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2016 Whatley Award

In memory of George Whatley, a founder and early president of the Popular Culture Association in the South, the editor and editorial board of Studies in Popular Culture annually recognize the article published in SPC that in their view best represents the scholarly values Professor Whatley sought for the organization and the study of popular culture.

The 2016 Whatley Award winner is

The Circus and Early Cinema:
Gravity, Narrative, and Machines

by

Helen Stoddert
Glasgow University

From the Editor

> "An outlaw can be defined as somebody who lives outside
> the law, beyond the law and not necessarily against it."
>
> *Hunter S. Thompson*

Popular culture has fueled a public love affair with a romantic version of an outlaw for generations, and the effects trickle throughout all kinds of entertainment. More than a thousand films incorporate "outlaw" in their title; one of the most famous is simply entitled *The Outlaw* (1943), the Howard Hughes' Western probably best known for Jane Russell's censorship-daring cleavage. In the 1970s and early '80s, artists like Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson popularized outlaw country music; Jennings sang the theme song for television series *The Dukes of Hazzard,* in which "good ol' boys" Luke and Bo Duke have "been in trouble with the law since the day they was born." Famed Gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, whose quotation defines *outlaw* for this issue, wrote about riding with outlaw bikers and gained notoriety for embracing an anti-authoritarian lifestyle. In an interesting coda to Thompson's legacy, actor Johnny Depp [who starred in *Fear and Loathing* in Las Vegas (1998), based on Thompson's novel and, over the years, has fancied himself a pirate/outlaw] paid $3 million to shoot his friend Thompson's ashes from a cannon, according to the writer's wishes. As these few examples suggest, outlaw mythology is everywhere.

When I was in high school, one of the first contemporary television series about which I wrote was *Alias Smith and Jones* (1971-1973), a Western based loosely on the popular film *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). The weekly plots revolved around the attempts of former bank and train robbers Hannibal Heyes (Pete Duel; Roger Davis) and Kid Curry (Ben Murphy) to go straight for a year, when they would be pardoned and the bounty on their heads removed. Although smooth-talking Heyes cracked safes swifter than anyone around, he did so with a twinkle in his eye, and the fast-drawing Kid could charm just about anyone. They clearly

were outlaws--their past was "against it," to use Thompson's definition of outlaws' position regarding the law—but they just as certainly wanted to become like the "good guys." As the opening voiceover reminded viewers, "Out of all the trains and banks they robbed, they never shot anyone." They were Robin Hood-esque outlaws who grew up during the 1860s and, as Heyes explains during one episode, turned outlaw only after their farms were overrun and their parents killed during the border wars preceding the Civil War; their thievery did not seem all that different from what they saw going on around them ("The Men That Corrupted Hadleyburg"). Not that the "everyone else robs banks/trains" defense is logical, but, week after week, Curry and Heyes proved that they were slightly tarnished good guys worthy of legal redemption.

The authors of this issue's articles seem to understand the idealized role of outlaws as a powerful cultural influence. Although the crimes committed by *Breaking Bad's* Walter White are far more violent and deadly than those of, say, the Duke boys or Heyes and Curry, he has clearly broken the law and fits a legal description of an outlaw. However, Paula Brown shows how White, like the televisionary outlaws of my youth, feels he has little choice but to break the law in order to survive. Brown further illustrates how even a meth maker/murderer like White can become understandable to an audience that continues to watch as the series protagonist becomes increasingly less sympathetic.

More noble or benevolent outlaws especially have captured the popular imagination and, for years at a time, television ratings. The Robin Hood myth is alive, Melissa Sartore reminds us, in *Veronica Mars*. Not only the title character but her father and friends become part of the collective social banditry evident throughout the series. Sartore further sees a link between Veronica Mars as an outlaw hero and one of her television predecessors, vampire-slayer Buffy Summers. Although Sara Raffel alludes to the moral differences between Buffy and her friends and their nemeses, in her article she more significantly analyzes Buffy's battle against "outlaw" technology, specifically the robot made in her image, the Buffybot.

Although television series continue to play a key role in our understanding or romanticism of outlaws, the study of a film series

across decades can show shifts in the ways male or female heroes and outlaws are portrayed. Darin Payne takes a close look at the Mad Max films and their representations of masculinity. He compares images of masculine film characters, such as *Die Hard's* John McClane, across films and time periods. One of the most interesting shifts in depictions of outlaws occurs in *Mad Max: Fury Road,* in which Charlize Theron's Furiosa becomes the pivotal outlaw character and Tom Hardy's Max more of a sidekick in this futuristic apocalyptic thriller.

As Steve Master and Taylor Joy Mitchell reiterate, we do not need to look only to fiction for examples of "outlaw" voices. Sports journalist Sally Jenkins may have inherited part of her writing style from her father, Dan Jenkins, one of the Texas Literary Outlaws. She may seem feminist to those who read her articles--after all, hers is one of the few female voices addressing gender issues in sports--but her stance on modern feminism situates her in opposition to long-established groups like NOW.

Whether working within the law but outside the norms established within a profession or a community or finding ways to circumvent the legal system, the fictitious or real-life protagonists of these articles are "outlaw" in some respect. They help mold popular culture and, as Hunter S. Thompson has done, force us to consider the line between legality and morality as we define outlaw.

I would be remiss not to note that this issue marks Volume 40--an achievement owing to the hard work and vision of the many editors who have shaped *Studies in Popular Culture* from the 1970s to the present. I applaud those who have come before me, and I look forward to guiding this journal into future volumes.

Talk with the editors about possible articles or book reviews at the

Popular Culture Association in the South conference

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Book Reviews

An invitation to potential reviewers and authors

Any scholar who wishes to review a book should contact the Book Reviews Editor, Clare Douglass Little, at

douglac2@erau.edu

Those whose work is unfamiliar to the editor may wish to send a CV or describe relevant reviewing experience within a discipline. Reviewers may suggest a book to be reviewed or request to be assigned one from among those sent to the editor.

Members of the Popular Culture Association in the South who have recently published a book are also invited to inform the Book Reviews Editor.

Reviews should be approximately 500-700 words and should be emailed as a Microsoft Word attachment. The contributor's surname should be in the file name. In some cases, review essays of 1,000-1,200 words may be assigned. Queries are welcome.

"No But"--Understanding Sally Jenkins' Friction with Feminism

Steve Master and Taylor Joy Mitchell

In a conversation years ago with the late, legendary college basketball coach Pat Summitt, *Washington Post* sports columnist Sally Jenkins asked Summitt if she was a feminist ("To 'Sum It Up'"). It seemed an odd question, considering Summitt's unparalleled role in the rise of women's athletics. Yet, for sports journalism scholars, Jenkins' question was compelling for another reason. What if Summitt had responded by asking, "Are you?" Much like Summitt, Jenkins has achieved success in an overwhelmingly male-dominated profession, and she has moved the needle forward for women in sports and, by extension, for women in general. Her visibility allows her to influence the way millions of readers understand gender issues in sports. Certainly no sign carrier (which would defy journalistic ethics), Jenkins has often questioned her "feminist credentials," particularly when she takes contrarian positions on issues near and dear to second-wave feminists. These positions mirror, to some degree, the historic conflict and evolution of the feminist movement in America. Considering that sports is such a fertile ground from which to grapple with feminist concerns, Jenkins should be considered a highly influential ally, whose career success and distinctive, if sometimes controversial, voice reflects the multifaceted later waves of feminism.

Heralded as one of the world's most talented sports journalists, Jenkins currently writes for the *Post*. In 2005 she was the first woman inducted into the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Hall of Fame. She worked for the iconic magazine *Sports Illustrated*, has authored twelve books, and serves as a guest analyst on sports television and radio shows. She has twice been named Associated Press's Sports Columnist of the Year, most recently in 2010, and is respected not only by colleagues and readers but those about whom she writes. Amid a high-profile sexual abuse scandal at Penn State University in 2012, an ailing Joe Paterno chose Jenkins to

conduct what was essentially his death-bed interview. When Summitt was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease, she selected Jenkins to tell her story, later described by *New York Magazine* as one of the "more crowning achievements in modern sports writing" (Leitch). Among Jenkins' more distinguishing qualities are her witty, creative writing style and her habit of practicing what journalism scholar Roy Peter Clark of the Poynter Institute tags Collateral Journalism: getting beyond the sensationalism of a major sports story and exploring it for "its higher implications, to help us get beyond the obvious, and through the secret doors into American culture." Considering these accolades and attributes, and Jenkins' standing as arguably the most prominent female voice in sports journalism, her connection to feminism presents an ideal landscape for analysis.

Based on the basic definition of feminism and her support for gender equity, Jenkins surely qualifies as a feminist, but her sports coverage aligns more closely with third- or fourth-wave feminism. Applying a wave metaphor to the large, complex feminist movement in America can be controversial, as many feminisms have existed within each wave. The metaphor also discounts pre-invasion feminists fighting oppression long before colonization and suffrage. However, the wave metaphor can be useful to reveal differences between the primary aims and tactics of each movement. After the first-wave championed voting rights, the second-wave sought to improve the social status of women, coining phrases like the "personal is political." These first two waves generally consisted of white, educated middle-class women. Third-wave feminists wanted a more inclusive community[1], and they debunked essentialist views like a universal womanhood. Beginning in the early 1990s, thanks in part to Rebecca Walker's "Becoming the Third Wave," the movement "arose from within the second wave, as opposed to after it" (Mann and Huffman). Fourth-wave feminism also grows out of and against previous waves. Like their predecessors, fourth-wave feminists focus on intersectionality and micropolitics, challenging oppression and sexism in everyday instances. Although too early to determine the specifics of the newest iteration, fourth-wave feminism is dependent on the internet (Munro). Digitally

driven, these feminists use technology to extend third-wave's call-out culture; they are body positive, trans and queer inclusive, and anti-misandry (Sollee). As the movement's aims shift, so do the various strategies used to gain gender parity. Jenkins' positions and techniques imitate these later waves. Not only does Jenkins purposefully pit herself against second-wave feminists like the National Organization of Women (NOW), she also demands a more elaborate understanding of the oppressions female athletes face.

Oppressions abound in both sports and journalism. In *Forbes'* "The Most Powerful Women in Sports," Jason Belzer reports that "the glass ceiling for women may be lower in sports than in any other industry." In January 2016, the Buffalo Bills hired Kathryn Smith--the NFL's first female coach in its 100-year history, and in August 2015, the San Antonio Spurs hired six-time WNBA All-Star Becky Hammon as the NBA's first female assistant coach (Davis). Approximately one-third of scholastic and college athletes are women, and the percentage of disparity is far greater on the professional level ("Empowering Women"). When women do get paid to play sports, gaps in pay equity are astonishing; the women's $2 million prize for the World Cup pales in comparison to the men's $9 million prize (Close). The pay gap could be attributed to factors besides blatant sexism: women still simply get paid less than men in all industries; droves of fans do not watch female sports, with tennis and gymnastics being the exceptions; female athletes do not garner the same corporate sponsorships; and major media outlets do not cover female sports. According to Sarah Laskow's "The Olympics are the Closest to Coverage Parity Female Athletes Get," media covers "women in sports" less than 5% of total time, and Laskow claims that number is "generous." Less media coverage of female athletes is not surprising considering that journalism is dominated by men: according to the American Society of News Editors 2013 consensus, men make up two-thirds of all newsroom positions: essentially the same gender breakdown in scholastic and collegiate sports (Joyce).

These pitiful statistics are rooted in the deeply embedded cultural assumptions that males, and therefore male sports, are dominant, which makes them more entertaining and, thus, more worthy

of financial backing and loyal fans. In *Gendering Bodies*, Sara Crawley, Lara Fowley, and Constance Shenan explain how sports grows out of and reinforces cultural values, acting as a prime "site for constructing meanings about bodies" that are constantly "gendered, or encouraged to participate in (heterosexual) gender conformity" (56, xiii). Divisions between men's and women's sports reinforce bodily differences, and the sports industry continues to devalue women's bodies in favor of the elite men or men's team sports and their fan base. Ticket price differences between the women's and men's NCAA's Final Four reflect this favoritism: a fan could shell out $570 per guest for the 2017 NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four championship game versus $75 per guest to watch all three Women's Basketball Final Four games ("Championship Tickets"). The staggering difference can also be attributed to the way the media covers men's sports; the women's Final Four is no less exciting than the men's, but without the media hoopla, viewers assume it is. Media coverage, or lackluster coverage, undoubtedly changes the perception of gendered sports. If more media time is devoted to women's sports, some goals that ushered Title IX through Congress four decades ago might be realized.

Because Jenkins exists at the nexus of these two very complex sites for gender studies--sports and media -- her feminist allegiances need to be recognized. The media in general, and sports journalism in particular, is failing women. Sports, as declared by Sadie Stein's *Jezebel* article, continues to be "one of feminists' stickiest subjects." Media, per the Women's Media Center (WMC), is having a "crisis of representation" ("The Problem"). WMC presented bleak data for its third annual Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2013 report. Newsrooms contain only 36.3 women, down from 1999 data ("The Status of Women"). To top those dismal numbers, the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports assigned sports journalism an "F" for gender representation in columnist and editors in 2014. Women make up 10% of the industry and must daily encounter blatant and subtle sexism such as the Bleacher Report's hottest female reporters, harassment from fans, athletes, and colleagues, and incredibly high barriers to entry for

women or minorities (Lapchick). In sum, Jenkins is a "rare breed" with a "uniquely difficult beat" (Morrison).

Why She is Clearly Feminist

More than any sports journalist, Jenkins has passionately high-lighted the advances--and inequities--connected to women's sports. A fierce defender of Title IX, she described the law as "the real Equal Rights Amendment," arguing "no other piece of social leg-islation in the last 50 years has had a more profound redistributing effect in American society" ("Title IX Opponents"). In a pointed *Post* column commemorating the 30th anniversary of the law, she describes its impact on women as a "seismic shift from the decora-tive to the active" and acknowledged it as a "dirty little secret" that, despite its positive impact, has never been fully enforced due to the sanctity of college football. In the column's crescendo, she wrote

> If you doubt Title IX is a good and needed law, sim-ply ask yourself what would happen if it were gutted or repealed. How many scholarships and resources would Division I athletic directors devote to women's sports? The answer is, the Connecticut women's basketball team would be holding bake sales to buy uniforms. ("Title IX Opponents")

While Jenkins speaks to the 600% increase in women's sports since Title IX's enactment, the fact that she has had to repeatedly defend the law proves gender equity in sports is scarce.

Beyond defending Title IX, Jenkins has blistered network tele-vision for its scant coverage of women's sports. Although quick to credit a few male newspaper colleagues for consistently covering the women's Final Four, Jenkins has also taken to task the many who ignore the signature women's event. In her 2007 column on the Rutgers-Don Imus controversy, Jenkins decried the irony of the widespread media attention finally being paid to women's bas-ketball. If Imus, a longtime radio talk show host, had not referred to Rutgers players as "nappy-headed hos," the media would have

continued its scant coverage. Jenkins reminded readers that "Some of the male sports columnists who weighed in this week annually neglect the women's Final Four, and most of them failed to witness a single game in which Rutgers played" ("A Needed Conversation"). In a 2010 column, she again exposed broadcasters like ESPN *SportsCenter* that devoted barely 1.5% of air time to women's sports over a 20-year period from 1989 to 2009 ("On Television"). While conceding that such editorial decisions are made using data and focus groups and that even women do not watch women's sports in "huge numbers," Jenkins argues, "it's difficult for any sports to develop a connection with viewers when no one sees their replays, hears their echoes, gets to know their players" ("On Television"). Furthermore,

> By failing to respond to cultural shifts and narrowing their coverage, [sports highlights producers] risk boring us. Market forces are one thing; poor editorial choices based on stubborn entrenchment is another. Their only obligation is to seek to expand the sports audience, not contract it by deprivation. ("On Television")

Her declarations prove journalism's irresponsibility to present women as equals.

Beyond using her columns to express entrenched cultural assumptions, Jenkins often reports on the gendered ways sports emphasize bodies. She did so with her piece on Mo'ne Davis, a Little League baseball sensation who, in 2014, "caused some powerful men to think in a different way about sport" ("Mo'ne Davis"). Jenkins accurately states that the only reason Davis "commanded record ESPN ratings" was because those men in charge of the industry "deemed her worthy" and "unrepulsive enough" ("Mo'ne Davis"). Jenkins' unrepulsive comment might be read as outlandish, but when compared to Fox News' council on whether the 2016 Olympians should wear makeup when accepting their medals, Jenkins' analysis is fitting. Fox News commentators claimed the athletes needed to be physically fit and adhere to culturally acceptable definitions of beauty in order to get a fan base: "When you look like a washed-out rag, no one's gonna support you" (qtd. in Pai).

By noting how male sportscasters highlight Davis' pleasing physical features, Jenkins commentary reminds readers that the young, black athlete is in a triple or even quadruple bind. She will have to overcome age, gender, beauty, and racial biases. Jenkins predicts, with anger and regret, that Davis "can't dream as big as the boys she beat" because of media coverage decisions--made mostly by male executives ("Mo'ne Davis"). As soon as Davis' Little League spotlight fades, she will go back to fighting misconceptions about "muscle gaps." Using data from the University of Minnesota's Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport, Jenkins censures the "relentless focus" on the arbitrary gendered binary that neglects a reality in which women regularly outperform men ("Mo'ne Davis"). Privileging masculinity and "muscle ignores that great performance is as much about head and heart and it perpetuates artificial barriers to women's achievements and improvements, such as red tees and three-set tennis matches" ("Mo'ne Davis").

The stories Jenkins tells of her own career arc, starting as one of the few woman sports writers in the early 1980s, illustrate the battles she fought to survive in a male-dominated profession while at the same time pushing, often in vain, for better coverage of women's sports. She points out that it "wasn't OK to be different" when she started as a sports writer, and she once considered it "a compliment if a reader said: 'I just read that story and I didn't even realize until afterward a woman wrote it" (qtd. in Hoffarth, "Title IX"). In the offices of *Sports Illustrated*, she recalls having to fight to feature Olympic track and field gold medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersee, because running a story on Joyner-Kersee was "somehow depriving the male athlete of space . . . . It's a very unconscious bias but very persistent and still needs to be addressed" (qtd. in Hoffarth, "The Sports Media"). Combined with her persistence in the face of these struggles, Jenkins' consistent recognition of inequities in sports, championing of Title IX, and unabashed reporting would lead readers to believe that Jenkins would be hailed as a traditional feminist. However, Jenkins strategically situates herself against certain feminists.

At Odds with NOW

One of the reasons Jenkins finds herself at odds with second-wave feminism is her tendency to take--and skillfully argue--positions that contrast sharply with mainstream opinion on sports issues. Influenced by her father, sports journalist Dan Jenkins, Jenkins often takes a contrarian approach with her analysis. "My dad taught me this," Jenkins said in an interview with writer Jerry Barca: "You take the prevailing attitude, you turn it upside down and you ask yourself if the opposite point of view is smarter. And, a lot of times it is" (Barca). For example, she has fiercely defended athletes' rights to use performance-enhancing drugs ("Want to End"). She sprung to the defense of Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps after his notorious bong hit incident, remarking that 42% of Americans had "gotten sweetly baked on hay" in their lifetime ("We Shouldn't Be Surprised"). Flashing her characteristic wit, she certainly challenged conventional orthodoxy at the Sochi, Russia, Olympics with her audacious (but serious) claim that figure skaters are superior athletes to the ice hockey players: "Tell a hockey player to jump four feet off the ice and whirl four times, then land on one leg--backwards--on a blade an eighth of an inch wide" ("Figure Skating"). While this approach makes her columns fascinating to read and keeps her comments section lively, it often places her at odds with typical views and iconic figures.

A particularly compelling example of Jenkins' contrarian approach was her insistence that Imus not be removed from the airwaves after his racially-charged slur about the Rutgers basketball players. Jenkins suggested that silencing Imus would constitute "undue harshness" and would waste an opportunity for a necessary conversation ("A Needed Conversation"). Calling for removal seemed justified. When Imus compared the "nappy headed" players to those on the Tennessee team, he equated ugliness with blackness, and then he sexualized the players by calling them "hos." His comment reflects the violent aspects of a white patriarchal society: the over-sexualization of black bodies stems from slavery and extends into the "disproportionate rates of rape, sexual assault and violence against women of color" ("Nappy Headed Hoes"). The day after Imus' "ho" comment went viral, the Feminist Majority

Foundation sprang into action, joining a rally at the Rutgers' Douglass campus and sending out more than 100,000 emails demanding Imus' sacking ("Feminist News"). NOW started the "Dump Don" campaign (C. Jenkins). Even though Imus went on Al Sharpton's show to apologize, Sharpton joined with NOW and others to appeal for Imus' firing (Faber). The national stage was set for a showdown, with a large swath of the American public on par with Imus' removal. Jenkins' position conflicted with responses from the National Association of Black Journalists, national companies (eight pulled advertising spots), and sign-carrying feminists (Johnson).

In her article, Jenkins explains that firing Imus would simply reiterate the unnecessary "harsh vengeance." Instead, Jenkins wants Imus to become Rutgers' biggest fan, "sit[ting] . . . in the front row wearing a sweat shirt with a big letter R on it at every home game" ("A Needed Conversation"). Jenkins suggests shifting the conversation about Imus' vitriol to him "us[ing] his microphone to promote and defend a deserving sport," one that, as she reminds readers, gets terribly scant media attention ("A Needed Conversation"). She wanted Imus to get to know the individual players and replace blanket generalities of sexism and racism. Here, her contrarian approach requires patience and thought; it goes against the second-wave feminist urge to fire Imus while simultaneously using traditional feminist techniques like consciousness-raising to get a conversation started. She wanted Imus to actually listen to the players--this listening remains a key component of third-wave feminists. In "Feminism Now: What the Third Wave is Really About," Kelsey Lueptow ranks listening as one of the five elements of the feminist movement; for Lueptow, "One of the most important and underrated goals of feminism is to listen to the cultural messages bombarding us." Jenkins' call for Imus to stay on air supports this goal.

While the Imus controversy illustrates Jenkins' contentious relationship with second-wave feminists, she has often posited questions about her own "feminist credentials" ("Tebow's"). On 28 January 2016, Jenkins tweeted that she was a "'No but' feminist" in response to a *Post* online survey asking "What type of feminist (or anti-feminist) are you?" (@sallyjenx). The survey's categories

range from "Hell, yeah" to "Certainly not" feminist. The "No but" group of responders is "distinguished by the fact that none of them identifies as a feminist . . . . But . . . they largely support progressive policy positions . . . [and] view feminism as optimistic and empowering." This group's views directly correspond with Jenkins' stated stance on feminism: her refusal to be a sign carrier coupled with her championing of policies like Title IX. The survey itself--its title, section, and responses--reveals the contemporary, conflicted thoughts about feminism and the emergence of new waves of feminism that work to reconcile issues surrounding the second-wave feminism.

One issue Jenkins addresses is that the second-wave feminist movement, what she calls the "feminist mainstream," appears to act as a monolithic movement headed by NOW. This condemnation is more than Jenkins being contrarian for contrarians' sake; NOW does seem to maintain a singular focus on reproductive rights, ignoring many other equity concerns. However, this was not always NOW's perception. In 1966, Betty Friedan gathered the disgruntled cohorts of the Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women in her DC hotel; she scribbled NOW on a napkin, and the women who attended this meeting vowed to change the glacier movement of sex equality ("Founding"). NOW was nimble in the beginning; it formed seven basic task forces. It organized, petitioned, marched, and got results. It pushed through the Equal Rights Amendment and ceased segregated "Help Wanted" advertisements ("Highlights"). Nevertheless, 60 years later, Jenkins refers to the organization as one built on "group-think, elitism, and condescension" ("Tebow's").

Jenkins is not the first to attack NOW. Dissident feminist and author of *Sexual Personae* Camille Paglia consistently comments on its group-thinking ("Has Feminism Gone"). Author and political activist Barbara Ehrenreich distanced herself from the organization during President Clinton's sexual assault cases (Ehrenreich). Other feminists have long criticized NOW for its focus on white, middle-class, or otherwise privileged positions. Thirty-five years ago, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzáldua published *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* in response to

a sustained neglect of theories and practices of the feminisms of women of color. Other sign-carrying feminists have also commented on what seems like NOW's condescension of men. Karen De-Crow, a former NOW president, became skeptical of the group's stance on men's rights; while never disavowing her NOW roots, DeCrow often acted as legal counsel in paternity cases (Young). Like Jenkins, these women have all found fault with some aspect of the second-wave's flagship organization.

Aligned with Later Waves

Coupled with her derision of NOW, Jenkins' contrarian journalistic style reveals her alliance with third- or fourth-wave feminists. Three columns in particular illustrate this: her defense of Olympic athletes posing nude in national magazines, her argument that sports culture condones assaults on women, and her support of Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow's pro-life Super Bowl advertisement.

In her August 2000 article "Female Athlete's New Clothes are Not What Some Think," Jenkins argues that the recent splurge of nude photographs reflects a much needed "redefinition" of feminism. Jenkins reviews the feminist response to four instances of female athletes appearing in various states of semi-undress in *Sports Illustrated, Esquire,* and *Women's Sports & Fitness.* The Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) condemned the athletes' actions, even though there was not a "single, actual, verifiable nipple in sight" ("Female Athlete's"). Then-executive director Donna Lopiano crafted the WSF's hardline response: "Any exposure in a sports magazine that minimizes athletic achievement and skill and emphasizes the female athlete as a sex object is insulting and degrading" (qtd. in O'Keefe). Lopiano stresses the consistent objectification of women within advertisement and hints at the problematic sexualization of a specific group of athletes gaining more attention and power. The 2000 Olympic games were the first time that women could "compete in the same number of team sports as men" (O'Keefe), and, according to the International Olympic

Committee, women comprised 42% of competing athletes; they set 23 out of 39 world records, and American women won 40% of the medals (Holste). The more women who compete more successfully in a traditionally masculine arena, the bigger threat they pose. This success is one reason why these women were not depicted in action like their male counterparts; rather, their media images oscillated from hyper-feminization to hyper-sexualization, from clean-cut sorority girls to provocatively-posed nudes. Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Linda Steiner claimed the nude photos "diminish" the athlete's power and strength by "putting them in their sexual place" (qtd. O'Keefe). The female athletes are sold to the public as wives and mothers to stave off fears of homosexuality, as beauty queens not powerhouses, or as portion and parcel of a full human in order to dehumanize or strip them of a full identity (Holste). For certain feminists then, the photographs continued to connect sex and sport because the men in American media and the sports industry would gain financially from this objectification. Jenkins, on the other hand, recognizes that these are the facts for female athletes, so she presents alternative ways to view these photos.

