents looting during the Rising, they fire over their heads. Captain Brennan then tells Jack he should have shot to kill, stating: "If these slum lice gather at our heels again, plug one o' them" (219). The looting, while comical, again points out the tenement residents' lack of wealth. Captain Brennan's reaction to the looting in turn demonstrates how poverty is cause for dehumanization; these residents, who live in squalor and see the rebellion as an opportunity to improve their conditions, are "slum lice" to the outside world. In this scene, the characters' economic marginalization is linked to their political marginalization – those with power in the rebellion are disgusted by the tenement residents, rather than fighting on their behalf. The Rising's promise of emancipation does not necessarily extend to those living in poverty; on the contrary, Captain Brennan would rather shoot the "slum lice" than champion them.

Aside from the direct depictions of political and economic marginalization, O'Casey also depicts other demons within the tenement house; namely, the residents themselves and the personal crutches they use. Though many characters in these plays display tremendous resilience in the face of hardship, there are others who crumble under it and rely on various means of escaping reality. In *Plough*, Mrs. Gogan's crutch appears to be death itself. She is depicted as having an obsession with death, as she says: "it always gives meself a kind o' thresspassin' joy to feel meself movin' along in a mournin' coach, an me thinkin' that, maybe, th' next funeral'll be me own, an' glad, in a quiet way, that this is somebody else's" (158). Death is so present in the tenement house that Mrs. Gogan begins almost to revere it, finding comfort in her own maudlin musings and using her obsession with death to avoid the pain of death itself.

For others, the means of avoiding pain is a more conventional one: alcohol. In *Plough*, everyone clings to the bottle, most notably Fluther and Bessie. Bessie in particular is portrayed as using alcohol to escape the pain of her son's death (190), yet both Fluther and Bessie are able to somewhat overcome their reliance on alcohol in order to help their housemates during the rising. In *Shadow* the destructive force of alcohol is similarly present in the background, as Minnie claims Tommy's father died of alcoholism (15), yet it does not feature as a directly

destructive force in the plot. In *Juno*, however, alcohol is an insurmountable demon for Captain Boyle, who embodies the negative stereotype of those living in poverty: lazy, unreliable, and alcoholic.

Captain Boyle's state can perhaps be understood as an example of the hopelessness that comes with living in political and economic marginalization. The audience learns near the end of the play that a combatant died in Boyle's arms during Easter week (147), hinting that Boyle's laziness may be the result of trauma. Boyle also seems to believe that those who live in tenements are not meant to be successful or lead good lives, such as when he asks of Mary, "what did the th'likes of her, born in a tenement house, want with readin'?" (134). He has internalized stereotypes of tenement residents as uneducated and worthless, and as such, has become a stereotype himself. In the same final moments where Boyle reveals his Easter Rising trauma, he also mumbles: "no matter what anyone may say, Irelan' sober is Irelan' free" (147), suggesting that alcoholism in Ireland is linked to and perhaps caused by sociopolitical oppression and marginalization. Bullet wounds and tuberculosis are not the only violent effects of living in a tenement house—there is also the violence of the residents' own demons, the necessary means of escape from a life of marginalization. By no means are all of the characters in these plays subject to this kind of escapism, but the ones who are serve as reminders that entrapment is not just physical but psychological.

Fintan O'Toole, writing about the idealization of the rural in Irish writing, argues that the tenement house is just the countryside in disguise, stating that "if the characteristics of rural forms in Irish writing are the pull to the past, the attraction of a knowable and self-contained community and in the theatre a tendency to super-naturalism," then "the tenement is essentially an urban version of the rural setting" (114). O'Casey's project, however, is not simply to write about urban Ireland; it is to tell the story of urban poverty amidst political violence, demonstrating how the intersection of economic and political marginalization brings destruction and desperation upon a vibrant and resilient tenement house. If this story is similar to the tales of rural Ireland, then this similarity may speak to the poverty and marginalization present in both rural and urban Ireland and show the manner in which the entrapment of poverty transcends geography. Regardless of whether or not O'Casey's tenement house is similar to a rural setting, the location evokes the specific conditions of urban poverty, allowing O'Casey to depict the violence, sickness, and demons that come with such marginalization.

O'Casey's tenement house thus occupies a contradictory role: on the one hand, it is the site of individual and communal resilience and resistance, and on the other it acts as the site of hardship and destruction that breaks those individuals and communities. This contradiction is precisely what makes O'Casey's tenement house so valuable. He does not dehumanize the tenement residents by presenting their lives as empty and pathetic, nor does he elide the horrors of tenement life to glorify urban poverty and political violence. Mrs. Gogan sums up this contradiction in *Plough* when she recounts a conversation between herself and Nora to Fluther, complaining about Nora's disparaging attitude toward tenement life:

"She's always grumblin' about havin' to live in a tenement house. 'I wouldn't like to spend me last hour in one, let alone live me life in a tenement house, says she. 'Vaults,' says she, 'that are hidin' th' dead, instead of homes that are shelterin' th' livin'; 'Many a good one, says I, 'was reared in a tenement house.'" (154)

The conflicting attitudes of Nora and Mrs. Gogan are two sides of the same coin—tenement life is vibrant and loving, and has turned out "many a good one," but it is also a trap of powerlessness. O'Casey realizes this very duality in each of his tenement plays, as they hover between comedy and drama, life and death, empowerment and entrapment.

In painting this full picture of tenement life, O'Casey indeed succeeded in bringing the tenement house into the narratives of national Irish identity. His plays now belong to the Irish canon: *Plough* and *Juno*, for example, were performed at The Abbey and The Gate last year as part of the Easter Rising commemorations. This incorporation of the tenement house into the canon can be seen as a fetishization of poverty and a voyeuristic means for middle and upper class theatre goers (though of course not all theatre goers are middle and upper class) to laugh at and to sympathize with those who lived in poverty without having to actually engage with the political issues underneath. Indeed, O'Casey's comical representations of tenement residents occasionally verge on stereotypes to be mocked. The Abbey's recent production of *Plough*, however, provides a perfect example of how, although the tenement house may now be canonical, it can still be challenging to grapple with these problems. Sean Holmes' production sought to draw connections between the urban poverty of the past and the present, dressing the characters in contemporary apparel: as Peter Crawley writes, the production put "the poverty of our era" at centre stage. Amidst commemorations that celebrate Pearse and Connolly as symbols of Irish identity, the Abbey's *Plough*

was a reminder of both the struggles of those who lived through the Rising and the hardships of today's urban poverty, all too relevant given the recent Irish recession and austerity policies. O'Casey's tenement house may then be as crucial today as it was in its own time, adding a critical component to the construction of Irish identity and bringing the songs and demons of urban poverty into the conversation. Though these plays may not be vehicles for direct political change, they can today, as in the early 20th century, prompt their viewers to question notions of the idyllic rural Ireland or the glorious fights for independence by bringing them face to face with the heart of poverty.

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McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 2017.

Editorial selection, compilation, and material  
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undergraduate students of its Department of English.

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The Channel is generously supported by the Arts Undergraduate Society, the Department of  
English Students' Association, and the Department of English.

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