Like other third-wave feminists, Jenkins positions herself against the "self-appointed moralists and feminist guardians" and wants to "eschew victimization" and find other ways to define beauty (Rampton). Some third-wave feminists would suggest that athletes gain a sense of empowerment by stripping down and selling the somewhat explicit images of their bodies. For instance, after the 1996 Olympics, male athletes were also posing nude and "photographers, perhaps for the first time, were using the same kinds of shots and lighting techniques when photographing male and female athletes" (Heywood and Dworkin 27). This "equal-opportunity sexploitation" provided any viewer--not just a white-male gaze--with images that challenged old dichotomies and reinforced the notion that although athletes' bodies were available for public consumption, the athletes had a say in that transaction. Dominque Dawes, the president-elect of WSF in 2004 and a gold medalist member of the 1996 U.S. gymnastics team, states that "any other female athlete had earned the right to choose where and how they

appeared in the media" (qtd. in Drape). For Dawes and other athletes, this perspective shift is about choice. Corralie Simmons, 2000 Olympic silver medal water polo winner, said she felt that women in sports had increased the positive images of women: "I think it's become better because you can represent yourself any way that you want at this point" (qtd. in Drape). Dawes clarifies that "It's a personal choice, and if an athlete wants to portray herself in a certain light, it's up to her" (qtd. in Drape). Adding women's choice into the equation of what happens to their bodies mimics certain changes in feminism regarding nudity and pornography. Jenkins' analysis reflects more contemporary feminist perspectives, as she situates these photos in terms of sexuality, pornography, and the historical debate between nude and naked.

Even those who Jenkins calls "creaking, old-school feminists" have long deliberated feminism's relationship to pornography ("Female Athlete's"). The 1980s witnessed heated debates between the anti-porn feminist movement, which wanted to ban the production of pornography, and the liberal feminists, who viewed industry censorship as dangerous. In 1985, Betty Friedan's question "Is One Woman's Sensuality Another Woman's Pornography?" was red lettered on the April cover of *Ms.* magazine, NOW's leading print publication. Anti-porn feminists like Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin argue that, beyond a causal link, pornography is the reason women are objectified. Pornography makes women's bodies objects, available for men's consumption; pornography reifies the connection between violence and women, as it's easier to incur violence on an object (Papadaki). Most anti-porn feminists want to censor the whole industry because it acts as an "apparatus" of a patriarchal society, created by and aimed at men, and it forces women to engage in heterosexual "acts that perpetuate ideas about male domination" (Levine). Unlike the anti-porn movement, the pro-porn feminists do not "blame" pornography for problems that arise in a patriarchal society; rather, they perceive porn as an extension of a society that institutionalizes degrading policies against women. Pro-porn feminists want to remove the shame levied on those involved in porn and highlight how the "industry . . . provides them with financial stability and the opportunity to explore

their sexuality" (Levine). Liberal feminists would stress the act of choosing what a woman does with her own body, "rather than . . . the content of any choice" (McElroy). Liberal and pro-sex feminists, consisting of academics and sex workers alike, express concerns over censorship and how it is usually used against the subjugated. Pro-sex feminists go even further than commending choice; they see it as beneficial to women. When third-wave feminists rethink the pornography debate, they tend to focus on sex positivity, gender equality, and sexual freedom. R. Claire Snyder-Hall contends in "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'" that "third-wave feminism respects the right of women to decide for themselves how to negotiate the often contradictory desires for both gender equality and sexual pleasure." This view is more than the liberal feminists' endorsement of choice and different from the pro-sex championing of pornography; it should be recognized as third-wave feminists' "deep respect for pluralism and self-determination" (Snyder-Hall). This respect for choice underscores Jenkins' decade-old argument that Olympian swimmer Jenny Thompson made a choice about her body, one that should be respected.

In her article, Jenkins posits a different angle than the hardline feminist response to the nudity. She begins by claiming she is currently naked, "waiting for the schoolmarms and the soreheads and the Robespierres to haul me off to the thought police at any second" ("Female Athlete's"). To solidify this rhetorical effect, she says she stands in solidarity with the athletes who stripped down against the "sports prudes and creaking, old-school feminists" ("Female Athlete's"). The conflation of prudes, soreheads, and schoolmarms is logical, but Jenkins' connection between the Robespierres and old-school feminists suggests that second-wave feminists use force to impose loyalty to a cause the way Maximilien Robespierre did during the French Revolution. For Jenkins, Thompson's disrobing was a "pinup for subversion, not sex" ("Female Athlete's"). Jenkins' penchant for subversives extends a long way back, particularly to her admiration for Summitt. While third-wave feminists do not necessarily equate themselves with subversives, they do recognize the need for feminism to shift and

try to do so from within the movement. Jenkins' assertion that "feminist guardians . . . misread the photograph" marks her as a third-wave feminist ("Female Athlete's"). Jenkins wants readers to recognize the distinction between Thompson baring her breast and her muscles: "What we are seeing firsthand is a redefinition of femininity into something more complicated and brawny--and it's high time" ("Female Athlete's"). Jenkins' redefinition spotlights what she viewed as a monolithic second-wave feminist response to the nude photos, calling attention to particular biases and presenting an intricate response to nudity in sport.

Ten years later, Jenkins again engaged in the practices of call-out culture when she wrote about the connections between sex and sport, most notably when she reviewed three tragic sports stories that broke in spring 2010. Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger was accused of raping a woman in the restroom of a Georgia bar. New York Giants Hall of Fame linebacker Lawrence Taylor was charged with the third degree rape of a 16-year-old, and a University of Virginia lacrosse player, George Huguely, was charged in the beating death of his girlfriend, a fellow U. Va. lacrosse player. Jenkins writes that the murderer's teammates likely knew of the danger he presented to his girlfriend; yet, their "fraternal silence" protected him. Jenkins asks, "Is there something in our sports culture that condones these attacks?" ("George"). More provokingly, she wondered whether male athletes, in general, pose a threat to women: "It's a difficult, even upsetting, question because it risks demonizing scores of decent, guiltless men. But we've got to ask it, because there's something going on here, a disturbing association" ("George"). In an interview with Steve Master, Jenkins admits that the column drew extensive criticism from feminists, mainly for her conclusion that women are helpless to address this problem: "The truth is, women can't do anything about this problem. Men are the only ones who can change it--by taking responsibility for their locker room culture, and the behavior and language of their teammates" ("George"). Second-wave feminist criticism would have stemmed from Jenkins' claim that "women can't do anything" to help correct the unequal gender dynamics that consistently occur in the male-dominated sports industry.

Gender dynamics and how to approach male privilege have historically been a source of tension in feminist movements. Male privilege in a patriarchal society might be invisible for some, but it exists. As evidence, contemporary feminists point to wage discrepancies, representation in politics and national corporations, or the fact that one-in-five U.S. women has been raped or experienced sexual assault. Feminists have treated this privilege in a variety of ways. First-wave feminists ignited the idea that women have the potential to contribute to society just as much, if not more than, men currently did; Susan B. Anthony's slogan, adopted by first-wave feminists, was "Men, their rights and nothing more! Women, their rights and nothing less!" Decades later, second-wave feminists carved out women-only spaces and conducted consciousness-raising sessions, with the focus strictly on women's experiences. Responding to a host of oppressions, second-wave feminists made the personal political and focused on the unequal power afforded to men. Some radical feminists fought for a matriarchy, and others, like Robin Morgan, have been pigeonholed as man-haters for struggling for sisterhood (Freedman). Less radical feminists used individual men in positions of power (e.g., employer, husband) as a springboard to critique institutions--from the workplace to the sports-media complex (Freedman). Unlike separatist feminists who believed that the inclusion of men in feminist politics would curb any social change, third- and fourth-wave feminists realize the need for men to join in the cause for equality (Rampton). In her 2014 United Nations speech introducing the HeForShe campaign, *Harry Potter* star Emma Watson implored men to fight gender equality: "If men don't have to be aggressive in order to be accepted, women won't feel compelled to be submissive. If men don't have to control, women won't have to be controlled" ("Emma"). Watson imparts how patriarchy can be equally detrimental to men who adopt carefully, cultural-constructed notions of masculinity--including the violence Jenkins condemns. The criticism against the HeforShe campaign--that it reinforces gender binaries and white privilege--proves that third- and fourth-wave feminists work in different ways to understand the "larger cultural and social picture that conditions masculinities, male anxieties and

behavior and shapes men's sexual and familiar relationships with women" (Aston 79). Third-wave feminist bell hooks recognized that excluding men from the fight would reflect the sexist contradiction feminism in general wishes to eradicate. Similarly, Jenkins pleads that men address locker-room culture and fix the problem of violence against women inherent in sport culture.

Jenkins uses third-wave tactics to dissect the internalization of oppressive structures--another aspect of third-wave, post-structuralist feminism. Relying on French social thinkers like Michel Foucault who theorize about the effects of oppressive hegemonic power structures, those feminists assert that identities are constructed based on language, discourse, and culture practices (Mann and Huffman). By analyzing the power structure of the sports industry and male-dominated cultural sub-groups like fraternities, Jenkins wonders if men involved in sports have internalized the toxic aspects of a traditional masculine identity. According to Harvey Mansfield's *Manliness*, dominant masculine attributes include power/strength, rationality, heterosexuality, risk-taking, dominance, leadership, control, and repression of emotions (23). These attributes, particularly the repression of emotion, are constantly played out in the sports industry, as in all fraternity cultures. Thus, when Jenkins questions if something in the lacrosse culture led to the murder of Yeardley Love, the answer is a resounding yes. To be successful, a player needs to be loyal, physically fit, competitive, poised, and aggressive.

Whether athletes come to their sport culture with these hypermasculine tendencies or develop them within the all-male group, they directly relate to sexual aggression and the subordination and sexualization of women. Because these groups value power and aggression, anything less is deemed feminine, reinforcing notions that women are weak, easily controlled, and commodifiable. The loyalty needed to score on the field keeps players from ratting out each other off of the field. These gendered tendencies reverberate throughout the culture and beyond because athletes wield enormous economic power--like million-dollar university budgets. Sports editor for *The Nation* Dave Zirin calls college athletes "deified entitled campus leaders who have a tremendous amount of

influence on their communities." For example, as soon as the Missouri football team joined student protests, the university president resigned (Glesson). This power correlates with the statistics: even though "one in three college assaults [is] committed by athletes," conviction rates hover around 30% (Benedict and Keteyian). As the Department of Education investigates more than 160 higher education institutions for sexual violence allegations, charges are hardly ever imposed on the schools, the athletic program, or the athlete (Benedict and Keteyian). The perceived lack of consequences becomes a reality for many athletes. Sexual violence does not happen in a vacuum; if schools and the sports industry continue to avoid charging assailants and silencing victims, these all-male groups will remain breeding grounds for sexual aggression. Thus, when Jenkins exclaims that men need to do something about locker-room culture, she wants men to recognize how they internalize the oppressive aspects of an industry that values violence and aggression. Here, as in other articles, Jenkins exposes another angle, this time standing up against a feminism that excludes men.

In 2014, Jenkins took another stand against NOW when it demanded to remove a pro-life, Super Bowl television ad featuring Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Tim Tebow and his mother. In "Tebow's Super Bowl Ad Isn't Intolerant; Its Critic Are," she argues that Tebow's "Celebrate Family, Celebrate Life" commercial proves he is one of the better things to happen to sports--far better than "Jim McMahon dropping his pants . . . in response to a question." Fully cognizant of how her argument will be received by second-wave feminists, Jenkins leads with a pre-emptive strike: "I'll spit this out quickly, before the armies of feminism try to gag me and strap electrodes to my forehead: Tim Tebow is one of the better things to happen to young women in some time" ("Tebow's"). Connecting feminism to armies and torture tactics reinforces the image of militant, angry feminists. Anti-feminists have promulgated this image as far back as the suffrage fight (Wade). Political cartoons depicted first-wave feminists as manly, ugly, angry, emasculating, negligent mothers, who forced domestic duties on subservient husbands (Wade). The anti-feminist campaign championed this image throughout subsequent waves of feminism, leading to a

current desire to disassociate from feminism. Results from a 2013 HuffPost/YouGov poll reveals that while more than 80% of respondents believe "men and women should be social, political, and economic equals," only 21% considered themselves feminist ("Top Lines"). The confounding contradiction between those supporting feminism's main goal but avoiding the label can be partly blamed on anti-feminist campaigns. Residing in positions of power and privilege, anti-feminists resist the movement to upend oppressive forces that benefit them. However, there are other causes for the disconnect. These include feminism's ineffective public messaging and, Jenkins' main objection to NOW, the seemingly "lockstep" thinking of second-wave feminists.

As a journalist, Jenkins erects NOW as a foil because she views the organization as being singularly and militantly focused on reproductive rights. This focus presents NOW as suppressing more and varied concerns and keeping people from considering a wider scope of opinions, something Jenkins has deplored in other organizations and industries. Similar to her reasoning to keep Imus on the airwaves, Jenkins champions the Tebow ad because it can invite viewers to "think more deeply about the issues" ("Tebow's"). For Jenkins, NOW's response to pull the ad suggests that the organization is more pro-abortion than pro-choice: Tebow's mother exercised her freedom of choice when her doctor suggested she undergo an abortion after she contracted a tropical ailment on a Christian mission in the Philippines. Jenkins levels blame at NOW for clamoring about the 30-second pro-life ad and not making a fuss over other ads that show "women in bikinis selling beer" ("Tebow's"). Because of NOW's uproar over the ad, Jenkins can degrade the organization for its public focus on reproductive rights and not on other sexist or oppressive ads. Jenkins' assessment aligns with younger feminists' reluctance to join NOW or, as Jenkins calls it, the "National Organization of Fewer and Fewer Women All the Time" ("Tebow's").

Jenkins' basic argument that NOW is intolerant and militant works well for her journalism and her sports-audience, but it also glosses over some intricacies about the controversy--things that third-wave feminists would push to analyze. Jenkins slyly mentions

that the ad was paid for by Focus on the Family, and she cites CBS's right to broadcast whatever advertisements it wants as a privately-owned corporation. This tacitly undermines the real reasons feminist organizations, NOW being only one, campaigned against the ad. According to Jehmu Greene, president of the New York-based Women's Media Center, protest over the ad was actually spurned by the conservative group's malignant anti-equality agenda and CBS's hypocritical policy to air this controversial ad but reject others by left-of-center organizations--MoveOn.org, PeTA, and the United Church of Christ ("Tebow Super Bowl"). Jenkins' reference to Focus on the Family does mention that the "group's former spokesman, James Dobson, says loathsome things about gays," but she does not connect NOW with this critique or the myriad problems surrounding the privilege of privately-owned media corporations ("Tebow's"). Jenkins does begin to remind readers that "abortion doesn't just involve the serious issues of life, but of potential lives," a move suggesting she might to do the difficult work of dismantling the privilege associated with choice, but then she quickly derides NOW for its condemnation of the ad and releases CBS from any responsibility ("Tebow's"). Jenkins' journalistic skill keeps the article moving and focused on deriding NOW. Using NOW as a foil, Jenkins builds on her repertoire with her readership; she ends the article with the implication that NOW's request to pull the ad suggests that "we as a Super Bowl audience are too stupid or too disinterested to handle [such weighty issues] on game day" ("Tebow's"). Cleverly, Jenkins moves from the first-person to the second, and the "we" unties the author and audience against NOW in an exercise that begins to examine what choice means. When fully exercised, this analysis echoes legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw's feminist notion of instersectionality. If Jenkins could get her readers to consider how gender, race, class, privilege, and power play out in pro-choice matters, then they could apply this analysis to the same intersections fostered by the sports industry.

Despite Jenkins' passionate arguments on issues concerning gender equality--and many other sports topics--she would most likely be bemused by a serious academic study of her relationship to feminism. Given that sarcasm and self-deprecating wit

are hallmarks of her journalism, she might enjoy the irony that her puckish jabs at early-wave feminism prompted a close inspection of her place in the movement. It is also fair to argue that, although her differences with second-wave feminism are real, the provocative contrasts she creates are as much for journalistic utility as any genuine desire to create dust-ups with feminist icons. After all, when addressing a mainstream audience not necessarily schooled in feminist history, Jenkins cannot effectively defend changes in the feminist movement (third wave and later) without reminding readers of its previous incarnation--even if "creaking old school feminists" might not be the most even-handed representation. However, even if second-wavers provide Jenkins with a convenient, pliable foil, few, if any, would ever doubt her commitment to the advancement of women in society. On this accord, it is useful to end this article as it began--Jenkins' conversations with Pat Summitt about gender and sports. During this project, Summitt passed away on 28 June 2016, after a five-year battle with early-onset Alzheimer's disease. A tragic loss to the sports world, her death was devastatingly personal for Jenkins. She wrote three books with Summitt, and Jenkins described her as "her closest friend." Jenkins respected a great many things about her friend--one of which, to be sure, was the role Summitt played in changing the way the world viewed female athletes and how those athletes viewed themselves. This is a common thread in Jenkins' books with Summitt and paints Summitt, if not as a "sign-carrier," then certainly as a stealth force--and a powerful one--in the women's movement. Equally common themes in Jenkins' Summitt narratives are nuance and contradiction. After all, what could be more nuanced or contradictory, from a feminism perspective, than Summitt, who took pride in being a Southern lady, who cooked dinner every night for her family, all the while drastically changing the world of sports for women?

This nuance and contradiction directly compares with third- and fourth-wave feminist movements, seen at work during and after the 21 January 2017 Women's March. What started as a Facebook status update from a Hawaiian woman launched into a protest attended by 3.7 million across the globe. The protest, like

many aspects of the feminist movement, has endured much resentment, particularly from women of color, transwomen, sex workers, and pro-life feminists who viewed it as a largely cis-gendered, able-bodied, white-privileged protest, one that initially co-opted its name from the 1997 Million Women March. Many of these Women's March protestors did not participate in previous Black Lives Matter events. Other concerns included the perceived second-wave organizers' naïveté regarding third- or fourth-wave feminists' focus on intersectionality. One illustration of this was when the organizers of the Women's March in the tiny, predominantly white beachside town of New Smyrna Beach, Florida, banned the word *intersectionality* from signs or chants. Other banned terms included *Fascism, Trump,* and *Republicans* ("Women's March"). Regardless, these words, particularly intersectionality, were chanted all over the nation and painted on countless signs by a range of feminists. This small example shows that there is much work to be done in the feminist movement, but what seems like messy in-fighting is actually progress and reflects Jenkins' contrarian thinking--turning prevailing attitudes on their head and having difficult, nimble conversations with the opposing view. Jenkins' fraught relationship with second-wave feminists asks readers to move beyond a lock-step reaction that no longer serves today's far more inclusive, intersectional feminist landscape.

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Notes

1. For more information on third-wave feminism, see Kinser. Third-wave feminism consists of

> a current era political body whose constituents practice a multiplicity of feminist ideologies and praxes while generally sharing the following characteristics: (1) They came to young adulthood as feminists; (2) They practice feminism in a schizophrenic cultural milieu which on one side grants that they have a right to improved opportunities, resources, and legislative support, and on the other side resists their politics which enable to them to lay claim to, embody, and hold onto same; (3) They embrace pluralistic thinking within feminism and work to undermine narrow visions of feminism and their consequent confinements, through in large part the

significantly more prominent voice of 6 women of color and global feminism; (4) They live feminism in constant tension with postfeminism, though such tension often goes unnoticed as such." (Kinser 133)

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Buffy the Vampire Slayer:
Technology, Mysticism, and the Constructed Body

Sara Raffel

Despite its focus on the supernatural and mystical, the characters in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) employ and battle against advanced technology. The technology available to the general population within the show's world remains consistent with the late 1990s to early 2000s setting; titular character Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar), for example, carries a beeper in case anyone needs to alert her of impending doom. However, creator Joss Whedon plays with the dangers and dreams of advanced technology to a surprising degree on a series focused on magic and mythos. Whedon presents technology both on its own and combined with mystical forces, writing plots that include a range of enemies adeptly keyed to the specific dystopian apprehensions about technology in the 1990s.

However, *Buffy* also has implications for the portrayal of female heroism. Whedon's show first aired in 1997 and was integral in the creation of a new heroine archetype. TV networks, focused on answering "women's growing discontent and dismay at their treatment in the media" (Magoulick 731), created shows designed to promote the 1990s brand of "girl power." Bolstered by other strong female characters like Xena (*Xena: Warrior Princess*, 1995-2001), Nikita (*La Femme Nikita*, 1997-2001), and Sydney Bristow (*Alias*, 2001-2006), Buffy thus transformed the female hero archetype into something at once seen as empowering to women, while still being palatable to a male audience. This archetype, one that combines the use of magic and technology to create a female hero who can be at once petite and dangerous, still exists today.

Whedon's exploration of the ideological similarities between magic and technology is not unique to *Buffy*. Throughout his oeuvre as a writer and director, Whedon continues his exploration of the convergence of magic and technology in films like *The Cabin*

in the Woods (Drew Goddard, 2012). In *Cabin*, a group of college students go on a weekend trip to the forest that is actually a ruse to sacrifice them to the Ancient Ones, who will destroy the world if the sacrifice is not conducted properly. The intersection of science and magic occurs in the underground lab below the cabin, where a group of scientists houses famous monsters from across the horror genre to unleash on the unsuspecting students.

Cabin furthermore speaks to Whedon's tendency to pinpoint and critique the gendered tropes of the horror genre. In the film, the scientists must conduct the sacrifice so that the sexually active female (i.e., the "whore") dies first, while the virgin either dies last or lives. The other three victims must also resemble archetypes--the athlete, scholar, and fool--but the order of their demise is flexible. Whedon's nod to the "final girl" trope allows a reversal of the genre in which the virgin refuses to kill her last surviving friend to complete the ritual and save a world that she deems unworthy. The final two calmly smoke a joint in the face of the impending apocalypse.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Whedon's technological narratives begin in the first season with "I, Robot . . . You, Jane." Here, a demon manifests itself as text in an Internet chat room to seduce Buffy's unsuspecting computer nerd friend into an online relationship that will eventually free the demon's physical form. Even when the characters think a human man exists behind the chat room text, they are wary. Through this introduction of the relationship between the technological and mystical in the Buffyverse, Whedon invokes one of the predominant fears in our society: on the Internet, one never knows to whom one is talking.

Sometimes, Whedon presents horrors far more advanced in technology. In season four, Adam, a government-created super soldier pieced together from humans, robotics, and demons, goes rogue and tries to bring forth the apocalypse. However, some of the most complex technological characters in the show are three fully artificial and intelligent robots, one male and two female. Of the three robots, one known as the Buffybot (Sarah Michelle Gellar) is modeled after Buffy. Spike (James Marsters), a vampire in love with Buffy, commissions Warren (Adam Busch), a villain,

to construct Buffybot as a robotic sex toy that also holds all of Buffy's memories. Buffybot's personality resembles Buffy's closely enough that the robot can convincingly impersonate the slayer, albeit briefly, even in the presence of her closest friends. The robots represent a misstep for Whedon, often lauded for his focus on strong female characters and his critique of the problematic treatment of gender in the genre. The technological females, especially the one representing Buffy, remain safely within the tropes of feminized artificial intelligence: always male-constructed imperfect copies of their organic superiors, useful only as agents of humor and sex, and forever requiring monitoring and repair. Essentially, the feminized technological body is uncanny and expendable and an affront.

Technology and the Supernatural

Before discussing the particular examples of the feminized technological body in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, one must acknowledge the complicated relationship among technology, magic, and the mythos of the slayer as it relates to contemporary society. The show's opening credits for each episode focus on Buffy's mystical origins. The voiceover states, "Into every generation a slayer is born: one girl in all the world, a chosen one. She alone will wield the strength and skill to fight the vampires, demons, and the forces of darkness; to stop the spread of their evil and the swell of their number. She is the slayer." For the most part, Buffy's fighting style adheres to this ancient dictate. Like the vampire hunters of many canons before her, she wears a cross and trains and fights with ancient, simple weapons like the stake and crossbow. She seeks information about the latest threats in ancient texts and personalizes her battles. Even her ability for witty banter with her opponents garners fame. James B. South argues for the slayer as an elaborate means of allowing the existence of a hero in a technological society trying to balance the dictates of Marxism and capitalism. According to South, the general populace, so used to the mindset and values of the working class, cannot recognize the prowess of the individual as at once part of the working class and able to fight

against the "technique" of capitalist society. Linking the vampires and their single-minded drive for blood to capitalism's desire for money and efficiency, South states, "Ultimately, the central issue in the series, the fight between Buffy and her friends against the vampires who would kill them and subjugate humanity, can be viewed as a reminder that we not only live in a technological society, but also a class stratified one" (100). South thus equates Buffy and her friends to the resistance against the oppression and technique of capitalist society.

South links technology and mysticism to a particular episode in *Buffy*, "The Wish," in which a spurned character wishes Buffy Summers had never come to Sunnydale (97). This wish creates an alternate reality in which one of the vampire foes Buffy defeated, The Master (Mark Metcalf), now runs rampant in her absence. The Master creates a blood extraction factory to more efficiently feed his growing horde of vampire followers. When explaining this tool, The Master declares, "Humans with their plebian minds have brought us a truly demonic concept--mass production" (South 98). This example knits together technology and mysticism, but South does not address the issue of gendered technology, though the first instance of artificial intelligence in *Buffy* occurs almost a full season before "The Wish."

Furthermore, South's article, published in 2001, cannot touch on the complicated issue of Buffybot, who appears in later seasons. Buffybot steals Buffy's individuality, undermining her heroic status both by copying her so effectively and by representing everything Buffy fights against; Buffybot is the brainchild of a vampire and a being created by a villain using technology. Furthermore, the final season of the television series involves Buffy sharing her power with an entire cadre of potential slayers, thus destroying the singularity of the "chosen one" prophecy and ending the conception of the slayer as a single hero, though the slayers are still all female. By taking away her status as a standalone hero, the show defies South's ideas and repositions the slayer in relation to technology by creating an artificial copy of her. Buffy once fought against mass production but ultimately embraces its ability to ease her burden.

Artificially and Mystically Constructed Beings

As discussed previously, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* depicts myriad instances and varying levels of technological sophistication and often combines or augments the technology with magic. The first instance of completely artificially intelligent robotics in *Buffy* appears in "Ted" during season two, wherein Buffy's mother, Joyce (Kristine Sutherland), brings home a new boyfriend. Buffy instantly distrusts Ted (John Ritter), but her friends advise her to give him a chance, thinking Buffy would distrust any man Joyce dates. However, Buffy's attitude incurs Ted's wrath. When he tries to get rid of the slayer in order to have her mother to himself, Buffy learns that the real Ted was a scientist who implanted his consciousness into a robot in the 1950s to give himself eternal life, and he has an underground bunker where he keeps the bodies of all of his former wives. The gender identity of Ted's creator is important, as men create all three robots in the show, a trope common to the artificial intelligence narrative. Though Whedon establishes himself in defiance of common tropes, artificial intelligence is one area in which he upholds gendered stereotypes in relation to both the outward gender of the creator and the gender of the resulting technology.

Thus, Ted's representation as a male form of artificial intelligence is also important. Whereas Buffybot's purpose is sex, Ted's purpose is to be a better version of his creator, a sickly scientist. Despite appearing in only one episode, his character is much more "human" than Buffybot, who is a caricature of Buffy in many ways. Buffy finds out Ted has never missed a day of work, which portrays Ted as a hard-working man. Indeed, Ted manages to fit into society since the 1950s. Despite imprisoning and ultimately killing four women, including the scientist's wife, Ted seamlessly leads a normal life until Buffy finds out about his nature. Unlike Buffybot, who is portrayed as somewhat airheaded, Ted is intelligent. In fact, he is so normal and likable that Buffy feels guilty for being suspicious of him, though her suspicions end up founded in truth. Finally, though the scientist who created Ted set out to make a better version of himself, Ted is still a middle-aged man. Unlike female representations of artificial intelligence, the scientist gives Ted a body that cannot be sexualized. Though he is a robot

and a villain, his personality and physique appear as human as possible. The only thing that sets Ted apart from the other characters is his technological construction. Conversely, Buffybot is overtly feminized and is not particularly witty or intelligent. Despite knowing everything Buffy knows, Buffybot often responds to people with nonsensical phrases, though Buffy is known for her witty banter. The implication for gendered artificial intelligence lies in the difference in purpose between Ted and Buffybot. Though they are both created for romance, Ted's strategy for attracting more women involves increasing his mental aptitude and not his physical capabilities, whereas the artificial version of Buffy attracts her mate by being less mentally critical and more sexually pliable. This difference suggests that men are valued for what their minds do and women for what their bodies give.

The fifth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* offers the most nuanced depiction of artificial intelligence as part of a narrative arc that continues over several episodes and into the sixth season. Buffy Summers mysteriously receives a sister, Dawn (Michelle Trachtenberg). A group of monks create Dawn out of mystical energy to provide a flesh receptacle for a powerful artifact known as the "key." Though Dawn has not lived a full life and has been recently constructed, she has all the memories of Buffy's sister from past seasons; the show's other characters also "remember" her as though she were part of their lives and part of the previous four seasons' action. Concurrently, Spike commissions Buffybot from Warren, who makes a girlfriend for himself in a previous episode and thus is able to construct a second robot. The notable difference between Buffy and her robot counterpart is that Buffy does not love Spike, while Buffybot does—or, at the very least, is programmed to make Spike her first priority.

When the show's characters discover Dawn's constructed nature, they are horrified but still determined to protect her and treat her as a human being. However, when they discover Buffybot, they are disgusted and often use Buffybot as a decoy to protect the human Buffy. They send Buffybot into battle first, knowing that if any harm befalls her, they can repair her later. Viewed as parallels of each other, Dawn and Buffybot raise interesting questions

about artificiality. In essence, their respective creators construct Dawn and Buffybot, both physically and mentally. Dawn is the human manifestation of a mystical key that can open different dimensions. Initially, she has no knowledge of that purpose. Her creators endow Dawn with memories of a childhood for which only the show's audience knows she was not present, but she is biologically human. Buffybot, however, is circuit boards. Like Dawn, Buffybot has memories, but Warren creates Buffybot for what the characters see as a lower purpose. Buffybot is not an entity in herself but a disposable replica of Buffy created for pleasure, whereas Dawn is a unique and powerful artifact worthy of protection that also happens to have a distinct personality. Dawn's flesh, blood, and humanity automatically elevate Dawn's constructedness to a level above Buffybot's in the eyes of the characters.

The "Warrior Woman" and Male Power

Film and television often depict men as the creators of artificial intelligence. A male scientist creates Ted, and Buffybot is the brainchild of a sexually frustrated vampire, Spike, and an evil genius, Warren. The robots' origins therefore do nothing to overturn this traditional conception of masculine power. Rather, they draw attention to the male power governing Buffy's life, despite the fact that the show falls into the genre of late 1990s "warrior woman" television narratives. Mary Magoulick compares Buffy to Nikita and Xena, two titular TV heroines of the 1990s, but cautions against these representations as feminist, stating "they did not make the women any less sexualized, nor did they conceive freshly of the very notion of heroes drawn as women" (731). The TV series *La Femme Nikita*, which first aired in 1997 along with *Buffy,* provides a good comparison within the genre, especially considering that both series are based on early 1990s films.

In *Nikita,* the titular character is in prison for murder, but the show stresses her innocence. (In the original French film, she actually commits murder.) Incorrectly believing her to be a hardened criminal, the government stages her suicide, and she wakes up in

Section One, a covert government organization dedicated to fighting terrorism. Like many '90s' heroines, both Buffy and Nikita are powerful fighters but are granted their power from or trained by men. They also establish powerful male love interests early in the series, Buffy to Angel (David Boreanaz) and Nikita to Michael (Roy Dupuis). These love interests provide a challenge, as they can come close to physically besting the female protagonists. Furthermore, "these series involve probable plot twists in which these strong women brutally battle the very men who control them and who may represent their 'true love'" (Magoulick 735). Magoulick argues these scenes and their subsequent "make up" scenes as part of the physical, emotional, and mental abuse commonly inflicted on female heroic characters of the genre (741).

Magoulick further critiques the very origins of Buffy's slayer power as a violation, stating, "We learn that the men formed the line of slayers (through a demon-like snake) in a violation that Buffy denounces as cowardly and weak. They were too afraid to fight the evil forces themselves, she believes, so they established a line of young women to do the dirty work" (737). The realization that the slayer not only receives but is forced into her mystical power by men comes late in the show, during the fifteenth episode of the final season, "Get It Done." Buffy learns the following from an ancient Sumarian text:

> First there is the Earth. Then, there came the Demons. After Demons, there came men. Men found a girl. And the men took the girl to slay demons. They chained her to the Earth. Filled her with Dark. You cannot be shown. You cannot just watch, but you must see. See for yourself, but only if you're willing to make the exchange. This is the only way.

Thus, men create--and in Ted's case, also become--formidable opponents through both magic and technology. Buffy makes efforts to turn away from outside governance throughout the earlier seasons. For example, she sacrifices the help of the watchers' council and thereby dictates how she chooses and fights her battles. Her relationships with other female characters remain an

important part of the show, but the view of masculinity as the creator of power, both mystical and technological, nevertheless dominates Buffy's relationships. Magoulick does not mention that Buffy's boyfriend at the time, Robin Wood (D.B. Woodside), grants her the ability to visit the source of her power, which the show calls the "Shadow Men." Wood, the son of a former slayer, gives Buffy a bag that he calls the "slayer emergency kit." The bag contains the means by which Buffy travels through a portal and learns the truth of the slayers' origins, an identity that, from the show's inception, troubles and distresses the slayer because, as discussed next, it calls into question the nature and extent of her humanity.

The Female Hero and the Male Gaze

The idea that Buffy is a troubling hero for feminist scholars is not new, despite her mainstream popularity. Like Magoulick, Marlo Edwards discusses *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* alongside "active female characters who function as 'sex objects'" (40) like *Xena, Le Femme Nikita, Tank Girl,* and Lara Croft. Edwards argues these representations "receive ambivalent responses from feminists who applaud their non-normative iconography and power while remaining suspicious of the 'perfect' bodies revealed by their skimpy outfits" (40). In this argument, Edwards follows a tradition of feminist film scholarship that began with Laura Mulvey's seminal critical and psychoanalytic text, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." According to Mulvey, the woman's body functions erotically both for the film's characters and for its spectators, creating a tension between the two "gazes" (838). From a psychoanalytic standpoint, the woman "also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference" (Mulvey 840). Edwards, using the example of *Barb Wire* as a counterpoint to the stereotypical active female sex object, argues the female action hero, despite her agency, can only overcome fetishization through the marriage of the actress' body and character (40). Essentially, Pamela Anderson's "ultra-constructed physique" (Edwards 40) as Barb ensures she never

becomes "simply an erotic spectacle" (Edwards 46) and equates her to male hero and actor identities such as Rambo to Sylvester Stallone and the Terminator to Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Buffy's mythos does not award Sarah Michelle Gellar the same consideration as Pamela Anderson's portrayal of Barb because the slayer has supernatural powers. Therefore, her body can do things beyond the realm of human possibility. As such, all slayers depicted in the show are attractive, young, slender women. Thanks to the metaphysical source of their power, the amount of force with which they land their punches does not match their physiques. As early as the first season, the show sets Buffy's petite size against her power. In the episode, "Prophecy Girl," Jenny Calendar (Robia LaMorte), one of the teachers at Buffy's high school who is also interested in the occult, expresses surprise at learning Buffy is the slayer. Calendar states, "The part that gets me, though, is where Buffy is the vampire slayer. She's so little," thus demonstrating how easily one can forget about Buffy's power when she stops exercising it. The tension between Buffy's body and her latent power is a convenient device that reinforces the gaze through its selective rejection. The body only appears powerful in moments of physical stress, and that power is only evidenced by its effect on an opposing body, such as how high she can lift the opponent and how much damage she can inflict with her blows. In this way, Buffy's body never actually defies the gaze. Unlike other physically strong superhero characters, like the Hulk or Captain America, Buffy never undergoes a bodily transformation to belie her power. She has no marking or uniform that signifies when she taps into that power. Ever-present but never actually visually inscribed on her body, her version of power ensures the heteronormative eroticism of the gaze can work while still allowing the female character physical agency. Technology affords Buffybot the same ability for this illusory rejection of the male gaze. As an exact physical and nearly exact mental copy of the slayer, Buffybot's mechanics allow her to be more powerful than she looks; that power, coupled with Buffybot's martial knowledge and memory of Buffy's battles, makes her a formidable opponent.

However, no matter how much physical power Buffy or Buffy-bot can wield, neither holds power that has not "been done" to them by men. In "Don't Look Now: Richard Dyer Examines the Instabilities of the Male Pin-Up," Dyer builds on Mulvey's claim that powerful women merely assume the phallus, stating

> There is no doubt that the image of the phallus as power is widespread to the point of near-universality, all the way from tribal and early Greek fertility symbols to the language of pornography, where the penis is endlessly described as a weapon, a tool, a source of terrifying power. (71)

This seems an apt place to note the phallic nature of Buffy's favorite weapon, a stake named "Mr. Pointy." As stated previously, men originally granted power to the slayer, and men continue to grant Buffy power, but, as Dyer notes, "The penis can never live up to the mystique implied by the phallus" (71). The male power in Buffy's life never lives up to the phallic power men grant her. As Buffy says in "Intervention," the episode which introduces Buffy-bot, "Strength. Resilience. Those are just words for hardness . . . . To slay. To kill means being hard on the inside. Maybe being the perfect slayer means being unable to love at all." Here Buffy's remarks align with Dyer's assertions that hardness, and therefore muscles, represent phallic power. Ultimately, men have somehow managed to give the slayer line more power than they themselves possess. The show visually codes the slayer power in Buffy's preferred choice of weaponry, rather than making her body itself the representation of phallic power. As a young girl forced to do the "dirty work" of a group of men, the nature of the original slayer parallels Buffybot's programming. Spike commissions the robot because Buffy refuses to have sex with him, so Buffybot's programming overrides the part of Buffy's personality that turns Spike down. Meanwhile, Warren programs Buffybot to love Spike even while Buffy fears for her diminishing emotional capacity.

Objectification of the Heroine

Spike justifies his hand in Buffybot's creation the same way that the robot's engineer, Warren, justifies the creation of his own girlfriend: as an act of love. When Buffy's friends, Anya Jenkins (Emma Caulfield) and Xander Harris (Nicholas Brendan), first discover Buffybot in a graveyard straddling Spike, they are initially horrified because they think Buffy is having sex with Spike. Xander confronts Spike, believing the vampire takes advantage of Buffy's grief over the recent death of her mother. When Buffy and her friends finally learn that Spike has created Buffybot, they immediately recognize her puppy-love actions towards him as a mark of Warren's craftsmanship and draw the conclusion that Buffybot stands in for Buffy in Spike's sexual fantasies. Buffy's friends' reactions to Buffybot's sexual purpose are disgust mixed with pity. Because Spike is a former villain, Buffy's friends cannot stomach the idea of the two having sex, though Buffy's first love was a vampire and she eventually has a relationship with Spike. At this point in the narrative, the idea of Spike using a robot to enact his sexual fantasies of Buffy elicits strong reactions of repulsion. Buffy has the strongest reaction against Buffybot, calling the robot "gross and obscene."

The show uses these reactions to set up Spike's behavior as sexually deviant, following Gayle S. Rubin's charmed circle. Rubin's circle determines a hierarchy of sex acts based on those deemed "Good" and "Normal" or "Bad" and "Abnormal" according to society (153). Casual, unmarried, and public sex all appear on Rubin's list of "unnatural" acts, as does sex with manufactured objects (153). Of course, Spike's relationship with Buffybot encompasses all of these. The fact that she is a manufactured object, though sophisticated, might play a part in the disgusted reactions to her sexual activity with Spike. Creation of an object that looks and acts like the woman he desires could certainly be considered as a form of fetish, the worst kind of sexual difference by society's standards (Rubin 154). However, Buffy's rejection of the robot as "gross and obscene" seems unfair to Buffybot, whose programming allows her to do little else *but* pursue sex with Spike.

The existence of the robot, therefore, raises interesting questions about the intersection of sex, technology, and consent. In *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*, Allucquère Rosanne Stone argues that this war is "the complex emergence not of new social but new personal formations, arising from the contested zone at the boundaries between the machine assemblages of commodification, simulation, political power, and the inexpugnable human desire for sociality and love" (170). Buffybot stands at this intersection. To return to the Marxist reading, the robot fulfills both an emotional and a physical desire, but she is also a commodity. Spike has purchased sex and companionship in the form of Buffybot. Buffy loathes and feels violated by the fact that a sophisticated sex toy has been created in her image and even successfully simulates her. Certainly, Buffybot fully consents to sex with Spike, but Buffy does not consent to the use of her image for that purpose. Stone argues against the application of the term "rape" to virtual reality, calling it a "privileged term" (171). When the sexual relationship occurs between two bodies, one of which is an artificially intelligent being with programming that overrides her ability to consent to the relationship, it raises questions about who has ownership of and agency over the technologically constructed body and how a technological society can come to define violations of that agency in a way that does not cheapen physical violations.

Primacy of the Original

At least in the case of Buffybot, Buffy has the final agency over what happens to her double, though the rest of her friends appear to feel at least a pitying endearment toward the robot. Anya, Xander, and Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan) plan to finally confront Buffy, to whom they believe they have been speaking all along. They plan to stage an intervention over the issue of what they believe to be an unhealthy sexual relationship, but Buffybot walks in and stands next to Buffy. Only then do her friends realize that they have been mistaking Buffybot for Buffy for nearly a day. Discussing how our technological identities affect intimacy

and solitude, Sherry Turkle notes, "When we see robots as 'alive enough' for us, we give them a promotion. If when on the net, people feel just 'alive enough' to be 'maximizing machines' for emails and messages, they have been demoted. These are fearful symmetries" (168). The fact that Buffybot could imitate Buffy well enough to trick Buffy's friends suggests that she is "alive enough." When Buffy dies at the end of season five, her friends reactivate Buffybot to make the vampires believe Buffy is still alive. She may not be perfect, but the fact that she is adequate to replace her human counterpart for some tasks elucidates Turkle's fears and a primary fear of artificial intelligence in general. Someday it may replace or enslave biological beings.

Unsurprisingly, this successful imitation makes Buffy defensive. Irked, she says, "You guys couldn't tell me apart from a robot." Buffybot immediately replies, "Oh, I don't think I'm a robot." Buffybot's disarmingly cheerful but tactless personality turns into a source of humor for the show, hiding the layers of fear implicated in this line. Not only does Buffybot know to "think," but she thinks she is real. In another context, this could be terrifying. It further emphasizes the dystopian fears of a technological takeover that dominated the 1990s. However, Buffy's constant disavowal of her double, Buffybot, makes it amusing. The audience, of course, knowing Gellar plays both characters, is in on the charade. It is amusing to see Gellar, who plays a mostly-serious Buffy by this point in the series, enact the lighthearted persona akin to the one she often portrayed in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s beginnings, when the slayer was still in high school.

Thanks to this tension between the viewer and Buffybot's narrative purpose, she becomes hard to decode. She is a device for sex and humor. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Susan Bordo touches on the narrative confusion that the cyborg causes when she asserts, "However, the spirit of episte-mological jouissance suggested by the images of cyborg, Trick-ster, the metaphors of dance, and so forth obscures the located, limited, inescapably partial, and always personally invested nature of human 'story making'" (228). The viewer, at times, is afforded a humorous insight into Buffybot's perspective. Her vision looks

like a late-1990s version of a desktop computer, with only four folders: "Hard Drive," "Slaying," "Locate Spike," and "Make Spike Happy." The latter, of course, is the only one with subfolders visible, titled "kissing_01," "kissing_02," "positions_01," and so on through several folders of "positions" and a "more" button--her drive is clear, no technological pun intended.

On the surface, therefore, Buffybot's humor stems from her eagerness to have sex with Spike, but there is much more at work in her character. *Buffy* fans adore Spike, and Buffybot provides a physical outlet for the fantasy of a Buffy and Spike relationship without compromising the Buffy character. The relationship among Buffy, Spike, and Buffybot shifts when considering it through different angles. From a narrative perspective, Buffybot is a simple outlet for Spike's fetish. However, from an audience perspective, Buffybot enacts a fan fetish. This shifting of meanings to play out an audience fantasy may be why Buffybot is a beloved character. According to Bordo,

> Deconstructionist readings that enact this protean fantasy are continually "slipslidin' away"; through paradox, inversion, selfsubversion, facile and intricate textual dance, they often present themselves (maddeningly, to one who wants to enter into critical dialogue with them) as having it any way they want. They refuse to assume a shape for which they must take responsibility. (228)

In some ways, Buffybot defies explanation. She is campy comic relief only three weeks after the bleakest episode of the series, "The Body," in which Buffy's mother, Joyce Summers, dies of a brain aneurysm in an episode completely free of either magical enemies or mystical cures. Buffybot is the technological embodiment of the Buffy-Spike sexual fantasy, a fantasy that gets all too real in subsequent seasons. She is a double to Buffy, a character who, as discussed previously, viewers are taught to regard as a one-of-a-kind heroine.

Performing the Dualism

Despite the existence of Buffybot and her ability to impersonate Buffy, the slayer refuses to initially acknowledge the successful doubling of her body. "Intervention" climaxes with a battle to rescue Spike from season five's major villain, Glory (Clare Kramer). Buffybot, in her constant quest for Spike, accompanies Buffy and her friends on the mission. During the fight, one of Glory's henchmen wounds Buffybot, and she malfunctions. Afterward, technologically inclined Willow has Buffybot bent over a table for repair, allowing Buffy to finally examine closely her inert doppelganger. The show sets this up with an overhead shot of the two in profile facing each other and Buffy asserting, "At least it's not a very good copy. I mean, look at it." Yet, the audience knows the two are the same body, Gellar's, and it is not actually a copy at all. To return to Dyer's argument, "rationally, we know that the beauty queen has dieted, exercised, used cleansing creams, solariums and cosmetics--but none of this really shows in her appearance, and is anyway generally construed as something that has been done to the woman" (71). Buffy may be supernatural, but Gellar is not. Buffybot may be a robot, but Gellar is not. The audience watching knows Gellar has both bodies, but that body is coded whenever it appears as something constructed, even by Buffy herself, whether by magic or technology.

Therefore, Buffy's body is the ultimate example of the unnatural body, yet she appears completely natural. Taken as two parts of a whole, the Buffybot/Buffy dualism becomes almost cyborg in nature, a point Buffy drives home when she impersonates Buffybot at the conclusion of the episode. As Spike nurses his wounds following his imprisonment by Glory, Buffy enters, dressed in the outfit Buffybot has been wearing throughout the episode. Pretending to be Buffybot, she says, "Spike, you're covered in sexy wounds," and proceeds to determine via the charade whether Spike gave Glory information regarding Dawn during his torture. When Buffy, standing in for Buffybot, finds out Spike did not give up her sister because he could not hurt the "not-so-nice" Buffy, she kisses him. The kiss outs her as Buffy, not Buffybot. By completing the circle and embracing a technological version of herself, even if only as a

ruse, Buffy creates a cyborg personality, marrying the technological and mystical bodies and calling attention to their singularity as Gellar's actual body. For a time Buffy is both Buffybot and Buffy, participating in what Donna Haraway, in "A Cyborg Manifesto," would call "oppositional consciousness" (520). According to Haraway, this occurs when people "read webs of power and refuse membership in social categories of sex, race, or class. People who don't fit in end up beneath a cascade of negative identities" (520). By briefly embracing Buffybot, Buffy creates a third version of her character. No longer the mystical slayer or the chipper robot, she creates a body that fluidly transgresses the boundaries of magic and technology, belonging wholly to neither. She makes herself "technological" without being technological, and it serves to draw attention to her humanity because Gellar plays it off so well. She manages to strike a balance between the overconstructed plasticity of Buffybot and the seriousness of Buffy in a nuanced way that makes her seem as though she could be either or both.

Buffybot is unique to the show's narrative in that she copies a living character. The scientist who built the robot version of Ted is long dead, so the audience has no original to which to compare him. Buffybot, however, performs Buffy. She, in return, performs Buffybot, but Buffy also performs the role of the slayer. This is an important role for which there are not only specific dictates in the show, but it is a role well-known throughout the canon of vampire media. Slaying is so important to Buffy's essential nature that Spike requests Buffybot be programmed to also slay, creating yet another performance of that character type. Gellar, meanwhile, not only performs all of these various versions of the Buffy character and the slayer but adds to the performance her own ideas of the heroine and femininity. To further complicate matters, Whedon released subsequent seasons of *Buffy* in comic book form in 2007. In the comics, Buffy looks like Gellar, who is so entwined with the Buffy character that the artists and writers are drawing Gellar performing Buffy; Gellar cannot help but continue the performance, both on paper and in the minds of those who watched the TV series and will always picture her as Buffy.

According to Judith Butler, performance (which, for Butler, is not the very specific practice of acting but rather the everyday enactment of identity) or imitation of identity "does not copy that which is prior, but produces and *inverts* the very terms of priority and derivativeness" (313). Gellar's performance of Buffy defines the character and female heroism, even while Gellar is simultaneously being informed by the Buffy character and female heroism. Furthermore, Gellar's performance of the robot produces a new version of artificial intelligence. When Buffy says the robot is "not a very good copy" of her, she suggests that there is an essential, totalized conception of the "Buffy" identity that can be copied. Butler notes, "In the act which would disclose the true and full content of that 'I,' a certain radical *concealment* is thereby produced" (309). Buffy and Buffybot illustrate this because, of course, the robot is a perfect copy of Buffy. Both are versions of Gellar, and yet the existence of the copy inscribes new meanings on all of the bodies linked to its performance, from Gellar to the female hero to gendered artificial intelligence. In the continual cycle of imitation and assessment, identity is always unmade without having ever been made.

In the end, however, Buffy takes ownership of the technological copy of her body through her own form of imitation and follows one of Haraway's main dictates:

> taking responsibility for social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and means embracing the task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts. (535)

This fluidity of identity that allows the appropriation of different versions of oneself, even artificially constructed versions, begins a trend in Whedon's work that Holly Randell-Moon argues manifests itself more explicitly in *Dollhouse* (2009-2010). Randell-Moon states that the relationship between the soma, or body, and technology that imprints the identity upon it "emphasizes the role of power in the construction of embodied identity in place of

a power that is gained solely through individual freedom" (273). Buffybot appears to be an early conception of this. Her power lies in her embodiment of Buffy and what Buffy stands for, rather than in anything she gains herself. Randell-Moon equates this approach to one enumerated by Michel Foucault in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977.* Rather than link power to a single force that stifles identity, Foucault links power to the multiple affordances and constraints that technology imposes on the body (98). Buffybot's power only extends as far as her programming.

Conclusion

Buffy's artificially intelligent double, Buffybot, plays conflicting roles ranging from sexual, to humorous, to awkward and uncanny, within the narrative of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* Her representation draws attention to the constructed nature of the female body, as well as the differences between technological and mystical constructions, even while she and Buffy remain safely within the tropes of the feminized action hero. In the end, Buffybot and the slayer are the same. The individual slayers are expendable in the context of the slayer line. Kill one, and another is called. Buffybot is an imperfect copy of Buffy and is, therefore, also expendable. Technology and magic work together to create separate conceptions of the same character that lead to the same conclusion, that the active female body, despite her apparent empowerment, ultimately wields male power.

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Robin Hood Goes to Neptune: The Collective Social Bandit in *Veronica Mars*

Melissa Sartore

Veronica Mars (2004-2007), a series about a young, strong-willed teenager student, found new life in 2013 with a successful Kickstarter campaign and a 2014 full-length feature film. The series-turned-movie continues to appeal to the hearts and minds of millions with its witty dialogue, catchy music, and social relevance, which includes tackling issues such as sexual assault, substance abuse, and broken families. Veronica Mars is a social bandit who defies unjust and ineffective school and law enforcement authorities. She challenges the income inequality and social class distinctions that surround her, while bringing justice to the masses in hometown Neptune and TV-land alike. As aspects of Veronica's banditry are manifested, it becomes clear that she is not the lone heroic figure in the series. The social banditry in *Veronica Mars* functions on cooperative levels as several characters emerge to collectively meet the requirements of a social bandit. As a result, both Veronica Mars and *Veronica Mars* represent true bandit heroes.

In his classic work on social banditry, *Bandits,* Eric Hobsbawm identifies social bandits as individuals who challenge economic structures and take part in class struggles (7). For Hobsbawm, banditry must be understood in the "context of the history of power, i.e., of the control by governments or other power centers . . . of what goes on in the territories and among the populations over which they claim to control" (11). Social bandits are more complex than legal bandits--robbers, criminals, insurgents--and they are not or are not thought to be criminals by the public, in this case the characters on the show and the TV audience. Challengers to Hobsbawm's model, such as Nicholas Curott and Alexander Fink, argue that social banditry is not always related to class struggles but still benefits society by flouting "inefficient laws . . . [to] directly provide an alternative to official protection and adjudication services" (489). These two theories coexist and cooperate, providing

the lens through which viewers see both the individual social bandit Veronica Mars and the collective social banditry found throughout the entirety of the show, as well as the more recent movie.

Hobsbawm initially claimed that social bandits only function in pre-modern societies, an idea that he revised in his later work, although he maintained that in most "'developed countries' . . . Robin Hood is now extinct, for practical purposes" (184). Graham Seal argues that social bandits are part of our identities and that we need them to remind us to stand up to injustice and help us feel as though resistance to oppression is even possible (182-183). Social banditry does, in fact, continue to exist in modern societies, and the "the social benefits of banditry help to explain the mystery of its heroic depiction . . . . [I]t is merely a reflection, albeit in idealized form, of what the people intuitively know: some banditry is not all bad" (Curott and Fink 489). Social banditry in *Veronica Mars* is, in fact, "not all bad," as Curott and Fink assert (489). It functions as a popular culture representation of the continued struggle against oppression and injustice associated with a wealth disparity and social inequity.

Social bandits in popular culture provide people with the freedom, heroism, and justice that they both seek and want to see in the world. As Seal states, "wherever and whenever significant numbers of people believe they are the victims of inequity, injustice and oppression, historical and/or mythic outlaw heroes will appear and will continue to be celebrated after their deaths" (174). The circumstances presented in *Veronica Mars* provide opportunities for these outlaw heroes to be heroic and for the larger concept of the social bandit to manifest itself. The series illustrates a tiered social banditry and multifaceted aspects of its formation, particularly during the first two seasons of the show, which is important to understanding the continued relevance of the series as well as how it helps to reflect the ever-changing need for and reshape the definition of Robin Hood figures. The need for outlaw heroes, for Robin Hoods, is common and will continue as long as there are struggles "over who controls the common riches and resources of the planet" (Seal 183). Veronica Mars is part of this cultural, historical, and mythical phenomenon.

Veronica Mars, the television series, was broadcast first on the United Paramount Network (UPN) and, during its final season, on The CW, a network formed from the UPN and WB in a joint venture by CBS and Warner Brothers (Wee 161-165). The series debuted to positive fan reviews, and, although it struggled in ratings, it slowly built up its audience over its three-year run (Rottentomatoes.com). *Veronica Mars* debuted one year after the cancellations of the popular teen series *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). The former, a series that initiated angst-ridden love triangles in a seaside setting when it debuted in the 1990s, and the latter, a fantasy drama featuring a strong woman hero imbued with super powers, were at the core of the late 1990s explosion in teen-centric television programming that extended into the early twenty-first century (Hills 54-67; Wee 70-74, 142-165; IMDB).

Veronica Mars carried on this television drama tradition, as did numerous series jumping on the adolescent drama craze, such as *Smallville* (2001-2011), *Everwood* (2002-2006), and *One Tree Hill* (2003-2012), albeit in the context of a female lead character searching for truth and standing up for personal and social justice (IMDB). During its television tenure, the series received nominations for numerous awards, winning the TV Program of the Year award at the 2006 American Film Institute (AFI) Awards, among others (IMDB). By the time of its cancellation in 2007, the series had developed a cult following with a small but dedicated fan base, many of whom were active later in the 2013 Kickstarter campaign that resulted in the 2014 *Veronica Mars* feature film (Strecker).

Veronica Mars differs, however, in the presentation of a resilient teenager functioning as a female detective determined to correct the wrongs within her reality-based community and, most importantly, being equipped with the tools to do so. She is a true social bandit through her acts of defiance and with her open resistance to wealthy elitism and immorality. Buffy slays vampires with her chosen-one superpowers in hell-mouthed Sunnydale, California, while Veronica, armed with her camera, wit, and determination, saves the day over and over again in "Anytown, USA"--Neptune, California (Bavidge 41-53; Osgerby 71-83). Both Buffy and Veronica

are heroines, to be sure, but the latter is placed in a relatable *noir* reality where justice needs an outsider to help it along in the right direction (Burke 123; Rich 8-19).

In Neptune, California, a person is either a millionaire or works for one; it is a "town without a middle class" ("Pilot"). The social inequality in Neptune fosters class and racial tensions, arguably presenting "one of the most honest and sensitive portrayals of socioeconomic class differences" ever shown on television (Feeney). In contrast to shows like *The OC* (2003-2007) and *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), *Veronica Mars* presents the wealthy classes as entitled and exploiting their social positions, whereas the former two shows seem to glorify excess and excuse it through philanthropy and apologies (Feeney). In all of these shows, the haves and the have-nots interact with one another, of course, but in *Veronica Mars,* the numerous subplots revolve around the uneven distribution of wealth, abuse of power, and inconsistent application of justice. Neptune is a town full of secrets, scandal, crime, and conflict, and the town's overall sense of unfairness drives *Veronica Mars* and its characters.

In this setting, the title character emerges as a young, sharp-tongued high school junior who has recently lost her best friend, social status, and family. The series starts by telling the audience about the death of Veronica's best friend, Lilly Kane ("Pilot"; marsinvestigations.net). This event propels the first season and most of the second season. Lilly was a mysterious, playful, but defiant teenager, and, after several suspected killers emerge, Abel Koontz--a disgruntled employee of Lilly's father paid to confess to the crime--is put on trial and wrongfully convicted of murder. The investigation leads to the demise of Veronica's father's career and further fuels her determination to find the real killer, correct the injustice, rectify the misinformation, and bring about vindication and closure.

As the series emphasizes the social issues facing Neptune and provides information about Veronica's current circumstances, it also introduces the audience to Veronica's friends, former friends, allies, and enemies. At times, these individuals function as the wrongdoers and the impetus for Veronica's heroic banditry. More importantly, however, these individuals are Veronica's helpers.

They all rebel and correct injustices and wrongs as the series proceeds and maintain their identities while simultaneously reaffirming, supporting, and emphasizing Veronica's place outside of the social order (Wilcox 50-56).

Keith Mars, private investigator and former sheriff, is Veronica's father and one of her helpers, yet he is often a hurdle to her banditry. Keith tries to protect everyone around him, especially Veronica, while simultaneously striving for justice. He is driven out as sheriff by the wealthy class in Neptune because they want an investigation surrounding the death of Lilly Kane to go away. Keith Mars unsuccessfully resists their efforts while an innocent man is convicted of the crime, and Mars loses his job in the process. He is replaced by Don Lam, who protects the interests of the wealthy in the social, economic, and political divides in Neptune ("Pilot"; Rich 12-13). Keith Mars provides Veronica with the skills and resources she needs to be a detective and protects his daughter as best he can from the social ills he meets in his work as a detective.

Wallace Fennel, another helper, meets Veronica when she rescues him from a run-in with Neptune's motorcycle biker gang, the PCHers ("Pilot"). Wallace quickly becomes Veronica's new best friend. He is the Watson to Veronica's Holmes, the accomplice to her crimes, an assistant in her investigations, and often her moral compass as well as her trusty and loyal sidekick ("Pilot"; Wilcox 53-54; Burke 116-117). The PCHers in Neptune, led by Eli "Weevil" Navaro, oscillate between being Veronica's enemy and ally, depending on circumstances ("Pilot"). Weevil and Veronica often do favors for one another and develop a relationship through which Veronica is able to explore the world of the PCHers and their contacts with the seemingly seedy elements in Neptune. Veronica also befriends Cindy "Mac" MacKenzie, a computer-savvy classmate who finds herself outside the popular kids at Neptune High ("Like A Virgin"). Both Veronica and Mac are misfits, and Mac brings an intellectualism to Veronica's life, adding yet another world of discovery to the heroine's experiences (Wilcox 52, 55). All of these individuals are from different walks of life but are unified by their connection to Veronica and their efforts to assist and collaborate with her and each other.

Love interests--past, present, and future--also serve as helpers or challengers to Veronica's banditry, functioning in various ways in the social bandit construct. Duncan Kane, the son of a rich businessman, brother to Veronica's now-dead best friend Lilly, and Veronica's former boyfriend, is one of the rich kids at Neptune High, a group known as the 09ers. Veronica still longs for Duncan but is unable to possess him, although she protects and helps him throughout the series. Logan Echolls, Duncan's best friend and the school smartass, similarly plays multiple roles in Veronica's life by frequently matching wits with Veronica, insulting her often, and later becoming her boyfriend (Rich 14). Logan is as complex as Veronica. He was Lilly's boyfriend, and his emotionally and physically abusive father, movie star Aaron Echolls, is later revealed to be Lilly's killer. Despite Logan's constant attention seeking, violent outbursts, and arrogant demeanor, he is a much better person than he wants anyone to believe and shares with Veronica a complex past full of hardship (Wilcox 54).

In addition to these major players, minor characters continue to factor into the social banditry throughout the show. Many of Neptune's citizens represent the injustices and wrongs against the lower class and are the force against which the social bandits rebel. Because Veronica can work well with a variety of characters--"the Mexican biker, the billionaire's son, the African American basketball player, the abused movie star's kid, the misfit middle class computer whiz"--she is the tie that binds them. These characters also represent "the different worlds Veronica can walk through as she responds to request after request for her help" (Wilcox 55). The following sections illustrate how Veronica Mars and her helpers serve as effective social bandits.

Veronica Mars: Social Bandit All on Her Own . . . Well, Kind of

Veronica Mars functions as a lone social bandit figure in Neptune in many ways. Social bandits "right wrongs, they correct and avenge cases of injustice, and in doing so apply a more general

criterion of just and fair relations between men in general, and especially between the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak," criteria which Veronica meets (Hobsbawm 29-30). In the pilot episode, Veronica explains how she has been shunned, relegated to the position of outsider and "peasant" ("Pilot").

She has not only fallen from the rich crowd but is also the victim of a violent physical act. After Veronica is raped at a party, she seeks justice from the police but is dismissed. Their treatment of her reveals why she ultimately rejects authority figures in Neptune ("Pilot"; Turnbull 317; Burke 117). When Veronica reports the crime, Sheriff Don Lamb asks her,

> Is there anyone in particular you'd like me to arrest or should I just round up the sons of the most important families in town? I've got not a shred of evidence to work with here, but that really doesn't matter to your family, now does it? ("Pilot"; vmtranscripts)

Veronica cries one tear, and Lamb tells her to go see the wizard for some backbone ("Pilot"; Burke 117; 120). She has been disregarded and sent away. As a result, her antagonistic relationship with the sheriff's department, already a factor because of her father's job loss, is now resolute. Veronica Mars becomes an advocate for justice through and through.

These events define Veronica in her new world, and she formalizes her role of heroic outcast. In the very next scene, Veronica is in the courtroom where Sheriff Lam is giving testimony about a robbery and, instead of the videotape evidence supporting his testimony, it shows his deputies at a local strip club ("Pilot"). Veronica discredits the Sheriff and his department and her own status as rebel outsider. She focuses on fighting to bring about justice, never stealing money from nor harming her community but rather providing a "valuable service to society" (Hobsbawm 23; Curott and Fink 472).

Necessarily, Veronica defies authority throughout the show, incorporating banditry as needed to accomplish her goals. She challenges the Sheriff's office through deception, evidence theft, and evasion ("Pilot"; "Credit Where Credit's Due"; "Silence of

the Lamb"; "Donut Run"). She violates school rules, breaks into
school administrators' offices, and steals information ("Return of
the Kane"; "Normal is the Watchword"; "Nobody Puts Baby in
a Corner"). In "Normal is the Watchword," Veronica breaks into
Neptune High to retrieve drug results from recent tests given to
the school's athletes. Wallace tests positive for drugs, which, he
says, is impossible, and Veronica is determined to find out why.
She discovers that the drug tests were conducted by a company
financed by many wealthy couples in town. Wallace's positive test
is the result of a calculated swap to protect the wealthy students,
who would have tested positive, gotten thrown out of athletics,
and jeopardized their futures. Wallace is expendable, and Veronica
exposes the plan. She trusts no one and takes it upon herself to
bring justice. Veronica is just in all of her actions because, as Paul
Hammond argues, she can "opt out of her end of the bargain"
found in the social contract theory of justice (Hammond 22). Af-
ter Lilly's death and her own assault, Veronica no longer believes in
the authority figures she once trusted to protect her.

Furthermore, the officials that Veronica defies are corrupt. The
blackmailing, negligent, shady Sheriff ("Pilot"; "The Rapes of
Graff"; "Not Pictured"); the high school principal who fathered
a child with a student ("Ahoy, Mateys!"; "My Mother, the Fiend");
and county administrator Woody Goodman, who molests young
boys ("Driver Ed"; "Happy Go Lucky"), among others, hold no
moral authority in Veronica's world. In this context, Veronica can
argue that "she has no obligation to obey the laws when breaking
them will do more to promote what's just and right" (Hammond
30). Her defiance of questionable authority is, in many ways, for
the greater good. The crimes and wrongs that she commits in her
efforts can be seen as legitimate and justified, making her a bandit
hero.

The acts of bandits are criminal but are shaped by the actions
of their "enemies." These "enemies" are enemies of the people.
Therefore, the crimes committed against them by bandits are
viewed as punishments given to deserving victims (Kooistra 39).
Bandits like Veronica break laws that are enforced by authorities
that the populace, be it the student body of Neptune High or the

lower class of Neptune, does not respect, but they provide "a system of rules and accompanying enforcement where the government fails to do so" (Curott and Fink 473). In this process in *Veronica Mars*, Veronica and her helpers function as one of the three types of social bandits identified by Hobsbawm--the avenger, the *haiduk*, and the noble robber--or as some combination of three throughout the series (Hobsbawm 22-23).

The avenger-bandit, as the name implies, needs vengeance. In what is often a terror-inspiring act, retaliation and justice are inseparable in the avenger's actions and beliefs (Hobsbawm 23, 63-78). The *haiduk* is "a more serious, a more ambitious, permanent, and institutionalized challenge to official authority," constantly goading the powers-that-be with acts of defiance and banditry (Hobsbawm 93). The noble robber, most readily identified as Robin Hood, works on behalf of society to restore moral and social order (Hobsbawm 46-48). There is necessarily overlap in these social bandits' deeds and outcomes, whether intended or unintended, and the intersection of the three types is demonstrated in both Veronica Mars and *Veronica Mars*.

Veronica as avenger and *haiduk* interact amongst the social tensions and feud-like mentalities that exist in Neptune. The wealth gap in Neptune creates a cycle of resentment, cruelty, and even acts of "terror" between the haves and the have-nots. The economic and social divide is best represented at Neptune High School by the clique known as the 09ers. In "Credit Where Credit's Due," Wallace and Veronica discuss their upcoming weekend plans, and the motivation of the 09ers becomes clear when Wallace talks about a party flier that is written in code:

> Wallace: I found this on the floor in gym.
>
> Veronica: You want to crash an 09er party?
>
> Wallace: Maybe. I don't know what an 09er is.
>
> Veronica: It's someone who lives in the prestigious 90909 zip code.

> Wallace: Look. You can't even tell who's put on it. You don't know when it starts, where it is or nothing. ("Credit Where Credit's Due"; vmtranscripts)

Veronica explains the code and interprets the flier for Wallace:

> Veronica: That's 'cause it's all in code. The moon tells you it starts when it gets dark . . . .

> Wallace: Ah.

> Veronica: . . . the hourglass indicates sand which means it's the beach . . . the Ks and the 9s tell you it's more specifically Dog Beach.

> Wallace: And the little eggs?

> Veronica: Friday. It's in code so undesirables, which by the way is you and me, don't show up.

> Wallace: How do you know all this?

> Veronica: 'Cause I used to be one of them. ("Credit Where Credit's Due"; vmtranscripts)

Veronica clearly identifies herself as a peasant, a member of the lower class who is on the outside of the upper class way of life. In this single conversation, Veronica both understands and explains the social and economic divides in Neptune, the outcast status she now holds, and the unfair system that surrounds them. The lines between desirables and undesirables are a constant point of tension in *Veronica Mars* and afford Veronica numerous opportunities to get revenge, functioning as both a *haiduk* and an avenger simultaneously.

The avenger-*haiduk* construct that is Veronica also demonstrates itself in "Return of the Kane." In this episode, Neptune High's election for class president pits an 09er, Duncan Kane, against poor-kid Wanda Varner. Veronica actively spreads Varner's message that rich kids are corrupt in a piece she writes for the school newspaper.

> Veronica: How do you account for your sudden popularity?
>
> Wanda: Isn't it obvious? It's class warfare, the haves versus the have-nots. You, more than anyone at school, should understand that.
>
> Veronica: But it's more quotable if you say it out loud.
>
> Wanda: Okay. The rich kids, they run things around here. They're the minority and they're corrupt. They get away with murder. ("Return of the Kane"; vmtranscripts)

According to Wanda, the only reason the poor kids are disenfranchised is because they allow it to happen. She calls for action and is essentially declaring war on the haves of Neptune High. Despite her appeal and approval, Wanda loses the election after the 09ers cheat. Veronica emerges yet again to help and discovers the dishonesty, and a second election is held. The character assassinations and even vandalism that take place during the election are reminiscent of classic family feuds, but, luckily, the election never involves violence. In the end, Kane wins but promises to mediate many social inequities of Neptune High ("Return of the Kane"). He seems sincere, but the wealth gap is so engrained in Neptune and Neptune High that there may be no way to fight it. For her part, Veronica is successful in her efforts as a bandit, avenging Varner while consistently seeking truth and justice against a corrupt system. She remains resolute after this success, and her persistence continues to be one of her most powerful tools.

Veronica as a *haiduk* continues as she purposefully sets herself outside of her previous social norm of 09er membership and takes on the permanent role of challenger to authority. Often enlisting assistance from her friends, Veronica is armed with her camera, wit, and investigatory skills as she repeatedly aims her "institutionalized" resistance at the Sheriff's department and Sheriff Lam. In doing so, she commits numerous crimes to correct one of their wrongdoings. In "Donut Run," Veronica is pulled into the search for Duncan Kane after he disappears with his infant

daughter. Veronica's reputation precedes her when she arrives at the Sheriff's office:

> Sheriff's Deputy: You're Veronica Mars, aren't you?
>
> Veronica: That's me.
>
> Sheriff's Deputy: Supposed to keep an eye on you.
>
> Veronica: Great. ("Donut Run"; vmtranscripts)

Lamb and the other authorities are aware of Veronica's skills and the danger she represents as she continues to challenge their power, but they can do very little to stop her. Veronica leaves no evidence behind as she does, in fact, help Duncan abduct the baby, who is in danger from her maternal grandparents, and flee Neptune ("Donut Run"). Her parents had abused the baby's mother, and Veronica and Duncan fear the same fate would befall the infant. They feel that they have to take the baby out of that family environment, putting the welfare of the child over the law.

Veronica Mars' permanence and defiance of authority carries over to her role as a noble robber, a Robin Hood, throughout the series. First and foremost, a noble robber begins his or her outlaw actions not through crime but as a victim of injustice. Additionally, a noble robber "rights wrongs"; "takes from the rich to give to the poor"; never kills or injures others unless it is absolutely necessary; is admired, helped, and supported by his or her community; is, in theory, invisible and invulnerable; and works on behalf of the legitimate "fount of justice" (Hobsbawm 47-48). Veronica Mars clearly meets these criteria. She is a victim of injustice; she rights wrongs, steals information on behalf of the knowledge-poor, does not kill, and is admired by her peers. Even the ones who do not like her often seem to need her. Veronica is "invisible" when she wants to be, using her camera to get information and to see others without being seen, and is "invulnerable" only through putting up walls and presenting herself as not giving a damn. The invisibility and invulnerability of Veronica Mars are tied to her ability to blend in with her surroundings as well as the support she receives from her helpers. Her father, Weevil, Wallace, and the like protect her when

necessary. She is not the enemy of all authority figures, either, just the ones who are corrupt and misguided. In fact, she often enlists authorities she can trust to help her.

"In her endless invention of complex ploys, and her constant outwitting of school authorities, and the growing sense around Neptune High that she is a competent individual to be feared and admired," Veronica functions as an avenger, a *haiduk*, and a Robin Hood (Kaveney 181). However, the notion of the Robin Hood figure as a social bandit also exists collectively in *Veronica Mars* through the actions of Veronica and her colleagues. Social banditry is ubiquitous throughout the series, as shown by using Seal's "Robin Hood Principle." It posits that fact and fiction are blurred when it comes to the actions of outlaw heroes, and, regardless of their criminal or dangerous behaviors, the world's Robin Hoods are still perceived as heroic. Robin Hoods become symbols of social right and represent hope and change (Seal 165-174). The "Robin Hood Principle" can be applied to collective action in *Veronica Mars*, as well as the actions of the series' title hero.

Helpers and Heroes: The Collective Social Bandit in Neptune

Several factors go into the heroic persona of a Robin Hood. Seal's elements of the outlaw hero cycle are based on tradition, circumstances, incidents, charisma, narrative framework, moral code, cultural script, and afterlife (Seal 173-174). Each element contributes to the formation of a larger outlaw hero construct. Tradition, based on national, ethnic, or regional storytelling, is associated with heroes and the historical circumstances from which they emerge. One incident usually propels a figure into the outlaw role. Through his or her charisma, the hero's morality, justification, and lore grows, as do his or her power and influence. The narrative framework becomes well known and socially accepted, with outlaws functioning as wily and defiant, yet brave and sympathetic figures. The cultural script of an outlaw as the protagonist emerges and continues into the afterlife as the myth of the hero

long outlives the individual. These aspects of the outlaw hero principle are perpetuated over and over again, varying in order and prominence, and form a "set of instructions for resisting, sympathizing, supporting, living, and dying in circumstances deemed oppressive and unjust" (Seal 174). Once these aspects are identified with individual characters in *Veronica Mars,* the collective outlaw hero emerges. Together, Veronica's "helpers" are social bandits in their own right.

Outlaw traditions, fact and fictive alike, are engrained in national and ethnic identities as well as geographic and historical understandings of the world (Seal 169). Neptune, California, is no different. The circumstances which bring about oppression bring a Robin Hood into existence. An outlaw hero is oppressed or perceives oppression, politically, socially, and/or economically, depending on the time, place, and situation. The denial of some resource--political or economic, for example--results in tensions and conflicts, thus creating circumstances in which a Robin Hood identity may become manifested (Seal 168).

The best example of a *Veronica Mars* character who perceives himself to be oppressed is Weevil. As the leader of the PCHers biker gang, Weevil functions as an outsider and a criminal. He is perceived to be a wrongdoer by residents of Neptune, and when his brother commits credit card fraud, a crime for which his grandmother is wrongly arrested, the lawyer suggests that Weevil confess. Weevil's reputation is summarized through the following dialogue:

> Veronica: Do you think you will?
>
> Weevil: I've got nothing to say to you, man.
>
> Veronica: Weevil, your grandma's in jail.
>
> Weevil: Oh, ar-are you reminding me 'cause I almost forgot.
>
> Veronica: I'm just saying with your reputation, you can't blame McCormack for thinking that—

> Weevil: My reputation? Oh, well, then I guess what everybody says about you is true, too, huh? That you, you like it a little freaky, don't you? That you spy on Duncan Kane. That you send him pictures of yourself. Be honest, Veronica. You think you're this big outsider, but, push comes to shove, you're still one of them. You still think like one of them. Take off. I don't want you around here. ("You Think You Know Somebody"; vmtranscripts)

Despite his time spent in juvenile detention and his gang affiliation, Weevil does his best within his circumstances. He takes care of his grandmother, refuses to sell drugs, and both assists and enlists Veronica, at times, in efforts against injustice. Weevil perceives himself to be a member of an oppressed group, which forms his identity and results in bandit behavior.

Numerous incidents propel individuals into the outlaw hero role. Lilly's murder, for example, incites tensions surrounding social and economic inequity throughout Neptune and defines the lives of many of its citizens. Even apparently trivial incidents can lead to life-changing consequences. For example, an event that highlights conflicting viewpoints about power at Neptune High involves Wallace Fennel. Through the course of the first episode, viewers find out that Wallace calls the Sheriff after some PCHers steal from the gas station where he works. In response, the bikers grab Wallace and tape him to the flagpole on school grounds. After Veronica rescues Wallace, they become fast friends. Over the course of the show, their friendship is solidified, as is Wallace's position as associate and assistant bandit ("Pilot"; Seal 168-169; Turnbull 318-319; Burke 117).

A Robin Hood must be charismatic and, in addition to Veronica, the wit and style of Logan Echolls finds no equal. The charismatic outlaw hero is set apart from the masses through his dialogue, style, and charm. The charismatic outlaw uses these skills to reject authority (Seal 169-170). He is handsome, wealthy, and self-destructive, attributes that he uses to help Veronica as well as to exercise his own moral code. On more than one occasion, Logan physically assaults men who threaten the women in his life,

playing the likable chivalric hero while committing a criminal act. Even when he begins dating classmate Hannah Griffin for nefarious reasons, he struggles with caring for the young girl while simultaneously deceiving her (Episodes 2.13, 2.14). He struggles with his morality, the ease with which he manipulates people, and his social and economic status, but he finds verbal and physical outlets to express his sense of right and wrong. His use of violence, however, is only when absolutely necessary, just like a noble robber. When a true wrong is presented, he reacts with an equally extreme reaction--physical force.

All characters in *Veronica Mars* are guided by their moral code, but the social outlaws' morals often contrast the societal norm. Weevil, Mac, Wallace, Logan, and Veronica subscribe to a moral code, and while they vary their interpretation, at times, they consistently reinforce actions aimed at justice. Their motivations, morality, and efforts create the cultural script of the show by combining the narrative framework and code of conduct, while simultaneously showing the influence of a hero's associates, actions, enemies, victims, and supporters (Seal 171-172).

In conjunction with the cultural script, the outlaw hero's continuing legacy extends the myth of a social bandit. The afterlife is often tied to tradition, art, and media as the significance of an outlaw hero's life extend beyond death (Seal 172-173). The concept of the afterlife is manifested in season one through characters' reactions and continuing responses to the death of Lilly Kane. Her death looms over Neptune in perpetuity. The audience is never sure who Lilly was but know that she is loved and missed. Lilly appears in dreams and flashbacks to be her own hero, a hero for the injustice surrounding her death, as well as to provide motivation and perpetuate her presence. In "Leave It to Beaver," Veronica has a flashback to a time she was with Lilly in her bedroom. She remembers that Lilly had hiding places because her mother was constantly meddling. As a result, Veronica searches Lilly's room and finds hidden videotapes implicating Lilly's real killer, Aaron Echolls. Other characters also seek justice after their death. After the bus accident that starts off season two, Veronica dreams of being on the bus in the moments before the crash (marsinvestigations.net). She speaks

with the victims, who offer cryptic clues to help Veronica find the truth behind their tragic deaths ("Normal is the Watchword"; "I Am God"; "Nevermind the Buttocks").

As illustrated through the previous examples, the "Robin Hood Principle" applies to characters individually and collectively. Veronica's individual banditry combined with the collected heroism in Neptune gives *Veronica Mars* layered acts of social justice and offers audiences a show based on traditions with which they can relate. The major dramatic arcs of each season provide additional insights into social banditry.

Veronica Mars: **Bandits, Bandits Everywhere**

Neptune desperately needs a hero, or several. Theft ("Ain't No Magic Mountain High Enough"), murder ("Normal is the Watchword"; "Plan B"), drug abuse ("You Think You Know Somebody"; "Betty and Veronica"), and physical and sexual abuse ("Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner"; "Not Pictured") all occur as the show progresses. As crime and disorder take place in Neptune during the first two seasons, the "good guys" and the "bad guys" are not always clearly distinguished. The social bandits, however, are able to expose the wrongdoers while combatting incompetent authorities, social inequality, and economic tensions that plague the town.

Veronica Mars shines in its quest for righteousness to resolve the major crimes and injustices. The major crime that drives season one and much of season two is the murder of Lilly Kane, and the investigation tests economic, political, and social relationships throughout Neptune. Veronica's dad, Keith, loses his job as sheriff over the investigation; Logan, Lilly's boyfriend, is left angry and bitter after her death; her family are bereft; Weevil, who had been in a secret relationship with Lilly, is heartbroken.

As circumstances of Lilly's death and its aftermath play out over the first season, all of the key individuals demonstrate aspects of social banditry in their efforts to learn the truth and cope with the loss. Veronica channels her grief into finding the real killer, and various theories about the murderer's identity then play out

during the first season. Veronica discovers that Lilly's parents had alibis ("Credit Where Credit's Due"), the Kanes' head of security, Clarence Wiedman, set up Abel Koontz ("Return of the Kane"; "Silence of the Lamb"), and that there was more to Lilly than she had known. Through trickery, Veronica disguises herself to get into Lilly's bedroom and discovers sex tapes that implicate Aaron Echolls. Lilly had been having an affair with him, and he tries to kill Veronica in order to get the tapes from her ("Leave It To Beaver"). Although Aaron is arrested for murder and put on trial, he is acquitted of the crime.

Aaron Echolls represents wealth, the arrogant sense of entitlement associated with money, and the social inequity in Neptune. Aaron admits he killed Lilly ("Leave It to Beaver"), and in several episodes throughout the first two seasons, he exhibits violent and amoral behavior (e.g., he beats Logan in "Revenge of the Kane," he mentally abuses his wife in "Lord of the Bling"). As a freed murderer, his very existence requires justice. Even Logan testifies against his father once he learns the truth ("Happy Go Lucky"). Despite Logan's testimony, Aaron is cleared of the crime, only to be executed by Clarence Wiedman at Duncan's orders ("Not Pictured"). Aaron is the personification of "the bad guy," as well as of inequity and unfairness, but with Veronica's and Logan's actions, his misdeeds become public, and he is brought to justice, albeit not legally.

The collective social banditry of Neptune cooperates with Veronica, facilitating her cause. With Mac's technical assistance, Veronica discovers that Abel Koontz has been framed by the Kanes' head of security ("Silence of the Lamb"), Weevil gives Veronica a pen that he has stolen from Lilly's room, one that contains evidence of Lilly's torrid affairs ("Hot Dogs"), and Lilly appears in a vision to tell Veronica that her parents are not her killers, guiding her former best friend toward the truth ("Kanes and Abel's"). Cooperation among and assistance from the social bandit figures, representative of circumstances, moral codes, cultural scripts, and afterlife, are key to the successful outcome of justice for Lilly Kane.

The evil of wealth is manifested in season two with the introduction of Woody Goodman, a wealthy businessman who owns

the local minor league baseball team and a successful burger chain. He also serves as Neptune's county supervisor. Goodman wants to incorporate the community, an act which would reinforce the class divide between the haves and the have-nots. He represents excess and the over-reaching influence of the wealthy in Neptune. He is entitled, believes he is above the law, and seeks to take control of Neptune in its entirety.

Goodman's actions exacerbates economic tensions in Neptune. Goodman wants to make Neptune a city or, as Keith Mars sees it, "a country club" ("Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner"). Talk of new citizens, increased taxes, antique shops, and crime-free streets puts everyone in Neptune on edge. When the local swimming pool used by the non-09ers is destroyed by their wealthy counterparts, a war ensues. Logan's house is destroyed by fire ("Normal is the Watchword"), an act Logan believes Weevil committed. In retaliation, Logan buys Weevil's grandmother's house and has her evicted ("Rat Saw God"). The best representation of this class-based antipathy occurs during a Future Business Leaders of America class activity at Neptune High, as articulated by several students:

> Dick Cassablancas: Here's a chart of our market capitalization versus earnings over the last two years. Now how's that look?

> Logan: Awesome.

> Veronica Voiceover: It looks like it's always looked: the rich get richer, and everybody else hopes for scholarships. ("Cheatty Cheatty Bang Bang"; vmtranscripts)

The economic gap in Neptune continues to grow, and the have-nots struggle against their circumstances and pervasive economic oppression.

Issues of wealth disparity turn deadly when students from Neptune High take part in a field trip to visit the minor league baseball field owned by Goodman. On the way back to the school after the visit, the school bus crashes ("Normal is the Watchword"). Prior to the crash, the 09ers in the group had decided to ride in a limo rather than take the bus, and, as a result, the eight students who die

are non-09ers. The rich kids avoid the accident, and the injustice of wealth strikes again. Veronica is supposed to be on the bus but is accidently left behind and escapes death. She investigates the crash, becoming implicated, for a time, in causing the crash, but unravels the mystery of its cause throughout season two. She exonerates the bus driver, who is unjustly blamed for the crash, and eventually finds the cause of the tragedy.

Veronica does not do all of this on her own, however. Through the collective efforts of Neptune's bandit heroes she is able to discover the truth about the crash and Goodman. Keith Mars works closely with Veronica--even when he may not know it, because she often dips into his evidence and information for her own purposes--to try to help the authorities in their investigation of the crash ("Happy Go Lucky"). Veronica dreams of the crash and its victims, who guide her to the truth ("I Am God"), and Logan provides Veronica and Keith with evidence possibly implicating Goodman in nefarious behavior ("Plan B").

In the end, it is revealed that Cassidy "Beaver" Cassablancas caused the crash. This act exposes Goodman's deeper crimes, that he has a history of sexual abuse against young boys. Beaver has previously been sexually abused by Goodman and is looking for revenge. Beaver exacts his revenge against Goodman by blackmailing him and ruining the plan for incorporation, but innocent people die in the process. Finally, Beaver blows up Goodman's plane before he commits suicide. Before Beaver's death, Veronica learns that he is also the individual who raped her. Beaver is a villain, but Goodman is arguably responsible for Beaver's behavior. Goodman embodies wrongdoing and greed and can be identified as the cause of violence, pain, and death ("Not Pictured").

Just like Aaron Echolls in season one, Goodman represents the injustice and inequity of wealth and power. Both men personify the dangers of excess. Goodman provides the impetus for the heightened economic and social tensions in Neptune as well as for Beaver's behavior. It is up to Veronica, with a little help from her friends, to be the bandit force in the face of what these men represent. The social banditry in *Veronica Mars* returns justice and righteousness to Neptune, it steals secrets and lies from the wealthy to

give justice to the poor, and it rights wrongs and establishes order along the way.

Banditry challenges economic, social, and political order in a way that offers populations the ability to assert their rights and control, exactly what Veronica and her supporters do (Hobsbawm 7; 11). Neither Veronica nor the other social bandits are willing "to accept the meek and passive social role of the subject peasant; the stiff-necked and recalcitrant, the individual rebels" (Hobsbawm 39-40). Outlaws do not run from persecution or injustice or hide in the face of oppression; rather they fight, resist, and work to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

Rob Thomas, creator of *Veronica Mars*, explains the evolution of the series' characters and plots:

> it was a pleasure with *Veronica Mars*, where you find those guest stars that you like and you think are good, and you figure out ways to go back to them. Where after a few seasons, it feels populated, it feels like you have created a world. I mean *Veronica Mars* sort of started out with this line: 'Fictional seaside beach community in California, this town with no middle-class.' And then each week you just painted a little deeper. ("WB Q&A--Rob Thomas")

For audiences, Veronica and her cohort were small-screen representations of themselves, facing the struggles and victories of everyday life. Within popular culture, *Veronica Mars* and Veronica Mars serve as reminders that heroes exist and champion justice even when economic, political, and social forces work against them. To view the title character and the show itself as a social bandit hero adds depth to the significance of both. The characters and circumstances presented in *Veronica Mars* demonstrate social bandits and the context within which they rise and fall. *Veronica Mars* reminds audiences that we can all be bandits and fight injustices on our own and with some help from our friends. The individual and collective social bandits in *Veronica Mars* remind us that standing up against wrongs is possible and show us how it can be done.

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The American Western Mythology of *Breaking Bad*

Paula Brown

Breaking Bad is a game-changing television series that created a unique kind of audience, viewing experience, and product. As an article in the *Independent* put it: "one d[idn't] simply start watching *Breaking Bad* in a casual capacity. It [was] a case of submitting yourself happily, voluntarily, to a cult of sleuthing and over-analysis. An episode [was] no longer a forty-six minute slice out of the working day--it [was] a meal of many courses" (Ross). The product itself was resolutely, uniquely teleological rather than episodic, firmly focused on the inexorable doom not just of the protagonist's life but of his virtue: a kind of bourgeois classical tragedy wherein the hero fell so far from the decent and good that he became a villain. Such a metamorphosis of the protagonist had never been attempted in television because the self-destruction of the protagonist would be suicide for the show. *Breaking Bad* was willing to destroy itself in order to perfect itself as a kind of tragic performance art.

Although the series was revolutionary in this respect, it was also deeply traditional in others, indebted to the generic television shows and films audiences had become familiar with from the big screen and from networks, most obviously, the mobster drama and the Western. The series recreates and rejuvenates the genre of the Western by reversing the expectation that it depict a quest or founding of civilization, instead revealing the loss of civilization. The series also draws on Western themes in its exploration of father and son relationships, questioning certain aspects of the myth of progress while reinforcing others.

One might object that mobster films with their notorious line-up of godfathers and bosses seem the most obvious genre of inspiration for *Breaking Bad*, because, after all, Walter White (Bryan Cranston), the high school teacher, ends up becoming a crime lord, and his fathering of two characters, Jesse Pinkman (Aaron Paul) and Walter White, Junior (Roy Frank Mitte), is a central theme. White's

criminality springs from his consciousness of paternal obligation: when he learns he is suffering from a cancer that will probably kill him, he resolves to cook meth to make a fortune to bequeath to his family. *The Godfather* series (the first of which appeared in 1972) created and then polished the seductive parent-criminal archetype, which, in the words of *Slate's* Alessandro Camon, represents fatherhood as "all-important" largely because "It was the source of authority, the reason for loyalty, the call of responsibility. It was the crucible where hard choices are made, and character tested. The word itself--'godfather'--evoked not so much 'the man who sponsors a child' as 'the father who is godlike.'" White's transformation into a successful criminal is similarly highlighted by the gradual construction of a myth of power and indestructability: White becomes Heisenberg, a reincarnation of a past genius, as well as a calculating murderer. Vince Gilligan, the creator and showrunner of *Breaking Bad*, transmuted the mild-mannered Walter White into a depraved drug kingpin, remarking in the *Los Angeles Times* that he wanted to "take Mr. Chips and transform him into Scarface" (Miller). The series demonstrates how a gentle, civilized, middle-aged father and teacher degenerates into a godfather of crime.

Although such a genealogy of *Breaking Bad* as a mobster show is generally satisfying, it fails to completely account for the cultural impact of the series. The setting, characterization, narrative codes, and mythology owe a deep debt to the American Western, even though the events depicted are set in the contemporary era. The term *mythology* will be used here to refer to the sorts of narratives that provide "great cultural significance" for society (Scholes 128). Western themes in the series have been explored by Amanda Knopf and Ian Dawe, who demonstrate how Western archetypes such as the outlaw influence the characters of the series (12-13). Knopf argues that the series ultimately "challenges" certain ideas integral to the Western, especially the idea of the "redemptive power of violence." In her view, the series "cautions the viewer about the tragic implications of continuing to cherish American values that are so essential to the Western genre" (23). This essay, in contrast, claims that the relationship of the series to traditional American values embodied in the Western is less contrarian. The

presentation of violence appeals as well as repels. Additionally, there is at least one Western myth *Breaking Bad* does not challenge and that it positively disseminates: faith in the power of justice. This belief is represented as a tragic but necessary condition for the continuation of American society. *Breaking Bad*'s treatment of the idea of progress (usually linked to the myth of manifest destiny in the Western) is more ambiguous, however.

Vince Gilligan has explicitly referred to the issue of genre several times, drawing comparisons between the show and classic Westerns. Knopf also mentions the influence of "spaghetti Westerns" on the series with their "bleak moral universe" (12). However, motifs from earlier, more traditional Westerns are also pervasive in *Breaking Bad*. Reviewing the characteristic narratives of these traditional films, as established by Robert Pippin and Scott Simmon, will help to establish expectations of the genre. In *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth,* Pippin demonstrates how three films--*The Searchers* (1956), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), and *Red River* (1948)--reiterate the "founding" theme of the *Aeneid.* The Civil War is the American Trojan War, and the migration west is the Odyssey. The point of migration is to found a "modern bourgeois, law abiding, property owning, market economy" (318). In these films, repeatedly, the tough old self-reliant cowboy must give way to a new man who is more civilized but less manly and independent. Simmon makes a similar claim in *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half Century,* asserting that the Western tends to "propound . . . ideas about American historical and political life . . . [including] social conventions" (103). Simmon, like Pippin, examines the American Western's aesthetics socially and culturally, although Simmon focuses his "cultural history" within the context of the humanities and on the early ideological influence of the films (xiv). Simmon's and Pippin's contextual approaches to analysis serve as models for a critique of *Breaking Bad*.

The location of the show provides the first clue to its genre. The scene is Albuquerque, New Mexico, which Gilligan described in a 2013 *IQ* interview with Bill Nevins as revelatory of "the depth and the sense of scale in the desert." The deserts of the American

West are depicted most poetically in the Western, for which desolate emptiness, according to Simmon, became emblematic of the classics shot in the 1940s. Knopf underlines the artistry of the landscape in the series by pointing out that, like the desert in "Ozymandius," "the desert where the series begins and where White's empire comes to ruin, remains visually unchanged" despite the "massive destruction" of homes, labs, equipment, and cars in the series (13). Simmon demonstrates how the existential emptiness of *film noir* influenced the depiction of landscape in the Western, the barrenness revealing the "characters themselves, who play out bitter conflicts on landscapes wiped clean for their testing" (194).

In addition to setting, the narrative of the film owes much to traditional Westerns. Gilligan's epiphany concerning this dominant influence occurred early, he said, upon his recognition of the confrontations White has with his enemies as classic gunfighter shootouts. He also mentions in this *IQ* interview that, after beginning shooting, "it suddenly dawned on me what the show could be. I began thinking about all those great John Ford movies and all those Sergio Leone westerns." The classic plotline of the Western-crime, chase, and retribution--is also mirrored in *Breaking Bad.* As so frequently occurs in the Western, the subject of *Breaking Bad* is justice. The essential myth, therefore, is the inevitability of punishment for criminality. Gilligan underlines this point, as reported by Martin Miller in the *Los Angeles Times*: "I just can't stand the idea of these people [criminals] going unpunished." In another 2013 interview , Gilligan added that he had been sure to make White "pay . . . for his sins" ("Breaking Bad Creator").

It is in the archetypal characterization of *Breaking Bad,* however, that Western themes of law, justice, and progress are most fully realized. Walter White's paternal relationship with Jesse Pinkman, a drug-dealing high school drop-out, is vital to the series, becoming transformed from authority, mentor, and teacher to partner and, ultimately, inferior, as Pinkman breaks away in disgust over White's cold-blooded murders. Their tense, evolving relationship echoes the complex attitudes towards the idea of progress of filmmakers who have created either classic or modern Westerns. The Western has often been regarded as a simple-minded affirmation of the

doctrines of Manifest Destiny and the unalloyed benefits of progress, but, as Pippin has argued in *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth*, the truth is that the classic Westerns have often expressed a tortured attitude about change and development. The old order embodied in the authoritative older cowboy is depicted as strong but hard and morally questionable; the new order, symbolized as the adoptive rather than biological son, is typically good but weak.

The Shootist (1976) and *Red River* (1948) demonstrate this plot. Both describe the initiation and education of the greenhorn. In both, a son is adopted by an older cowboy, and in both films the relationship is troubled. In *The Shootist,* the aging gunslinger (J.B. Books, played by John Wayne), dying from inoperable cancer, puts his criminal past behind him in order to teach the rebellious youth Gillom (Ron Howard) how to protect himself with a gun and how to cultivate a "third eye." Gillom attempts to steal Books' prized horse, Old Dollar, and tensions arise. In the end, however, the kid with the delinquent tendencies is set on the true path to civilization by his association with the old reprobate. The teenager learns not just how but also when and whom to shoot, defending the dying Books (who has just polished off several enemies in a shootout at the Metropole saloon) after a sneaky bartender shoots him in the back. The youth, appalled by the gun and all it represents, throws it away as Books nods in approval. The outlaw heroism of the old gunfighter, who dies on his own terms by arranging his last shootout and emerging victorious over his enemies, gives way to the new world order of trolleys, Oldsmobiles, wily newspapermen, cowardly lawmen, and nervous widows that the film meticulously depicts. There is, accordingly, a sense of progress as well as a sense of loss. As Knopf remarks, "the pursuit of progress, individuality, and confirmation of . . . courage on the frontier' are counterpoints to the 'violence and greed that are often its precursors" (12). *Red River* also juxtaposes a character personifying progress towards a new, civilized West, the diplomatic young Matthew Garth (Montgomery Clift), who clashes with a weathered older cowboy, Thomas Dunson (John Wayne), who represents a rougher, more violent approach in settling conflict. Pippin observes in his assessment of Wayne's character in *Red River* that there is a "shock" in

transitioning from one masculine ideal to another, more feminized model. The transition is not easy; the sacrifice of the heroism of the past seems too difficult to make even though the youthful spirit of the age demands it.

Clint Eastwood, adapting the plot of the *Shootist* in *Gran Torino* (2008), updates the narrative for a younger generation with cars and gangs instead of horses and gunslingers. Walt Kowalski, played by Eastwood, is an old veteran with a violent past, alienated from family and society and dying from cancer, who befriends a young man who attempts to steal something of deep significance to the old man. Thao, played by Bee Vang, an immigrant from Laos, attempts to steal Kowalski's Gran Torino. In both *The Shootist* and *Gran Torino*, the young men are assisted or trained by their older mentors in managing weaponry: Gillom is given lessons in shooting by Books; Kowalski similarly teaches Vang to shoot an old army rifle the older man used in Korea that, in the words of Roger Ebert, he keeps "ready to lock and load." In each movie, a climactic shootout provides a final resolution of conflict. In *Gran Torino*, the liberal implication, influenced by the ethos of the sixties, is that the violence of corruption and of gang warfare can be overcome by nonviolence: at the end of the film Kowalski stages a shootout in which he draws fire from his opponents but is himself unarmed. The community, observing the slaughter of the innocent old man, comes forward as witnesses against the murderer, and thus progress is made and justice done. This ideology of nonviolence is not unalloyed; even Roger Ebert, in his 2008 review, claimed that "Gran Torino isn't a liberal parable" because Eastwood "doesn't play nice . . . [and] makes no apologies for who he is [that is, a racist]." Ebert admits that the film portrays the liberal dream of "Americans of different races growing more open to one another in the new century" and "the belated flowering of a man's better nature." The creed of progress is thus again underlined in a typically Western manner.

The recurring mythology in these films, which as Roland Barthes would say is "naturalized,"[1] is that of the successful initiation of the young into resolute and competent leaders, implying the inevitability of progress and upward mobility resulting from

the growth of relationships of mentoring friendship of people within a democratic community rather than a clan or family. Such a progressive myth is fitting to the optimism of a country such as the United States. In the Western, this initiation is often represented as the integration of the greenhorn into a select group by the experienced old hand. Examples of the tenderfoot or the greenhorn being introduced into the hard life on the range are common. In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (another one of Pippin's 'founding' Westerns), a tenderfoot lawyer, Ransome Stoddard (Jimmy Stewart) is educated about the necessity of violence in the West by an experienced cowboy, Tom Doniphon (John Wayne). The film *Cowboy* (1958) repeats the narrative, depicting a young easterner, Frank Harris (Jack Lemmon), who induces an experienced rancher, Tom Reece (Glenn Ford), to go on a cattle drive with him. Harris toughens up and learns the trade, despite being an inexperienced liability at first.

Another common variation of this plot is to pair an inexperienced, fatherless boy, often of uncertain parentage, with a grizzled old mentor who guides him to adulthood whilst undergoing dangers of various sorts out on the range. A few examples here are *Red River* (1948), *The Searchers* (1956), *The Shootist* (1976), and, much later in the century (after everyone had agreed the Western was dead), the *Lonesome Dove* miniseries (1989). In *The Searchers*, one of Pippin's founding Westerns, John Wayne plays the part of Ethan Edwards, a grouchy, racist Confederate veteran, and Jeffrey Hunter takes the role of Martin Pawley, the adopted teenage brother of Debbie (Natalie Wood), who has been abducted by the Comanches. Edwards and Pawley spend the entire film tracking and searching for Debbie, and in the process, Pawley matures from a boy who follows his mentor to a man who stands up to him. As Richard Slotkin demonstrates in *Gunfighter Nation*, "Martin's power as both strategist and warrior grows to equal or exceed Ethan's" (470). In *Lonesome Dove*, there is a slight variation on the theme: the boy Newt Dobbs (Ricky Schroder) once again is of uncertain parentage, though it is suggested that his father might be Captain Woodrow Call (Tommy Lee Jones), who is one of *two* grizzled mentors; the other is Captain Augustus 'Gus' McCrae (Robert

Duvall). Call can never quite bring himself to admit that he is the father of the boy whose mother was a prostitute.

The initiation of the young man often depicts a tension or conflict of old and young over what Pippin calls the "political philosophy" undergirding common American Western myths. In *Red River,* as well as in *The Shootist*, the conflict is between an individualist version of masculinity and a more communal one. Clips from *Red River* were inserted into the initial scenes of *The Shootist* to provide background information about Thomas Dunson's personality, revealing the close thematic relationship between these films. Masculinity in America has traditionally been associated with perceptions of "potency," dominance, leadership, and the ability to "provide" for the family (Kimmel 79; Faucette 76). In the specific Western films under discussion, the experienced veterans of the frontier provide leadership by instructing adopted sons in knowledge and mastery of the cowboy craft (typically represented in the Western as knowledge of the gun and/or skill in riding, scouting, tracking, etc.), as well as the projection of authority or leadership. A look at *Red River* demonstrates how this plot operates. In the movie, an aspiring rancher, Dunson, adopts a young boy, Matthew Garth (played by Montgomery Clift as an adult), with whom he forms a relationship after the boy's wagon train is wiped out in an Indian attack. Dunson founds a cattle ranch near the Rio Grande with nothing but a cow and a bull saved from that conflict. Dunson deals with a couple of Mexicans who attempt to expel him with a legitimate claim that the land is already owned by shooting one of them. After fourteen years, Dunson's skill at ranching and shooting troublesome Mexicans is evidenced by the huge number of cattle he owns (more than 10,000). The focus on the relationship between man and boy is made obvious early when Dunson explains to Garth that the name of the ranch (Red River D) will incorporate his first initial, M, after he earns it. During the film, Garth earns this right by demonstrating not just his skills on the ranch and on the long, arduous drive north to sell the cattle, battling hardship, storm, and stampede, but also in his understanding of men when a mutiny arises over Dunson's domineering, high-handed leadership.

In the conflict between Garth and Dunson, the primary tension between values at the core of the myth of the American Western is revealed: the belief in the justice of the rugged frontier individual (what Simmon calls Jacksonian or *common man individualism*) or in the power of the community (what Simmon calls *Jeffersonian small scale participatory democracy*). This conflict, in turn, reveals an ambiguous attitude towards progress, which is attained to some degree because, by the conclusion of the films, economic betterment is achieved, and law and order are imposed (e.g., the end of the cattle drive results in profit; the homestead and family are defended; the Native Americans are defeated; killers are meted out just rewards). The idea of progress is culturally and politically coded. The nineteenth century assumes progress is inevitable and involves taming of the wilderness and the spreading of "civilization." The Western film genre of the 20ᵗʰ century only buys into part of this cultural code. As Pippin points out, there is often "a founding of a city" in Westerns, as new homesteads are founded and new territory conquered, but there is a price to pay (318). The tough old self-reliant cowboy (the John Wayne type), who is a refugee from the Civil War, is "doomed" because the kind of man he represents is fated to be replaced by more feminized, cooperative men who are more commercially successful, less pugnacious, or more cultured (318). Pippin concludes that classic American Western films are ambivalent: "these tales are not simple ones of progress," and "new forms of authority exemplified by the triumph of [Montgomery] Clift over [John] Wayne are just more hidden and efficient forms of ruthlessness" (318).

The relationship between Walter White and Jesse Pinkman in *Breaking Bad* reflects the customary tensions between father and *adopted* son characters common to the Western genre. Just as Books teaches Gillom how to shoot, White encourages Pinkman to use a gun as well as to murder in order to protect their common interests. The extrovert Pinkman, unlike the loner White, adapts to the expectations of the men on the street, managing the crew of drug dealers because he works best in a team, much as Garth in *Red River,* but Pinkman, like Garth, repeatedly mutinies against the tyranny of the adoptive father. There is a moment of intense conflict when

White accuses Pinkman of stealing some profits from a drug deal, just as Gillom is accused of stealing Old Dollar. These tensions reflect the two versions of masculinity intrinsic to the development of American mythology--the Jacksonian individualist vs. the Jeffersonian democrat--as well as an ironic, ambiguous representation of the myth of progress. The series' representation of the decline and fall of Walter White is paradoxical because it is both tragically momentous and existentially empty. White's character, like Ethan Edward's in *The Searchers*, is equivocal because of its complexity; the initial season establishes his conscience, heart, and sense of obligation to his family and students despite the lack of "respect" accorded him (Faucette 75-76). White's later transformation into a ruthless character adds another layer to his development rather than negating his previous qualities. Faucette writes that "it is men like Walt who use 'a perceived crisis' of masculinity as the rationale for returning to outmoded modes of male authority in an attempt to take control" (85). However, the character of White has resonated with contemporary audiences not simply because it speaks to a modern phenomenon, a "crisis of masculinity" (though that may well be true), but because it re-enacts the mythic character and narrative of the doomed, sacrificial, law-breaking individualist, the old Confederate outlaw, whom Americans have felt both drawn to and repelled by well before the 1960s. This character, as Richard Slotkin points out, is a kind of vigilante, an individual who, in moving into new markets and new territories, creates methods of controlling "undesirables" (173). In the Old West, these undesirables were Mexicans, Native Americans, or rustlers, who served as competitors for range and cattle; in twenty-first century America, they are rival drug dealers. Although the shootouts are more gruesome than those in traditional Westerns, *Breaking Bad* seduces viewers through the bloodshed even as Walter White repels them. The degree of violence is more intense, but White's character appeals to viewers for the same reasons John Wayne's did in *The Shootist* or Clint Eastwood's did in *Gran Torino*. All these texts represent the same archetypal leader whose strengths, paradoxically, are also weaknesses.

Pinkman, like these other generic adopted sons, is more social as well as weaker and more effeminate than his adoptive father. At the beginning of the series, Pinkman is represented as a comic, likable loser, a small-time drug dealer who repeatedly screws up the assignments that White gives him. Thus, because Pinkman never learned his chemistry well enough to understand the properties of hydrofluoric acid, he puts a decomposing body in a bathtub. The acid eats through the tub and the second floor of the house, and the corpse lands on the first floor in a disgusting pink lump of toxic liquefied flesh. Pinkman seems to be regularly beat up by drug dealers and agents of the law, but he is averse to committing violence himself. In the course of the series, White teaches him, as in any Western, to learn his craft, do his job better than the competition, and toughen up. Undertaking this kind of toughness, however, is a lesson in dehumanization: Pinkman is persuaded to murder the innocent, gentle Gale Boetticher (David Costabile), White's lab partner, in order to protect himself and White from Gus Fring (Giancarlo Esposito), a ruthless drug kingpin. *Breaking Bad* demonstrates what is lost in the learning or progress of the young, who lose their humanity when they sacrifice victims to their goals; the victims haunt those who murder them. The corpses have mass; they stink and decompose.

Possibly the most poignant death is represented as that of Jane Margolis (Kristen Ritter), Pinkman's girlfriend, who is depicted choking on her vomit in her sleep as White stands over her, allowing her to die rather than save the woman his adoptive son loves. Pinkman's subjection to and emasculation by White is depicted in this scene, which first reveals White's concern as he sees the girl he has rolled over on her back begin to vomit, then his hesitation as he considers whether he really should help her, and finally his horrified recognition of the fact that he has allowed a person to die without attempting to help. Jane's mouth in the final moment is shown wide open, filled with the half digested food that also flecks her cheek; she is transformed in the matter of a few seconds from a beautiful lover twined in her boyfriend's arms to a disgusting corpse. Pinkman is lying next to Jane during the whole

scene, perfectly helpless and unconscious in his own drug-induced stupor. The specter of Jane returns to haunt both Pinkman and White.

By refusing to rescue Jane, White ensures that Pinkman remains loyal to him, stays by his side, and does not elope with Jane. White also protects Pinkman from a life of heroin addiction, which he and Jane seem close to adopting, and defends himself from Jane's blackmail, a not inconsiderable bonus. The benefits accruing to White from allowing to Jane to choke to death are manifold. His action, therefore, is complex and ambiguous, and his choice is hard. The horror the audience feels over this scene is reflected in White's face, which convulses with pain as he stands over the corpse.

This ambiguity is intensified over the course of the series as White is transformed from an empathetic husband, father, and citizen to a cold-blooded murderer, but his transformation is most vividly enacted in the last episode, which invites the audience to view White first as a lonely lover and father, then as a ruthless killing machine, and finally as a tragic hero who submits to his doom. White's death is staged as an elaborate, ritualistic, cowboy sacrifice. The episode is carefully framed by references to Western tropes, images, and music. A tape by Marty Robbins, a country singer popular in the mid-twentieth century, falls out of the glove compartment as White makes his dark, isolated, final drive back to his home to say goodbye to his family before staging his death battle. The lyrics of "El Paso" mournfully ring out. The last episode of *Breaking Bad* is entitled "Felina," who is the *femme fatale* of the song; she is the Mexican girl with whom the speaker falls in love. "Felina" is also an anagram for "Finale." The events of the episode as well as the series reflect the narrative of the ballad, wherein the singer falls in love with the "wicked Felina," kills a rival for her love, is "shocked by the foul evil deed [he] has done," runs from the law, goes far away "out to the badlands of New Mexico," and discovers that, when he is alone, "nothing is left." Returning to the scene of the crime, "Riding alone in the dark," he spies "Rosa's Cantina below" and takes on a slew of enemies: "off to my right I see five mounted cowboys, off to my left ride a dozen or more." As he goes down in blazing gunfire, he feels "something is

dreadfully wrong" in his side, a "deep burning pain" where he has been shot. As he dies, Felina comes to him to give him "one little kiss and . . . goodbye."

As in the song, White has done a "foul evil deed" (or two or three), is on the lam far away, and is planning to go out in a blaze of glory. In a 2013 interview on the AMC website, when Aaron Paul and Vince Gilligan are questioned about this final episode, Gilligan mentions *The Searchers* as an inspiration for the scene where White confronts the Nazi gang in the "cantina." White is waiting for Pinkman to appear, and the audience wonders, because White and Pinkman have become so antagonistic, whether White will kill Pinkman in carrying out his vengeance on "Uncle" Jack Welker, his nephew Todd Alquist, and the other white suprema-cists. Welker had helped White out by carrying out assassinations for him but had then murdered Hank Schrader, White's brother-in-law. Gilligan admitted that he was influenced by the moment in *The Searchers* when the John Wayne character finally approaches Debbie, the object of his long search, who has been living with the enemy Comanches, and the audience does not know whether he will kill her or rescue her, but at the last minute he "sweeps her up in his arms" (Acuna). When the long-suffering Pinkman, who has been held captive (as Debbie was), is delivered to White, he leaps on top of Pinkman, screaming as he bears him down to the floor as if he is enraged by hatred. In reality, White is shielding Pinkman and holding him safe from harm as he activates the machine gun that he had set up earlier in his car outside the building to start spraying the building, killing almost everyone outright.

When everyone except White and Pinkman appears to be dead, White pushes the gun over to his former partner and tells him to shoot him, but his former disciple is unable to pull the trig-ger and throws the gun away in disgust. The gun toss, rather than evoking *The Searchers*, evokes another John Wayne film, *The Shootist*, when Gillom throws away the gun after he shoots the bartend-er. Although White, unlike the singer in "El Paso," has no one to comfort him as he dies, because Pinkman quickly abandons him to drive away from the crime scene, the focus of the episode is still squarely on White's love, which haunts the conclusion. The

narrative code of the Old West allows vengeance such as White's only if it is motivated by love, and love is the subject of both the concluding song and White's last meditation when he is left alone to ponder the carnage all around him. As the strains of the love song "Baby Blue" begin, he caresses a metal chamber, one of the gleaming coppery tanks with the nozzles, pipes, and gages sprouting from it that he helped to assemble and perfect for the creation of meth. As he strokes the metal, he gazes at himself in the reflection on the steel, and his hand leaves a smear of blood. The camera cuts from the scene. The last crane shot shows a fallen White spread out below like a "starfish martyr" (Hamblin).

The position of the body, as well as the smear of blood from the previous scene, invites the audience to view the body not merely as an object, thing, or, in semiotic terms, the innocent "signified," but as a sign or metaphor. The blood represents the passion, the shoot-out the sacrifice, and the sprawled body the crucifixion. Any interpretive community familiar with the tropes of traditional Western narrative as well as Christian iconography can recognize these references. Knopf mentions the "homage" paid in the shot to sacrificial imagery in both Sam Peckinpah's *Billy the Kid* and Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. He argues that because viewers cannot be sure that White is dead in this scene, there can be no final determination concerning the tragic impact of his death. Unlike Peckinpah's representation of the Christ-like Billy the Kid, there is no "transfiguration" of the outlaw, which Knopf claims is necessary in order to create a tragedy "align[ed] with many traditional Westerns" (20).

Knopf appears to have conflated two arguments here: one concerns tragedy and the other Christianity. Knopf argues that because there is no transfiguration, there is thus no redemption in a Christian sense. The sacrificial themes and imagery, however, echo the narrative in at least two other Westerns in addition to Peckinpah's, suggesting that White is intended as a classic tragic protagonist. In neither *The Shootist* nor *Gran Torino* is there any transfiguration of the protagonist. In "Felina," White is depicted on multiple levels as a sacrifice for those he loves: for his son White, Jr., his daughter Holly, his wife Skyler, and his adoptive son Jesse. The theme

of martyrdom is thus underlined by repetition. White's love for family is emphasized when he ensures their future financial comfort by visiting Gretchen and Elliott Schwartz (Jessica Hecht and Adam Godley), wealthy old college friends of White's in Santa Fe, instructing them to give several million that he has earned in their names to Walt, Jr. The Schwartzes are compelled to obey because White fools them into believing there are snipers outside as well as other colleagues who will monitor their future compliance. White's love for his daughter is established as he lingers over the sleeping Holly one last time, and his love for Skyler is demonstrated when he instructs her to use the lottery ticket with the coordinates of the graves of Hank Schrader, White's DEA agent brother-in-law, and Steven Gomez, Hank's partner, in order to strike a deal with the authorities. White is thus represented as a parent and spouse who provides for his family at the price of self-destruction without expecting or demanding from them anything in return for his love. That this sacrifice is made in full awareness of his true nature is clarified when White tells Skyler that his choice of a life of crime was selfish but that he loved it because it made him feel powerful, successful, and alive. Thus, White's actions are noble in the final episode in a classic sense. Like Oedipus, who blinds and exiles himself in order to restore Thebes because he acknowledges and takes full responsibility for his actions as a patricide and as an incestuous adulterer, White assumes accountability for his crimes when he stages his own death, enacting justice both by "paying" for those errors and by saving Pinkman from slavery.

According to the classic guidelines for tragedy, the tragic protagonist need not be transfigured or redeemed; he must only, according to Aristotle's *Poetics* 2.xv, at least, have noble characteristics and suffer a fall from respectability or renown. This nobility or goodness is defined as "manly valor." Ultimately, as a strong figure, he must take responsibility for his "error or frailty"(*hamartia*) and demonstrate clear understanding of his limitations, undergoing *anagnorisis* or recognition of his true nature (Aristotle 2.xiii). White the respectable family man (if not exactly "highly renowned and prosperous") becomes, in the terms of the *Poetics* 2.xiii, an outlaw, a well-known figure in Western lore, and thus falls from grace in

society. This change, again according to the traditional Western's formula, happens not because of inherent vice but because of a series of miscalculations or "errors." Such a plot is most likely to generate pity and fear in the audience, for pity is stimulated by the observation of great calamity falling on another, fear by the adversity and tribulations of a human being such as ourselves. The outlaw in the Western is one who has made such an error without initial moral corruption, a man who has perhaps murdered but did so to destroy a greater evil or to save or defend his family, who can no longer turn back the clock or reintegrate into normal society, who has fallen from grace. As Ian Dawe explains, "even when an outlaw 'goes straight,' American westerns cannot allow him to completely escape the past. There might be forgetting, but there is no forgiving" (38). The tragedy depicted in *Breaking Bad* is that of the outlaw, a noble man of high intelligence, motivated by deep familial love, corrupted by overweening ambition, who embraces the justice of his doom.

White's tragic fall may be best understood not as the result of inherent vice but as a series of miscalculations and errors that have twisted an originally noble soul. That is one reason it provokes both "pity" as well as "fear" in the audience. White's primary miscalculation involves mistaking ambition for love. When he allows Jane to choke to death on her vomit, he persuades himself he is allowing her to die in order to save Jesse from addiction, just as he persuades himself early in the series that he is making money in order to make sure his family has something once he dies of cancer. His fall into the role of a drug kingpin is a slow and tortuous affair, where he is drawn reluctantly into ever more violent acts as a consequence of actions and events he initiated in the past. White never went into the drug business to hurt anyone; he mutates into the role he only intended to play-act: that of Heisenburg. The more violence he commits, the more he is inexorably corrupted by the power he wields and the more difficult he finds it to dissociate the original goal of providing for his family from an alarming ambition he had before never consciously acknowledged, much less embraced. Even as White's old identity becomes lost in

that of a gangster, he never renounces his love for those to whom he is closest, attempting to protect them even after death.

Protection of family is a common theme in Westerns: in *The Searchers*, family is restored when John Wayne enfolds Debbie in his protective embrace and takes her home. In *The Shootist*, Gillom learns from Books in the final shoot-out how to use a gun to defend others so that Gillom can go back to his mother as the man in the family, helping to protect a new, more law-abiding society. In *Gran Torino*, Kowalski dies defending a Laotian family so they can continue to contribute to the vitality of the melting pot that is America. Each of these Westerns reflects the culture of the American society in which it was produced. However, when Pinkman is released from slavery under Uncle Jack, he is not reunited with anyone, not with White or with mother, father, or lover. Each man goes his separate, isolated way. It is difficult to tell if Pinkman is laughing or sobbing as he roars off into the darkness and the empty desert. He has been saved, but whether he has been mentally and emotionally damaged beyond repair is a question left hanging.

If White's tragedy is judged within the framework of the Western, it can be evaluated as a logical extension of the ambiguous attraction and repulsion twentieth century filmmakers have demonstrated towards progressive assumptions encoded within the Western. It is important not to underestimate the complexity of the attitudes towards progressivism in the archetypal Westerns and to be skeptical of the common claim that "the classical western is dead" because "the ideological gravity of the classical western [is] . . . demolished" (Berg 224). In order to more narrowly define the central tenets of progressivism, sociologist Robert Nisbet explains

> There are at least five major premises to be found in the idea's history from the Greeks to our day: belief in the value of the past; conviction of the nobility, even superiority, of western civilization; acceptance of the worth of economic and technological growth; faith in reason and in the kind of scientific and scholarly knowledge that can come from reason alone; and, finally, belief in the intrinsic importance of the ineffable *worth* of life on this earth. (317)

In the Western, civilization is represented traditionally by the symbolism of the book, lawman or judge, woman, and town. The cowboy is tamed by his relationship with a good woman who shows him his obligation to the demands of his family and society. Scholarly knowledge and culture are revealed in obedience to written word, inscribed in books, and to judgment of the sheriff, lawyers, and court. *Breaking Bad* features these classic elements: the lawman, Hank; the lawyer, Saul; the book, *Leaves of Grass*; and the good woman, Skyler. Walter White initially demonstrates progressive beliefs; his respect for erudition, culture, and tradition is also revealed in his dedication to education and reverence of science, embodied in his icon Heisenburg. White's desire for economic prosperity may be perceived as both admirable and ruinous. Almost the same elements are shuffled around in the iconic film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* but *Breaking Bad* reverses the narrative flow of this film. In the classic with James Stewart and John Wayne, the lawyer (Stewart) eventually wins over the Wild West by subordinating the power of the cowboy (Wayne) and his gun to the rule of law and the education of half of Shinbone while the portrait of George Washington hovers benignly over the classroom. Liberty Valance, the symbol of lawless and narcissistic violence, is subdued, and civilization blooms in the desert.

In *Breaking Bad*, White, like the lawyer Ransome Stoddard, attempts to educate his young students, but unlike Stoddard, he gradually relinquishes his dedication to education, identity as a scholar, resistance to violence, and belief in the "intrinsic importance" and "worth of life" (Nisbet 317). White's job teaching high school chemistry is depicted in the first season as difficult partly because it is one society no longer respects enough to pay teachers adequately. White is paid so little he has to take on a job washing his students' cars. The show's representation of disillusionment with the vocation of educators reflects twenty-first century erosion of faith in education. White's fidelity to academic tradition and higher culture is decisively broken later in the series when he betrays Gale Boetticher (David Costabile), a man who symbolizes ideal academic collegiality. Boetticher's resume is impressive. In addition to having an M.S. degree in organic chemistry, with a

concentration in x-ray crystallography, he has an intricate, thoughtful philosophy of life, justifying the manufacture of meth on the bedrock of libertarianism. Boetticher putters around watering plants and pursuing hobbies, engineering the perfect coffee machine and reading poetry. His love for Walt Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," which he recites from memory for White, holds particular meaning for both men, as the poem celebrates the intuitive, spiritual insights that may be gleaned from the quiet study of nature. Despite White's obligations to this cultivated scholar, his partner, his intellectual equal, White orders Pinkman to kill Boetticher because he is worried that Gus Fring, the drug lord who runs the meth lab, might employ Gale to replace White and Pinkman (which would then lead to White and Pinkman becoming expendable themselves). Signs indicating Boetticher's academic dedication and harmlessness are scattered liberally; especially notable are the lab notebook on the coffee table next to his dead body and the dedication in his notes over a Walt Whitman poem to "W.W. My Star, My Perfect Silence." Ironically, but fittingly, the gift Boetticher gave White, *Leaves of Grass*, is the clue that leads to Hank's discovery of Heisenberg. This discovery uncovers the mystery of the identity of the meth manufacturer that has obsessed the DEA agent the entire series, and in solving this riddle, Hank unmasks White's alter ego. This book has another handwritten dedication that forcefully reminds Hank of one in the notes recovered from the scene of Boetticher's murder: "To my other favorite W.W. It's an honor working with you. Fondly, G.B."

White betrays not just Gale but Hank Schrader as well. Hank, the DEA agent, plays the tough, good lawman, in opposition to Saul, the sleazy lawyer, revealing the show's complex allegiance to law in society, which is more tortured than that of the traditional Western. In the classic Western, the rule of law overcomes use of force. In *Breaking Bad*, the rule of law is portrayed as corrupt and imperfect. Though Hank is a good man, he is hardly John Wayne. In the first season, Hank swaggers and boasts about his job, gun, and accomplishments. Ironically, he initiates White into his life of crime when he invites him to a meth bust and lets him have a look at a real meth lab. Nevertheless, despite the show's initial satire of

the ineffective cop, Hank gradually evolves in the course of the series into a courageous, thoughtful individual who overcomes the violence of the streets as well as his own panic attacks, solving the mystery of Heisenburg and making the ultimate sacrifice of his life for community and family. Whereas Hank's fidelity is to serve the greater good of the community, to lock up criminals in order to make society safe, Saul's commitment is to himself and to his pocketbook, and he uses his knowledge of legal loopholes to ensure that the guilty get away with murder and that he and White make as much profit as possible. Hank represents the spirit and Saul the corrupt material flesh of the law; White betrays the former to the latter.

Skyler, White's long-suffering wife, plays the "redemptive woman," generally portrayed in the Western by a "minister's sister" or a "schoolmarm" but sometimes by a barmaid or even (in *Stagecoach*) by a prostitute (Slotkin 304). Skyler attempts to redeem White after she discovers that White is a meth cook and a drug kingpin, pleading with him, threatening to expose him, but ending up partially corrupted by him, laundering his money in a car wash and cooking the books to legitimize his wealth. Ironically, Skyler gradually loses power over White over the duration of the series as their relationship becomes more passionate and as White begins to "transform into a more dominant male figure" (Faucette 77). As Faucette notes, "this change shocks and thrills Skyler" (77). White's masculinity is underscored by the birth of a daughter. As in other Westerns, such as *The Virginian,* by Owen Wister, "a primary sign of social and moral superiority is not nobility but virility" (Slotkin 176). Skyler leaves White for good only when she becomes too frightened of him to live with him any longer. The point appears to be that Skyler's nurturing, tough love, dogged loyalty, bookkeeping, craftiness, children, passion, and creativity are not enough to "redeem" White. In this Western, the protagonist's good woman does everything humanly possible in the name of love to save her man, but love is not enough.

Despite the fact that the redemptive woman is denied her traditional redemptive act and the good lawman Hank is killed while the corrupt lawyer Saul is unpunished, justice, as in all traditional

Westerns, is ultimately served, and it is served because the strong, virile tragic protagonist accepts full responsibility for his acts, acknowledges who he has become in full consciousness of his evil, accepts his doom stoically, and sacrifices himself in order to restore peace to society. The series demonstrates that, although the law may be ineffective and love may fail, justice is more enduring than individual lawmakers, lawyers, or lovers. White's motivation in the concluding episode is purified by the disinterested desire to make his family (who now hate him) safe and secure before he dies and to punish those who have done wrong, including himself. The song "Baby Blue," which is incorporated into the last episode, articulates this point explicitly in the lines, "I guess I got what I deserved." The sword of judgment hangs over Walter White throughout the series, and when it strikes, its aim is true. Family, perhaps, may fail, society may crumble, future prospects may be bleak, but faith in justice endures. This faith in justice and in the strong, manly protagonist who executes it with a tragic self-sacrifice is integral to the American Western. Moreover, the series' complex and tortured representation of progress embodied in the death of the old Confederate outlaw is another indication that it follows the lead of iconic American Western films, demonstrating the allegiance of the show to certain core values of the genre.

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Notes

1. According to Barthes, a myth is merely the interpretation of any particular phenomenon by a culture reflecting its own particular ideology. An idea may be said to naturalize an object or

a situation when it implies that it is true or factual rather than interpretive. The basis of myth is that it "transforms history into nature" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 128).

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Shifting Gears and Paradigms at the Movies: Masculinity, Automobility, and the Rhetorical Dimensions of *Mad Max: Fury Road*

Darin Payne

When shifting paradigms, it's important to put in the clutch. So goes a well-worn aphorism that's been kicking around for decades. Patricia Nelson Limerick is regularly cited as a source for this quotation in scholarly circles, but even she attributes the remark to a college student of hers (Limerick 21), which, along with its ubiquity online, puts its reference point squarely in the land of popular culture. I open with it here for that reason *and* because it is an apt metaphor for considering one of the US's most significant vehicles (pun intended) for managing paradigmatic shifts in popular culture: mainstream movies.

Since Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno first offered their mid-twentieth century criticisms of what was then a fairly new medium in the making and managing of shared meanings among the masses, popular films have been understood to serve a rhetorical function beyond mere entertainment. Horkheimer and Adorno's criticisms were deeply pessimistic, suggesting that movies are a staple of the "culture industry," an integral facet of late capitalism that seeks to create a singular shared consciousness driven by consumption and pacified by entertainment that reaffirms existing social roles and relations. Writing about popular culture generally and film more specifically, they argue that

> The details become interchangeable [--] the hero's temporary disgrace which he accepts as a "good sport," the wholesome slaps the heroine receives from the strong hand of the male star, his plain-speaking abruptness toward the pampered heiress, are, like all the details, ready-made clichés, to be used here and there as desired and

always completely defined by the purpose they serve within the schema. To confirm the schema by acting as its constituents is their sole *raison d'etre*. In a film, the outcome can invariably be predicted at the start--who will be rewarded, punished, forgotten. (98-99)

Such homogeneity and predictability becomes, for Horkheimer and Adorno, intimately connected to the reproduction of ideology, as the medium "trains those exposed to it to identify film directly with reality" (99-100). Yet Horkheimer and Adorno's specific examples of cliché seem contradictory to their argument: their reference to "wholesome slaps" that a heroine might receive from the male star of a movie surely gives most readers in the twenty-first century a significant measure of pause. Presuming it does, then perhaps the reproductive nature of popular culture is not so complete and predictable after all.

None of which is to say that Horkheimer and Adorno's pessimism is entirely unfounded; they are referenced initially here (instead of, say, the Birmingham school of cultural studies scholars like Stuart Hall or Angela McRobbie) because our current mediascape is awash with analyses of films and television shows that (mis)represent reality in any number of ways to reinscribe specific social roles and relations. For one example, scholars, reviewers, bloggers, and everyday users on social media routinely discuss Hollywood's failure to adequately represent racial diversity, a fact that has become especially evident at major awards ceremonies like the Oscars--a criticism evidenced in the popularity of 2016's social media tag *#oscarssowhite*. For another example of mainstream movies' skewed representations of reality and social relations, one even more directly relevant to this article's argument, consider that a comprehensive study by scholars at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism recently revealed that more than 70% of all speaking roles in the top 100 movies of 2013 were male (Smith, Choueiti, and Pieper). Given those numbers, it is perhaps not surprising that nearly half of the mainstream movies released annually in the US in the past few years have failed the well-known Bechdel test (Ulaby; Agarwal)[1]--which is an indicator not of parity in gender-based

representations but only of a baseline, minimal recognition of female characters on their own terms. Such a baseline test was met by only 55% of the mainstream movies in 2014 (Pulver).

Yet the scene *is* changing. As the chorus of criticism grows louder through social media and the popular press, Hollywood necessarily adapts. For instance, Disney, a long-time producer of patriarchial normativity (Bell, Haas, and Sells; Ward), is finally developing films that depict women as powerful, creative individuals, as central protagonists rather than "pampered heiresses." (See, for examples, *Frozen*, *Malificent*, and most recently *Moana*.) Across and within mainstream movies, patriarchy is being contested, contradicted, challenged--not all at once and not in a revolutionary manner but in ways that reflect the debates of the public sphere. The same profit motive that seems constraining to critics clamoring for immediate change to the status quo onscreen is, in fact, a significant force for slow and steady change--one that is necessarily in tune with the masses and the politics they will or will not support with their consumer spending habits. Hence the metaphor of the clutch: mainstream movies might seem on the surface to be conservative rather than progressive in their "safe" representations of "reality," but, as mechanisms for shifting paradigms, they often embody the dialectic tensions that accompany change, providing for a broad segment of society a transitional space of easing-in.

This embodiment, in fact, a dominant rhetorical dimension of most mainstream movies: they express, reflect, and ease in paradigmatic changes by balancing contradictions in the public sphere. Moreover, they do this precisely because they are part of the "culture industry" and are dependent for their very survival not merely on viewers' appreciation of art or aesthetics but also on their own existence as saleable commodities for mass consumption. A recent Hollywood film, one that was successful with most critics and much of the viewing public--namely 2015's *Mad Max: Fury Road*-is pertinent to this argument. This film is an extended example of mainstream movies' rhetorical work around gender, not just because it aptly illustrates my thesis but because it was so successful across differing communities of the public sphere. Additionally, the film is an even more appropriate site of illustration for my

arguments about "shifting gears" because of its deep engagement with "automobility," a term used by some scholars of popular culture to describe a masculinist subgenre of late twentieth century mainstream movies in which men find agency and freedom in their abilities behind the wheel. Those features, combined with the representations of its leading male and female characters and their receptions by the viewing public, make *Fury Road* an exemplar of both literal and metaphorical gear shifting on the big screen.

Rhetorical Dimensions of Mainstream Movies

The analysis of *Fury Road* is prefaced with a brief explanation of how rhetoric, as a theoretical framework, can be employed to understand the "functions and manifestations" of popular culture--a phrase I borrow from Barry Brummett (Rhetorical Dimensions 39-45) and build upon with scholarship from elsewhere in the humanities, including cultural studies, feminism, anthropology, philosophy, and film studies. In developing a framework for rhetorical analysis, Brummett builds on Samuel Becker's "mosaic" model of communication to focus not on the discrete text (like a speech, essay, or poem), but on the patterned "bits"--such as TV shows, advertisements, images, slogans, etc.--that comprise how our world is understood and communicated to one another (*Rhetorical Dimensions*; *Rhetoric in Popular Culture*). In doing so, Brummett shifts the traditional definition of rhetoric as referencing an act or object to constituting a social *function*, namely that of managing meaning within social arrangements. This makes rhetoric an inherent *dimension* of "the countless acts and objects comprising a cultural environment" (*Rhetorical Dimensions* 38). Clearly influenced by the strand of semiotics and Marxism produced by and after the Birmingham School of cultural studies, Brummett sketches three levels of rhetorical functions (and their corresponding manifestations) at work in contemporary media and material culture: for Brummett, *exigent*, *quotidian*, and *implicative* functions of rhetoric operate within *interventionist*, *appropriational*, and *conditional* manifestations, respectively.

On one end of this rhetorical spectrum are the exigent functions that manifest in interventionist acts and objects: explicitly

argumentative op-ed essays, speeches, public service announce-
ments, and so on. At this level of rhetoric, viewers and readers are
usually aware of the persuasive intention and action occurring. In-
deed, much of the rhetoric taught by Aristotle and in the millennia
that have followed can be considered more narrowly as a pedagogy
of exigent/interventionist rhetoric. At the opposite end of the
spectrum, however, are implicative functions served by conditional
manifestations, the latter of which are more like "shadow texts"
that indirectly, implicitly, and sometimes even unintentionally serve
to shore up the commonly held beliefs and shared meanings that
circulate within the cultures we inhabit. (Hence their being termed
"conditional," as they provide the conditions for shared under-
standings and meaningful social interaction.) They are the manifes-
tations of rhetoric that are most invisible to us, functioning below
our conscious awareness but acting as the foundation for the more
recognizable deliberations and decision-making in which we rou-
tinely engage. Philosopher Louis Althusser would undoubtedly la-
bel this social function of rhetoric *ideology*, described in his famous
definition as "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of
individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162). This is a
relation into which people are "always-already" interpellated as
subjects through myriad social, material, and discursive conditions,
so much so that when they are hailed by others, they recognize
themselves in the address (176). This concept brings us back to the
movies: the alleged plot device of the rugged male hero at some
point wholesomely slapping the pampered heiress is just one of
the bits in a mosaic model of communication that, when articu-
lated with certain other bits, begins to form a coherent picture of
"reality," a meaningful pattern within which individuals might find
themselves and relate to others.

Use of the term *articulated* in the preceding sentence is inten-
tional, as it alludes to the "articulation theory" taken up so in-
tensively within British cultural studies. As Lawrence Grossberg
notes, articulation is the production of unities out of fragments.
It "links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this
meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics" (qtd. in
Slack 119). Such articulations, according to Stuart Hall, "shape the

understandings and conceptions of the world of men and women in their ordinary everyday social calculations, construct them as potential social subjects, and have the effect of organizing the ways in which they come to or form consciousness of the world ("Ideology" 49). Rhetorician Sharon Crowley adopts Hall's usage of the term to describe how commonplace beliefs and normalized relations are both socially constructed and contested through rhetorical action. Thus, "articulate" conveys two of its common meanings at once: to speak and to connect. Rhetoric, as Crowley notes, is both a means of expressing and connecting values, beliefs, and identities, thereby enabling and making constructions of reality that are--at least momentarily--coherent (60-61). The momentary nature of that coherence is significant: in her examination of rhetoric and fundamentalism in mainstream U.S. culture, Crowley explores how the conditional rhetorics of Brummett's model (even though she does not name them as such) can shift over time as beliefs get articulated, *re*articulated, and *dis*articulated through multiple, competing rhetorical practices and contexts. While Crowley has always been more likely to study the kinds of rhetorical manifestations defined by Brummett as interventionist, both scholars are on shared ground in recognizing that what the world means to us is never fixed for all time but is always being made and remade through rhetoric.

Indeed *Fury Road* is, to a considerable degree, a filmic exercise in ideological disarticulation and the remaking of social relations, particularly around gender. The film does more than pass the Bechdel test; it creates a world in which men are neither the primary agents of change, as they so often are in movies made for the masses, nor the exclusive heroes or decision makers. There are damsels in distress in *Fury Road*, but they are ultimately their own saviors, led by a woman described by *New York Times* film critic A.O. Scott as "a rebel with a buzz cut, a prosthetic arm, a thousand-mile stare and a supremely righteous cause." The movie thus works to complicate longstanding gender norms of the "Hollywood blockbuster," but not via the sorts of countercultural critique typical of art-house cinema and instead as a mainstream embrace of broader shifts in our shared ideological landscape. As such, the movie reflects and

promotes evolving understandings of gender performance and subjectivity, specifically those appropriate to twenty-first century western audiences. Rhetoricians would consider this "kairotic," a key term often used to indicate rhetorical acts attuned to a particular time and place, whereas cultural studies scholars such as Hall and Grossberg would see this as an example of popular culture's potential for resistance to the status quo in terms of both production and reception of media.

My movement thus far in this article away from the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer and toward the optimism of scholars like Hall does not necessarily mean that I am simply following an evolution of theory or a "history of ideas" apparent in the chronological relationship between the Frankfurt and Birmingham schools of cultural studies. Arguments from both are here because both remain relevant to any study of popular culture under capitalism. As Douglas Kellner writes, "Contemporary culture is more commodified and commercialized than ever"; moreover, "media culture continues to be highly ideological and to legitimate existing inequalities of class, gender and race" (24). Yet Kellner also acknowledges, at the same time, that audiences play a significant role in decoding such legitimating products of media culture and in influencing new products that films and television shows (for just two examples) both articulate and disarticulate ideological meanings in ways that are contingent upon political economy and, inevitably, reflect the paradigmatic shifts underway in the public sphere (32-33).

It is instructive to consider, for example, the gender norms and relations at work in a similarly popular film, also of the action movie genre, but hailing from a different moment in time--namely the now-iconic *Die Hard*, which was highly successful with critics and the mass public alike when it first arrived in theaters nearly thirty years ago.[2] For readers not familiar with the movie, it revolves around a wise-cracking cop named John McClane, played by Bruce Willis in his A-list breakout role, battling German thieves inside a towering Japanese executive building (the "Nakatomi Plaza") in Los Angeles as he tries to save his wife from their clutches. Given three decades of separation from the film, it's easy to see

some significant ways in which it was a fitting response to America's social, political, and economic conditions of the mid-1980s. For many audience members in the U.S., the film was undoubtedly revealing, reflecting, and responding to anxieties attendant to paradigmatic changes underway, particularly those related to globalization, the rise of feminism, and (corresponding to both) an emerging "crisis of masculinity."[3] Men's roles as "breadwinners" were being threatened by women entering the workforce in large numbers, as well as by losses of traditional blue collar jobs amidst the immense competition from other countries' products newly available for consumption in the U.S.[4] Kairotically speaking, then, a late-1980s cineplex in the U.S. was a perfect place and time to *articulate* American exceptionalism and blue-collar masculine prowess, both of which are embodied in the character of John McClane. He may be an off-duty cop, but metaphorically speaking, he is a "cowboy": his name is just two phonemes away from "John Wayne"; his most famous line from the film is "Yippee-ki-yay, Motherfucker"; and the film's lead villain, Hans, mocks him for being "just another American who saw too many movies as a child, another orphan of a bankrupt culture who thinks he's John Wayne [. . . or] Marshall Dillon." (McClane's retort is that he was "always partial to Roy Rogers.") Thus at a moment in history when U.S. hegemony and male dominance are being threatened, the movie provides a return of sorts to a mythological figure steeped heavily in the country's collective imagination. That figure of the cowboy, quintessentially American and traditionally masculine, saves the day. By the end of the film, the Japanese building is destroyed, the Germans are dead, and McClane's wife, Holly--a woman literally trapped in a tower--has been returned to him. At a level of rhetorical metonymy, the world has been remade.

Many critics of action films like *Die Hard* see the genre as deeply conservative (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 22; Vogel), particularly given its rise to popularity during the Reagan era of American isolationism, heteronormative family values, and free market individualism. These were the dominant political and economic ideologies circulating at the time, and they are set in dialectic tension with the challenges emerging from the material and social conditions

represented on the screen. Despite the film's resolution fantasy, there is no denying that the protagonist's obstacles represent a reality that was indeed already well underway: Holly's position as an executive in a global corporation is *not* dwelled upon as an anomaly; the Nakatomi corporation's American headquarters might be destroyed, but it is still only a building. Furthermore, although the cowboy is an admired mythical figure in much of the American imagination, it is also a figure glaringly from history--a relic of the past that is no more likely to reemerge than women are to return to their once-assumed place in a suburban house's kitchen. The new and the old are both on display in *Die Hard*, and different readings can be applied to the film depending on differing audiences: for example, my undergraduate college students viewing the film in the spring of 2016 were immediately struck by the retrograde sexism of McClane's "hypermasculinity" and the film's fear of all things un-American.[5] "Hypermasculinity" has increasingly been considered a pejorative term in mainstream media, due in part to the continued gains in feminism[6] and also to emergent normalizations of multiple masculinities, many of which are expressed, explored, and naturalized in popular culture these days (Connell). In 2016, the American cowboy no longer represents straightforward masculinity but an amped up, hyperbolic version of increasingly narrow traditional constructions. In the 1980s, however, the conservative codes of hypermasculinity resonated with mainstream audiences enough to make *Die Hard* highly successful as mass entertainment, despite (and because of) the visual reminders of social changes underway. Viewers could recognize those changes as elements of an encroaching reality, even while being comforted by the conservative escapist fantasies simultaneously present. The film was, in many respects, a transitional "bit" in a complex mosaic of differences--a clutch for shifting gears from one kind of social order to another.

To understand this metaphorical shifting of gears in the present moment, I turn now to examine more closely *Fury Road*. It is a film rife with seemingly endless literal gear shifting serving as a vehicle for the easing in of new forms of masculinity demanded by twenty-first century gender norms and necessitated by the

realities of ecological devastation brought on by climate change. In some respects, the film is nearly oppositional to *Die Hard* in its more progressive representations of gender roles; however, much like its action genre predecessors, *Fury Road* absorbs and reflects the dialectic tensions of its rhetorical context, finding success with the masses through a careful balancing of ideological norms and contestations.

Finding Ourselves on the Fury Road

Fury Road is technically the fourth installment in a film franchise begun in 1979 with the dystopian action movie, *Mad Max*; "technically" is the key word because, as critics have noted, this most recent film is not a sequel in the traditional sense, nor is it exactly a "reboot" (Fischer). It builds upon an established backstory and character; however, both are revised substantively. As Tom Hardy, the actor playing the titular character, commented during a pre-production interview, "It's a relaunch and revisit to the world" using the same character but "bringing him up to date by 30 years" (Weintraub). The films in the franchise preceding *Fury Road* revolved around Max Rockatansky (Mel Gibson), a former police officer whose wife and infant child were slain by marauding bikers, leaving him as a broken loner on the desolate highways of a future wasteland. Many fans of the action movie genre throughout the 1980s would be right to place the character of Max alongside their other masculine heroes, as he battles villains and survives in the desert through wit, brawn, and sheer physical endurance. He does not have the exaggerated musculature of many of his contemporary action heroes, such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, but he certainly demonstrates most of their other qualities, including an apparent imperviousness to physical punishment and a near-totalizing individualism.

In *Fury Road*, Max (now played by Tom Hardy) is drawn, reluctantly, into assisting the Imperator "Furiosa" (Charlize Theron), a woman who is on the run with five women away from a tyrannical demagogue named "Immortan Joe" (Hugh Keays-Byrne).

Presiding over a citadel and hoarding scarce resources of food, gasoline, and water from the impoverished masses around him, Joe maintains his power through a combination of a cult of personality and an army of "War Boys," all of whom are sickly and dying (as is he). When Joe discovers that the five women--whom he calls his wives but are more accurately his sex slaves and unwilling breeders--have been absconded by Furiosa (who has served him until this point as a driver of a gasoline tanker called a "war rig"), he and the War Boys give chase. Max is forced along for the ride, initially strapped to one of the cars as a human blood bag for its driver, Nux. (The film begins with a brief prologue in which Max is captured by the War Boys and fashioned into a living donor. As sick as they might be, they extend their lives with fresh blood from healthy individuals whom they hunt in the surrounding desert, Max being their most recent victim.) Over a seemingly relentless (but genre-appropriate) series of car chases, crashes, explosions, and fight sequences, Max and Nux join Furiosa in her efforts to escape with the slaves, battling Immortan Joe and his War Boys through a blistering landscape of highways, canyons, and sandstorms, mostly in cars, but just as often on, under, and between them at high speeds.

The centrality of the film's action rooted in moving automobiles is certainly a continuation of the franchise's roots, especially its first and second installments. Despite being Australian in almost all aspects of their making, the *Mad Max* films gained cult followings in America at least in part because of their extensive car chases.[7] History scholars James Todd Uhlman and John Heitmann, writing in 2015, argue that the automobile and driving in American popular culture have "increasingly served as arch-signifiers of the autonomous self-determining subject" (86). Quoting historian Cotton Seiler, they add that driving and the freedom, skill, and ability to do so--a combination they term *automobility* and see as masculinist[8] in its function--have become the twentieth century's "crucial compensation for apparent losses to the autonomy, privacy, and agency registered by workers under the transition to corporate capitalism" (Seiler 13, qtd in Uhlman and Heitmann 87). One might make a similar argument about masculinist conceptions

of automobility-as-compensation in the early twenty-first century as well. Correlation is not causation; however, it is worth observing in light of Uhlman and Heitmann's claims that the American "muscle car" was all but dead throughout the booming 1990s and beyond--until the collapse of the economy and the sharp hike in unemployment brought on by the subprime mortgage collapse of 2007. In 2008, amidst massive hikes in un- and under-employment, Dodge began selling their Challenger, a re-release of and direct throwback to the 1970 "muscle" model of the same name. In 2009, Chevrolet re-released their Camaro based on its 1969 iteration. A 2010 Superbowl ad featured another revived muscle car, the Dodge Charger. The commercial, titled "Man's Last Stand," features a series of young men accepting a narrator's litany of subservience (to corporate bosses and, even more so, to their wives) that they are willing to accept, only because they can escape it all by roaring victoriously down the highway. By 2011, the *Wall Street Journal* declared definitively, "Detroit muscle-car mania is back" (White). Thus for American men, in media representations, capitalist consumption, and lived experience, automobility may be performing a similar rhetorical function as hypermasculinity did in the action film genre of the 1980s.

The film's analyzed by Uhlman and Heitmann articulate ideologies of masculinity and autonomy in the figure of the male driver, capable of self-determination despite his being surrounded by oppressive forces--certainly an apt description of Max Rockatansky. Although Uhlman and Heitmann could easily have pointed to the *Mad Max* franchise or even to Dodge's "Man's Last Stand" advertisement, they draw on the subgenre of auto theft films to explore this articulation, exemplified as it is in movies like *Bullit* (1968), *Gone in 60 Seconds* (1974), and *Gran Torino* (2008), each featuring a classic American muscle car. They make the case, hearkening all the way back to Claude Levi-Strauss's conception of myth in *Structural Anthropology*, that such films are working out a cultural tension, in this case the "contradictory expectations and realities of individual autonomy in postwar America" (Uhlman and Heitmann 88). While Levi-Strauss's notion of myth might enable one to see the films as a reductive analog for making the contradiction more

easily resolvable by audiences, rhetoricians are more likely to view the films as diffuse texts in an ongoing dialectic, as metonymic representations engaged not in simple resolutions but in re- and disarticulations of ideological linkages.

In *Finding Ourselves in the Movies*, philosophy and film scholar Paul Kahn argues along similar lines, suggesting that mainstream movies serve as narratives with which audiences can identify, not as homogenized masses but as individuals actively engaged in critical practices of interpretation and self-reflexive identification.[9] For audiences in 2015 and later, *Fury Road* provides specific opportunities for interpretation and identification among the generation of Millenials[10] who have grown up amidst popular culture's continued articulations of masculinity, autonomy, and automobility and also amidst its contradictory challenges to those ideological formations. In the aforementioned Superbowl ad featuring men reluctantly accepting all the impositions put upon them, mainly by their female partners, the male narrator states, in acquiescent monotone, "I will say 'yes' when you want me to say 'yes' [. . . .] I will listen to your opinions [. . . .] I will be civil to your mother [. . . .] I will put the seat down [. . . .] I will carry your lip balm [. . .]," and so on. Yet a quick search on *YouTube* finds its dialectic counterpart: a structurally identical spoof featuring a series of women and a female narrator, who states, "I will make 75 cents for every dollar you make for doing the same job [. . . .] I will assert myself and get called a Bitch [. . . .] I will assure you that size doesn't matter [. . . .] I will elect male politicians who will make decisions about my body [. . .]." The narrator finishes with this sentence, dripping in sarcasm: "I will watch Superbowl commercials that depict men as emasculated and depressed, and I will feel so fucking sorry for you." Notably, both videos were uploaded to *YouTube* in February 2010, only four days apart; the original ad had as of this writing just over 350,000 views; the spoof debunking the sexist nature of the original had more than 500,000 views in the same time period.

Not only are such critiques in wide circulation, but the ideological connections they are attempting to disarticulate are, in fact, crumbling: the female narrator in the spoof reminded viewers in 2010 that she would, of necessity, elect male politicians who would

govern even her own body; however, just seven years later, she (almost) no longer needs to. By early 2017, the American people recognize that while Donald Trump won the electoral vote, the U.S. clearly cast the popular vote (by a margin of approximately three million votes) in favor of Hillary Rodham Clinton in an effort to elect her as the first woman president. Despite his winning of the electoral vote and despite that he has been confirmed as president, Trump has been routinely lambasted in the mainstream media for (among other things) his rampant sexism, evident in a well-documented history of his objectifications of women and in his outdated embrace of machismo.[11] Those characterizations and criticisms of Trump have not been in restricted circulation among some small group of countercultural feminists pushing against the status quo, either; they have circulated in mainstream media *as* the status quo, as responses that have reached a relatively new stage of normativity in U.S. history. Consider, for example, that the number of spectators attending Trump's inauguration was utterly dwarfed by the number of participants attending the Women's March on Washington the very next day. Hailed as the largest day of protest in U.S. history, the women's march brought three times the number of people to the same space that remained relatively unfilled the day before (Broomfield).

During their first formal debate, Clinton was able to capitalize on such broad-based public opinion by calling out Trump's mistreatment of a former Miss Universe winner, Alicia Machado, whom he had "fat-shamed" publicly when he was the owner of the pageant; Clinton chastised him for objectifying her and calling her "Miss Piggy," telling him derisively, "Donald, she has a name" ("Fact Check"). That segment of the debate was highly shared in social media, commented on intensively in the press as evidence of his outdated sexism, and applauded by many as a moment of victory for Clinton. It was a moment that resonates well--or articulates well--with much of what *Fury Road* displays. Viewers might even see that moment with Clinton and Trump as a rough analog to an early moment in the film when Immortan Joe discovers that his slaves have been rescued: upon opening the vault wherein they are normally kept captive, he discovers them missing, only to see

written above their beds their defiant parting script, "WE ARE NOT THINGS." For the shrinking number of patriarchal masculinists in this new century, the writing is literally on the wall. Women will not be objectified. They have names, Donald.[12]

The point to make here is not so much the comparison between a fictional villain and President Trump; it is rather that at least one significant reason for the latter's failure to win the popular vote is the paradigm shift we are presently in, evidenced in (and facilitated by) the diffuse popular texts of our current historical moment, those which enable and condition many viewers to see in Immortan Joe and Donald Trump common characteristics to be interpreted negatively. Mainstream news outlets, cable television, movies, and the internet's myriad flows of information, commentary, and entertainment display on a daily basis evolving gender roles and subjectivities increasingly available in our social contexts, including multiple forms of masculinity itself (what Raewynn Connell describes using the plural form *masculinities*). Such displays include critiques of patriarchy like the Superbowl ad's satirical counterpart, which have us laughing at corporate attempts to link together masculinity, power, and automobility, thereby denaturalizing such connections and enabling new ones in their place.

Fury Road shares in such work, but it does so on a grand scale and within a genre that leads many viewers to expect otherwise from it. From its inception, the movie's franchise has always been premised on the world's end as a result of our addiction to oil and our automotive fetishism. James McCausland, Miller's co-author on the original *Mad Max* screenplay, explains that the idea for the movie emerged out of the 1973 oil crisis that affected fuel supplies worldwide: "George and I wrote the script based on the thesis that people would do almost anything to keep vehicles moving and the assumption that nations would not consider the huge costs of providing infrastructure for alternative energy until it was too late." Although that might have motivated the original movie's environmentalist critique, which was a relatively new one three decades ago, by now our collective awareness of automobile emissions' contributions to climate change are commonplace, so much so that *Fury Road* can establish its backstory with just a few brief

images and audio clips. (Its opening title sequence is laid over snippets of static and faded newscasts, beginning with the phrase "oil wars" and the declaration "we are killing each other for gasoline.") Thus the film's apocalyptic premise--readily assumed and accepted by many viewers in the twenty-first century--serves contemporary rhetorical ends in concert with the film's rearticulations among masculinity, aggression, and automobile dependence. In addition to writing "we are not things" on the walls of their chamber, Joe's "wives" have also scrawled this rhetorical question: "Who killed the world?" The question is never addressed directly by any of the characters, but the answer appears to lie in the linkages among the opening title sequence and those writings on the wall. Whereas one critic has argued that the film's answer to its own question is "toxic masculinity" (Muckherjee), the film's answer also includes in its matrix male-oriented obsessions with driving, the very ones that American car companies are now exploiting and encouraging in their muscle car revivals.

It is fitting, for example, that the sickly War Boys worship their cars quite literally. On the way to chasing down Furiosa, they pray briefly at an altar of steering wheels; Nux and one of his brothers even fight over a particular wheel with a kind of religious ferocity. War, for them, is on the highways, and they are indoctrinated to believe that the way to Valhalla is through death at high speeds. Automobility is thus articulated with war and aggression, furthering its ideological connections to masculinity. However, it is also being linked here with death, destruction, and cult-like servitude. These articulations run counter to those at work in the auto theft films analyzed by Uhlman and Heitmann; they also run counter to those of the original *Mad Max*, the titular hero who found power and, to a considerable degree, freedom (as opposed to servitude) in driving his modified "Pursuit Special" Ford Interceptor. *Fury Road* makes a point of eliminating that original car within the first few minutes, leaving Max primarily as a passenger of other vehicles--first on the front of Nux's and later inside Furiosa's war rig. Although Max is occasionally behind the wheel, he is more often not driving, making him, as Scott puts it, Furiosa's "sidekick." Writing for the journal *Feminist Media Studies*, Alexis De Coning also uses

the term *sidekick* to refer to Max, noting that it is "the female characters who drive the action" in *Fury Road* (175). She also observes, drawing on a review of the film for *Slate* by Dana Stevens, that the character of Max is often placed in positions of "extreme passivity" (175), furthering the disarticulation of power and automobility.

The gender role reversals observed by Scott, De Coning, and others are not just reflected in who is doing the driving: whereas Max is, of course, brave and engaged in dangerous actions throughout, he is no more the agent of their escape than is Furiosa. In a telling scene--one analyzed by De Coning, Muckherjee, and others--Max and Furiosa are being pursued by one of Joe's allies, the "bullet farmer" (a symbolic stand-in, perhaps, for the profit-oriented arm of the military industrial complex). They have a long-range rifle and three shots to stop him as he narrows the gap between them. Max, down on one knee and with a determined, careful focus, takes two shots, missing both times. He pauses, glances over his shoulder at Furiosa standing behind him, and hands her the rifle. No words are exchanged, but it is clear: she is the better shot, and he knows it. He serves as her gun rest for the third, successful, shot in which she blinds the bullet farmer. Eventually Max kills the bullet farmer; however, that action takes place off-screen. Such a sequence may have been filmed initially (more than 480 hours of raw footage exist), but, if so, it has been left on the cutting room floor. This might not be surprising as a rhetorical choice, given that the film's editor is Margaret Sixel. Although it is rare for a woman to edit an action movie in present-day Hollywood, Miller has argued for the need to have her in that role, stating that "if a guy did it, it would look like every other action movie" (Gardiner).

What occurs on-screen is Furiosa's superior use of weaponry at a crucial moment. Also onscreen is her--not his--eventual battle with the film's arch-villain. The latter moment is no minor reversal: it is a staple of the entire action movie genre to have the male hero square off with the lead villain near the very end. This confrontation is expected as a generic typification--one played out in true form in *Die Hard*, for example, when John McClane faces Hans Gruber (who holds McClane's wife at gunpoint) on the edge of the crumbling Nakatomi building. In *Fury Road*, by contrast,

Max is scrambling over and along a line of moving vehicles, trying to come to her rescue, when Furiosa brings herself face to face with Immortan Joe. Hanging from the side of his speeding car, she pulls his head against the door's open window, hooking her spear gun into his mask. "Remember me," she growls, just before dropping the weapon's rope between the tires of the automobile--an action that results in Joe's face being torn off in a gruesome, well-deserved death.

Those two words she utters mark the only time Furiosa interacts with Immortan Joe in the entire film. Her line can be understood to be a question, as in "Remember me?" She was, after all, stolen as a child to serve the warlord; she was taken from "the green place" to which she has been trying to return. Her words--delivered ambiguously by Theron with a combination of ferocity and victory--might also be heard as a command, as in "Remember me!" In this case, the declaration might be directed as much to the audience as it is to Joe, the dying embodiment of "toxic masculinity." The end of the movie has Furiosa rising, literally and metaphorically. She is hoisted on a platform up into the citadel, where she will take Immortan Joe's place as a new kind of ruler. Her way will be different than his, a way made clear by the simple act of the water being turned on for the impoverished citizens below.

Finding Ourselves in the Dialectic: Some Contradictions

Lest Furiosa's ascension in the final moments of the film be unambiguously taken as a reflection of the rise of feminism or the decline of a particular kind of masculinity or even patriarchy among viewing audiences in 2015 and later, it is worth noting a few contradictions to such a tidy interpretation. To begin, although it is a fair take on the movie's plot to call Max a sidekick, the film is still his" in the title. In many respects, it need not have been. The movie might have simply been called *Fury Road*, a title suggestive of Furiosa's name and temperament and even more fitting in terms of the story. Moreover, despite its origins and development, the film's

place within the original *Mad Max* franchise is rather tenuous: as most reviewers have observed, *Fury Road* stands on its own, and viewers need not ever have seen the earlier installments to understand the story, yet it remains a *Mad Max* film. The marketing function of the franchise and the movie's full name significantly link the film to the prior trilogy, which might have been a persuasive strategy to draw in consumers, but it also inevitably frames the film in specific ways, marking it as a particular kind of action flick and predefining the character of Max and his centrality to a considerable degree.

When Althusser explains how individuals are interpellated as subjects in ideology, he draws on Freud and the example of a newborn baby, stating that "it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable" (176). The child-to-be is always-already constructed through a "familial ideological configuration," within which the child will have to find itself and through which it will already be known. Althusser is here working out a thesis of ideological self-recognition, one that Kahn applies to film audiences as they critically analyze the representations playing out onscreen. In the case of *Fury Road*, audiences and characters can be understood as always-already interpellated subjects in the making: as much as this updated Max of thirty-years-later will hand over a rifle to Furiosa in an acknowledgment of her superior shooting skill, such an act can be potentially read as a patriarch's magnanimous gesture in the context of this character's history and his fans. Max is ultimately produced through a rhetorical interplay that includes audiences' expectations of genre and character, especially those established through repeated iterations.

For example, a minor controversy erupted just prior to the film's release: several mainstream news outlets reported that men's rights activists (MRA) were calling for a boycott of the film because they felt it was "feminist propaganda" (O'Neil; Darby; Huppke). The MRA author credited with calling for a boycott is Aaron Clarey, writing for a website called *Return of Kings*, a site well known for its anti-feminist diatribes. In his call for a boycott, Clarey analyzes only the trailer, observing the centrality of Theron's character and

the degrees to which she seems to be the one in charge. Clarey is dismayed that she "barks orders" at Max in one scene: "No one barks orders at Mad Max!" he writes. Clarey is even more dismayed to learn from online articles that Eve Ensler was brought in as a consultant on the film's production. She was brought in not because of her fame from *The Vagina Monologues* but because of her prior activist work against global sex trafficking. Clarey's response to the trailer is significant because it demonstrates how expectations for a film can be informed to a considerable degree by its placement within a franchise, genre, and/or history. Because of that contextualization, Clarey believes the film is a Trojan Horse, designed to dupe unsuspecting men into seeing it. In other words, for Clarey, changes in a character's gender performances across an established franchise are not logical, natural, or realistic and will not be read as such; they only occur as a result of a nefarious agenda and can thus be dismissed rather than integrated into one's evolving conceptions of the world. The call to boycott the film is a call to ignore it, to hold onto the Max of the 1980s; this, in turn, means that whatever rhetorical work *Fury Road* is attempting to do, whatever shared meanings it is managing in the public sphere, it is not shifting the worldviews of oppositional or resistant audiences. In fact, it is functioning as a catalyst for at least some circulating discourses reaffirming misogyny.

Even for those within the MRA movement who saw the movie, *Fury Road* has enough internal contradictions to provide interpretations sympathetic to that community's shared ideologics.[13] As user Maxx argues on the internet forum, *A Voice for Men*, *Fury Road* demonstrates the brutality of the world and the challenges it poses to women who choose not to accept men's leadership and protection; he suggests that the movie is a reminder to women that they need men. That interpretation is furthered by blogger Redd Fields in the same online venue, whose article is titled "*Mad Max Fury Road*: A Real Men's Right's Activist's Review."[14] He analyzes a significant scene in the film, one wherein Furiosa finds the remaining members of the matriarchal society she was stolen from as a child, the "Many Mothers." The society is all but gone, their numbers down to just a few. They have nothing left. Fields writes

that audiences will "come to one inevitable conclusion. True ma-triarchies either destroy themselves, or are subject to the whims of conquerors. Either way, like this feminist utopia, true matriarchies die due to their own paranoid delusions."

Such masculinist interpretations may be strengthened through analyses of the characters as well: while Joe's enslaved "wives" all conform to traditional expectations of feminine beauty, Furiosa does not. Her buzz cut referenced by Scott is one marker among several that effectively separates her from them; additionally, she wears clothing similar in form and function to what Max wears, down to her dirt-soaked cargo pants and combat boots. The "wives," on the other hand, are "super-model gorgeous" and "gen-erally indistinguishable in their catalog-ready prettiness" (Stevens). In contrast to them, as Nicole Sperling writes for *Entertainment Weekly*, Furiosa "has degendered herself into a sort of eunuch war-rior" (21). One might ask what meanings are being managed, then, when the only way a woman can become this film's action hero is through an erasure of standardized feminine features. Perhaps the film is making an argument in favor of traditional masculinity after all.

In contrast, Women's Studies scholar Natalie Wilson argues on the site *Bitch Flicks* that Furiosa is not a degendered eunuch "but rather a gender-queer, disabled, bad-ass feminist hero who proves that heroism has no one gender, no one body type, no one sexual-ity." De Coning also argues that *Fury Road* does not simply reverse hero and sidekick roles in Max and Furiosa but instead opens up possibilities for expressions of nontraditional gender performanc-es by both and thus provides a repositioning of men and women in cinema. De Coning draws attention to Max's function as an ally, and she references Jack Halberstam's oft-cited scholarship on "fe-male masculinities" as an explanation for Furiosa's agency (175). In doing so, De Coning makes the case for further research into contemporary understandings of masculinities and public sphere responses to their manifestations in popular culture. Additionally, she provides yet another potential perspective for interpreting the rhetorical work of *Fury Road*.

The back-and-forth and in-between among men's rights activists, feminists, and gender scholars in popular press and academia is probably enough to demonstrate the larger dialectic struggles around gender in the public sphere and *Fury Road's* interpretability within them. The purpose in such an illustration is not to suggest that this particular film is well suited to Derridean deferrals of meaning or relativist deconstructionism. When all arguments circulating in mainstream media about *Fury Road* are stacked up and counted, it is evident that for the majority of reviewers, critics, and commentators in the U.S., the film is progressive in its representations of men and women, and it is critical of longstanding articulations among patriarchy, power, and masculinity. The film's rhetorical function, for most viewers in the mainstream, is to disarticulate those constructs, revising as well their relatively recent media linkages to automobility. Yet, those functions are facilitated by the film's openness to more conservative takes by its balancing of genre expectations and its disruptions thereto. Max may not be the action hero audiences are used to, but he remains heroic and integrated into much of the action. Furiosa might dispatch the villain in a climactic battle on the road without Max's help, but she is, in the end, saved by him when he replaces some of her lost blood with his own on their return ride to the citadel--an act that parallels his more passive role as an unwilling donor attached to Nux driving away from the citadel at the start of the film. Finally, while the movie clearly critiques our auto-centric culture and aggressive, dangerous dependence on oil, it is also, without question, a visually astounding, adrenaline-fueled, action-packed thrill ride involving speeding cars and spectacular crashes. There remains at the center of the film's appeal a celebratory display of the tremendous power of automobiles, particularly as technological extensions of the self.

The Fast and the Furiosa: Looking Elsewhere in the Mosaic

It is not surprising that, for all its critique of automobility, much of *Fury Road's* success lies in its simultaneous embrace of it. For evidence of the continuing appeal of automobility in U.S. popular

culture, one need not look further than the fact that the other auto-centric blockbuster film of 2015 was *Furious 7*, an unmistakable reinforcement of the articulations among men, power, and cars. This movie does *not* foster linkages between driving and ecological devastation the way *Fury Road* does, nor does it challenge to any real degree the centrality of the men in the film, men whose agency is enacted in their physical strength and in what can be considered a kind of post-humanist fusion with vehicles; behind the wheel, the lead characters are essentially unstoppable, defying gravity (literally), fighting terrorists, and crisscrossing the globe to prevent its domination by nefarious forces. These men in cars are not killing the world; they are saving it. Moreover, the world is not a wasteland destroyed by our quest for oil; it is, rather, a planet of wealth and technological excess, from the gleaming, shiny towers in Abu Dhabi to the bright neon lights of Tokyo and downtown Los Angeles.

Thus, the contradictions and dialectic tensions operating within *Fury Road* are also evident within the broader mosaic of rhetorical bits that comprise our current popular culture mediascape. If audiences understand movie-going to include more than one must-see film in any given year, then they can begin to look at the contradictions *across* films as well as within them. Hence the success of both *Furious 7* and *Fury Road* in the same year. Many viewers, perhaps uneasily and with considerable ambivalence, inhabit competing worldviews as they consume and produce popular culture. They view, share, and comment upon the news regularly and are reminded of climate change and ongoing wars, but such information and participation are inevitably framed, interrupted, and shaped by advertisements for muscle cars and trailers for films like *Furious 7*, often on the same page or screen. These are the contradictory diffuse texts that Brummett argues are key to understanding rhetorical change.

As paradigms shift, so do the arguments, identifications, ideologies, and representations of reality circulating in shared social contexts. Mainstream movies--driven as they are by a balance among entertainment for the masses, artistic integrity, and profit orientation--are reflective and productive of those shifts, not because they

celebrate an emerging worldview or reinforce an established one but because they must do both if they are to survive the marketplace. They are conservative and progressive in the same instance, albeit by differing degrees, but never one to the exclusion of the other. Moreover, the internal dialectic of any one film can be understood as one element, or argument, within a larger dialectic, one which cuts across a broader social landscape that includes other films, television programming, and the internet's endless stream of information, entertainment, and participation platforms. While many disciplinary perspectives can help audiences to understand those dynamics and to interpret the work of a film in popular culture, rhetoric is particularly well suited to the task because of its emphasis on audiences and contexts, the interpretability of texts within and across diverse social formations, and the persuasive functions of symbolic exchange.

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Notes

1. The Bechdel test comes from cartoonist Alison Bechdel, who, along with her friend Liz Wallace (whom Bechdel believes was inspired by Virginia Woolf), observed the great difficulties in finding a mainstream movie (or other works of fiction) in which (a) there are at least two women characters (b) who talk to each other (c) about something other than men or their relationship to men.

2. According to Box Office Mojo, *Die Hard* earned over $80 million at the box office, making it the seventh-highest grossing film of 1988 (out of 254 releases). *IMDB* lists *Die Hard* as 1988's second most popular film, giving it 8.2/10 stars. Finally, the review aggregator site *Rotten Tomatoes* gives the film a 92% critics' approval rating.

3. While many generations of Americans seem able to claim a crisis

of masculinity (Cohan; Kimmel; Traister; Baker), adults in the 1980s experienced a particular variation that was clearly connected to the gains of second-wave feminism from the preceding quarter century and to the economic challenges of global capitalism, especially those evident in the rise of Japan as a financial superpower. Brummett has analyzed Japan's economic threat to the U.S. as it has been realized metonymically in the movie *Gremlins*, observing, for example, that a mysterious Asian man and his creature called "Gizmo" (surely a coded reference to products like the Sony Walkman) are the origins of the chaos brought to small town America.) In similar fashion, *Die Hard*'s masculine hero is separated from his wife initially because she left to take on her own career in a Japanese corporation--a combined obstacle to his status as a working class head of household that is resolved through the destruction of her workplace and her safe return to his powerful embrace.

4. Susan Jeffords, citing feminist scholar Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The War Against Women,* writes, "Throughout the 1980s, the Yankelovich Monitor of U.S. social attitudes recorded that men's primary definitions of masculinity rested in their sense of a man being 'a good provider for his family'" ("Can Masculinity be Terminated?" 352).

5. The term *hypermasculinity* is an appropriate fit here for its vernacular usage, as my students were using the label as it is often deployed in the popular press to characterize the exaggerated forms of masculinity typical in advertisements, action films, and comic books. This differs from how scholars in psychology often use *hypermasculinity*, which is to reference a triad of behavioral qualities--namely, aggression, a callousness toward women, and excitement in danger (Mosher and Serkin 150).

6. Except in specific instances, I rely in this article on the vernacular, umbrella term *feminism*, despite the establishment and academic development of several historical and political variations, including, for example, first, second, and third wave feminisms; liberal, radical, and cultural feminisms; postcolonial and postmodern feminisms; and even post-feminism, which may be considered to imply the end thereof but is often deemed, like postmodernity

and poststructuralism, to be a continuation of the project. I prefer the broad, general term *feminism* in this particular case because, as a rhetorician of popular culture, I am especially interested in the discourses that circulate among the audiences and critics of mainstream movies; in this case, it is most often just the singular, general term used in the public sphere. Moreover, within such discourses the term often captures elements of various feminisms (though certainly not all): it is used, for instance, to reference equitable representations of women in movies, to describe qualitative changes in those representations over time, to signify shifting epistemologies of gender, and to construct identifications within feminism's overall liberatory agenda that is sometimes just about women and sometimes about both women and men.

7. It is tempting to make the case that *Fury Road* is not an American film, as it arises out of an Australian franchise, was filmed primarily in Namibia, was directed by an Australian (George Miller, who has been integrally involved in all four films in the series), and has its two leading actors hailing from Great Britain and South Africa (Tom Hardy as Max and Charlize Theron as Furiosa, respectively). However, the film's funding, distribution, and pre- and post-production are thoroughly integrated into the Hollywood machinery, and both Hardy and Theron are widely recognized as international "Hollywood" actors at this point in time. It is, therefore, a mainstream Hollywood blockbuster made as much for American audiences as any other blockbuster released in 2015.

8. Seiler and Uhlman and Heitmann analyze in their respective studies the racialization of the male driver, tying that along with masculinity to material, social, and historical circumstances. Given the particular focus of this essay, I am limiting my analysis to representations of masculinity and, for now, setting aside examinations of race.

9. Identification is often considered an inherent function of rhetoric, particularly in the theoretical framework developed by Kenneth Burke, well known for his groundbreaking scholarship in rhetorical theory and for his use of *identification* as a key term.

For Burke, symbolic activities--including films--establish connections among people and objects in our social world: he writes that the symbolic "considers each thing as a set of interrelated terms all conspiring to round out their identity as participants in a common substance of meaning" ("A Rhetoric of Motives" 1326). Moreover, the work of creating identifications is a central part of the symbolic function that Burke refers to as rhetoric's "terministic screen." Speaking primarily of linguistic forms (but by implication all symbolic activity), Burke writes famously, "Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" ("Language as Symbolic Action" 1341). Sounding not unlike Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg describing ideology, Burke recognizes the ongoing struggles for identification and disidentification in popular culture's symbolic operations, including especially those that are not consciously recognized as such in the moment of articulation.

10. In popular American culture, *Millenials* usually refers to the generation born between 1982 and 2004 (Bump).

11. In the month before the 2016 national election, a group of thirty Republican lawmakers signed a letter disavowing Trump for president, summarizing much of the steadily circulating mainstream criticism about him. They wrote, "In nominating Donald Trump, the Republican Party has asked the people of the United States to entrust their future to a man who insults women, mocks the handicapped, [and] urges that dissent be met with violence [. . .] . He offends our allies and praises dictators. His public statements are peppered with lies. He belittles our heroes and insults the parents of men who have died serving our country. Every day brings a fresh revelation that highlights the unacceptable danger in electing him to lead our nation" (Bash and Kopan).

12. It may be unfair to President Trump to compare him to Immortan Joe, but such comparisons already circulate online in the form of comic-style and Photoshopped memes. Clearly there are significant similarities worthy of elaboration. Trump, like Joe, maintains considerable power and wealth through a cult of

personality, is largely regarded as a misogynist and demagogue-in-the-making, and espouses ethnocentric and isolationist ideologies in his immigration proposals and in his desires for a giant concrete wall along the U.S. southern border, all of which brings to mind Joe's cult-like leadership over his citadel and the hordes of impoverished masses kept out of its interiors. Further, according to popular interpretations of his appeal, Trump's fan base includes a majority of white males--including even those of white nationalist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and Storm Front, both of which are now evolving into what is known as the "alt-right movement"; coincidentally, Immortan Joe's War Boys are covered head to toe in a white chalky dust, a visual linkage between the likes of Trump and his white male followers. Trump may not be physically dying like Joe, but he is indeed emblematic of a nexus of certain articulated positions--what Crowley would term an "ideologic" (60)--that some would say is gasping its last breath.

13. See Note 9 for a brief definition and another example of the term *ideologic*.

14. Field's title is a reference to the fact that Aaron Clarey's article was (mis)labeled by the mainstream media as a call by the MRA to boycott the film; however, Field and others emphatically declared that Clarey did not represent a formal MRA response or call.

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Book Reviews

Oliver, Kelly. *Hunting Girls: Sexual Violence from* The Hunger Games *to Campus Rape.* Columbia UP, 2016. 216 pp.

Kelly Oliver traces the theme of women as prey from medieval fairy tales to contemporary films and discusses the ways this has impacted the lives of adolescent girls and college-aged women. By normalizing perceptions of women as sexual prey and portraying lack of resistance as consent, various media have contributed to the growing trend of sexual assault as entertainment. In addition, institutions like higher education perpetuate victim-blaming and rape culture, making college an especially dangerous experience for young women.

Oliver begins her pop cultural analysis by dissecting scenes of violence against powerful, young heroines, like those in *Twilight* and *Kick-Ass*. Oliver argues that the more empowered a female protagonist is, the more visceral and gratuitous the violence is against her. Many of these assaults, often sexualized, are with men and other women whom the main character knows and trusts. In some instances, these depictions include drugged or unconscious victims, making the portrayals more alarming in light of the many date rape and "party rape" crimes that have dominated the news in recent years.

In the second chapter, Oliver analyzes the impact of social media on rape culture, arguing that "invasive technology" has turned rape into a spectator sport. Building on Nancy Bauer's concept of the "pornutopia" (an imagined reality based in misogynist ideologies where women enjoy rape and can even give unconscious consent), Oliver reviews several legal cases that involve video evidence of rape which were discovered after becoming viral content. She argues that, in conjunction with other institutions, social media normalizes rape because perpetrators feel that they have an approving audience. Rape apologists and internet trolls then use social media to harass and re-victimize the survivors of sexual assault. Likewise, Oliver explores the interconnectedness of the

ubiquitous pornography genre of creepshots—compromising pictures, normally of women, taken without consent—and the rhetorical attenuation of the term "rape" to "nonconsensual sex."

Chapter 3 focuses on young adult dystopian films, such as the The Hunger Games and Divergent series, and the ways they mirror millennials' lives through the portrayal of ever-present recording devices and surveillance. In these films, it is an oppressive government that victimizes girls and young women as a form of entertainment; furthermore, the female protagonists are able to return the physical violence inflicted on them and lead revolutions against the tyrannical high-tech regimes. Oliver argues that these films can be interpreted simultaneously as "feminist revenge fantasies" (114) and perpetuations of the same hegemonic sexist narratives that have existed since medieval fairy tales. In these contemporary narratives, female empowerment is problematically defined through heteronormative, masculinist paradigms.

Oliver's concluding chapter traces the rise of what she terms the "New Artemis": girls who hunt, who are close to nature, and who ultimately value female solidarity, such as Katniss Everdeen from The Hunger Games and Princess Merida from Brave. This chapter also provides an argument to redefine consent intersubjectively in an effort to contribute to the current discourse surrounding the term in legal, public, governmental, and academic institutions.

Oliver, a professor of philosophy, incorporates psychoanalysis, literary and feminist theory, and media, legal, and Higher Education studies into her thorough investigation of sexual violence in fairy tales, films, and media technology. There are some argument redundancies throughout the book, but these could allow the chapters to be read as individual articles (as two of the chapters were originally written). Although based in strong scholarly research, the text is accessible to undergraduate students and a broader public audience. Oliver's style is sometimes blunt, sarcastic, even angry, making it a provocative choice for a gender studies book club, whether in or outside academia. However, this tone also contributes to Oliver's most problematic argument: her critique of trigger warnings. In addition to some logical and evidentiary weaknesses,

the dismissive tone in this section is unlikely to convince those in support of trigger warnings and safe spaces.

Overall, Oliver succeeds in demonstrating the impact of historical and contemporary images on the lives of real girls and women and the ways in which our cultural institutions legitimize and maintain rape culture, making *Hunting Girls* timely, relevant, and important.

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Avery-Natale, Edward. *Ethics, Politics, and Anarcho-Punk Identifications: Punk and Anarchy in Philadelphia.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016. 235 pp.

Examining "the ways in which anarcho-punks identify themselves" (1), this ethnographic study explores themes and identity construction within the anarcho-punk subcultures of Philadelphia, of which the author is a self-professed member. Avery-Natale uses lyrics and interviews to study the "narratives" through which this community constructs and defines its identities, an approach influenced by his background in Sociology (Ph.D. Temple). Though Avery-Natale has an academic background, the tone of the work suggests it is aimed at a non-academic audience, and the conclusion directly addresses the anarcho-punk community. Arguing "only another punk could adequately research this culture" (xii), Avery-Natale's obvious affection for the community shapes his arguments and methodology. The chapters, often reading as loosely unified essays, are united by Avery-Natale's argument that the defining theme of the anarcho-punk identity is an emphasis on ethics and an ideal "hypergood" for which members of the community strive (6). The work is a deeply personal affair for the author, exemplified by the prologue, "A Personal Narrative: 'Punk Rock Saved my Life'" (ix). As a result, readers sharing his experiences and affinity for the topic will appreciate the work, but newcomers to the field--*posers,* in the anarcho-punk vernacular--will be less interested.

United by a general topic and a theme of ethics, the work reads like a collection of related essays. The introduction provides a methodological and theoretical primer on identity studies and ethnography, quickly referencing Plato, Aristotle, Sartre, and Lacanianism. This will be a confusing chapter for non-academic readers, or a rather general overview for an academic audience. It introduces the ethics theme, arguing "the most salient plot [of the work] is the ethical ideals that anarcho-punks attempt to live up to," which Avery-Natale calls the "hypergood" (6). Avery-Natale's personal experiences overpower his objectivism, presenting anarcho-punks as a morally ideal community that cares for "[almost] *all* human beings," (17, author's brackets and italics) and recognizes that their "joy and pain is equal to all other's [sic]" (19). His anecdote about "Polly," a teen who drinks all night while assisting the elderly during the day, is an example of his idealism (34). This ethical utopian ideal, which he describes in his final chapter, is the work's *raison d'etre*.

The thematic chapters are linked through the ethical argument of the work. Chapter One lauds the energy and "DIY" ethos of the culture. Chapter Two examines its communal and political construction. Chapter Three addresses the role and meaning of fashion and style. Chapter Four discusses the interplay between "punk" and "anarchism," examining how this duality shapes the community's utopianism and political activism. Chapters Five and Six are the most interesting, addressing flaws within the community. These chapters highlight the predominately white and male identities of punk, attempting to reconcile this with their self-professed messages of inclusivity. In the final and most personal chapter, Avery-Natale calls for improvement, arguing that these weaknesses can be fixed. Here any objective tone is lost, as the work appeals directly to anarcho-punks in Philadelphia and beyond to live up to his utopian vision, declaring "we know better than most that *we can do anything*" (224).

As an academic study, this work suffers from being pared down to a 226-page monograph from a 335-page dissertation. Discussion of methodological approach, notably regarding the selection of interviewees, is omitted. Though interesting, quotes from "Carrey,"

"George," "TJ," "Halley," and "Liz," are at best anecdotal, and we have no idea who they are as individuals (40). The only well-known interviewee is Ian MacKaye, who is quoted briefly. The greatest weakness of the work rests with the editors. Writing *tics*, which editors should catch, abound. The expressions "we see," "therefore," "furthermore," "thus," "in other words," and sentences beginning with "However," are so prevalent as to distract from the flow of the work.

This book is a personal letter to the anarcho-punk community in Philadelphia and beyond. If readers go into the work expecting a strictly academic, sociological study, they will be disappointed. If they expect an informal, community-oriented work from the outset, readers are more likely to appreciate the book. Read as an academic study, the author's personal views lack objectivism, and his idealized and utopian depictions may alienate readers outside his target audience. If the book is read in the spirit of a punk *zine*, however, it takes on greater charm, meaning, and idealism. In his final chapter, for example, Avery-Natale instructs the community on "how we can do better" (220), urging a rejection of "sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and so on" (215). Ultimately, the work is not meant for an academic audience, nor does it make that claim; it was written for the anarcho-punk community, and the book will be earnestly appreciated and valued by "Carrey," "George," "TJ," "Halley," and "Liz."

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Sterba, Wendy. *J.J. Abrams vs. Joss Whedon: Duel for Media Master of the Universe*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. Print. 304 pp.

In the earliest days of the internet, I was part of a Kenneth Branagh listserv. Its most vocal contributors staged a running battle pitting Branagh against Laurence Olivier. (Spoiler alert: they always declared "Ken Doll," as they called him, winner.) The modern age seems filled with artificial rivalries and seemingly arbitrary

dichotomies. Such a face-off is offered in Wendy Sterba's *J.J. Abrams vs. Joss Whedon*, a fascinating consideration of twin talents restricted somewhat by filtering its analysis of their works through an artificial competition, awarding points based on criteria established by Sterba. The book is designed on the premise that either Abrams or Whedon will claim his rightful place as successor to Steven Spielberg. The book's subtitle, proposing the writers/directors/producers/TV-showrunners engage in a "Duel for Media Master of the Universe," suggests a grander title even than Spielberg's "King of Hollywood." That subtitle indicates a rivalry, if not direct antagonism, between the pair, yet there is no evidence they are building towards any confrontation. In fact, Sterba's own preface undercuts both the hint of competition and the notion one creative force need rise above the other, as it positions Whedon and Abrams as successors to both George Lucas and Steven Spielberg (who are, in fact, noted friends). The book seeks to find a singular successor for Spielberg, but given Lucas' success with the creation and establishment of an ongoing multi-media franchise, the Jedi creator would actually seem the more likely "Media Master" whom Abrams and Whedon might seek to replace. Although Spielberg did begin with television, he is chiefly a film director, while the twin subjects here span a variety of media, so perhaps they both have already eclipsed Spielberg in terms of being Media Masters in the twenty-first century.

Fortunately, although the competition structure plays a part in each chapter, it does not inhibit Sterba's excellent discussion of both figures. Fans and scholars alike can read, digest, and enjoy the accessible analysis provided here. The two creators' works are addressed chronologically, revealing clear parallels in their careers (contemporary success with series featuring strong female protagonists; the common creations of cult, myth-driven series that inspired both avid viewership and academic study; both directing episodes of *The Office*; and their contemporaneous release of horror films), but the effect also is to highlight significant differences in productivity at different stages in their careers. As a result of his finding success relatively earlier, Whedon receives the earlier majority of the discussion, and his work--which has reached more

extensively across diverse multi-media platforms--lends itself to more unified discussion befitting Sterba's auteur theory-based approach, but what seems an initial imbalance is righted as the book progresses (and as more opportunities to consider Abrams' works appear). Along with achieving a narrative balance, the discussion also offers a fair look at both of the titular competitors, avoiding the danger of stacking the deck against one or the other, and Sterba's steady hand through these chapters keeps the reader engaged.

Given the long futures ahead for these Media Masters, this duel is far from over, and Sterba can certainly continue the comparison in further studies. One clear area of expansion comes with the material covered in the penultimate chapter ("Hit and Myth!"), which discusses the times these two creative forces have played in others' toy boxes. Abrams' work with first the *Mission: Impossible* series and more recently with both *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* gives him far more such ventures with established franchises than Whedon's work with *The Avengers* (although the discussion of *Much Ado About Nothing* as part of the "Shakespeare franchise" is an inventive inclusion). Since this study's publication, Whedon has been announced to direct a *Batgirl* feature, so he will have a hand in both the Marvel and DC Cinematic Universes, a dual influence in two blockbuster pop culture franchises perhaps only matched by Abrams' work on the films based on Gene Roddenberry's and George Lucas' creations, respectively. Clearly, these two will continue leaving their marks throughout the universe, and, while an ongoing duel need not be the focus of the study, that study should continue. This book starts a discussion that will surely continue for many years--and further projects--to come.

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Santana, Richard, and Gregory Erikson. *Religion and Popular Culture: Rescripting the Sacred.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016. Print. 260 pp.

First, the good news: a serious reader, interested in the interaction of religion and popular culture, will find *Religion and Popular Culture: Rescripting the Sacred* a rewarding investment. The authors, Richard Santana and Gregory Erikson, present their work as "accessible," and it mostly is, though in a few spots a poorly prepared undergraduate will grumble. It has earned a second edition outing, indicating it already has been well received. The thesis of the book begins with the assertion that American popular religion is largely uninformed and malleable. While poll results suggest 50% of all Americans "believe the Bible must be read literally and is incapable of scientific or historical errors . . . [yet] an even higher percentage than that cannot name the four gospels" (19). Moreover, the authors suggest that the Protestant Christian theology so influential in America contains an inherent malleability because, while the old Reformation formula for faith invests confidence in "scripture alone," reformers also taught Americans to believe in "the priesthood of the believer," the right of Christians to interpret scripture according to their own conscience--thus the vast number of Protestant sects but also the easy susceptibility of American religion to "rescripting" the sacred. This term contains a clever double *entendre*: "scripture," the stated locus of most American Christian denominations, may be subject to "rescripting," like the revised script of a movie, television, or game.

As for the bad news, there are some minor annoyances: readers will learn far more about popular culture than about American religion from this work. The authors are informed and sufficiently well-read in the field, but religion scholars will have a quibble or two. For example, in a chapter focused on a genuinely fascinating discussion of baseball, the authors, referring to the similarity of baseball to an Americanized sense of Christian life, say, "Like Christian salvation, reaching base must be personally earned" (46). No mainstream Christian denomination in the United States would recognize itself in that statement. Christianity is a rescue-religion, which typically suggests salvation cannot be "earned." If the statement is asserted to be true despite what Christians believe about themselves, that's fine, but the authors do not make that distinction, and this might shake a reader's confidence in their grasp of

the subject. Moreover, the authors do not discuss the Christian doctrine of grace and forgiveness much at all, despite how deeply Americans have absorbed and reflect this belief in their pop-culture references. In this country, all dogs really do go to heaven! One might also argue that the authors give the impression that evangelical Protestants are the dominant Christian community in this nation, when, in fact, Roman Catholics outnumber any single Protestant denomination, representing around a quarter of all self-identifying Christians in America. It is true enough that there are, in total, far more Protestants, but this glosses over nuances and deep divisions among the Protestants themselves. Any implications of all this are unexplored.

Despite these grumblings, there are rewards in reading *Rescripting the Sacred.* The authors' familiarity with the full scope of American popular culture is impressive and informative. They discuss the evolution of American religious ethos in sports, advertising, music (pop, jazz, and heavy metal!), movies, television, and video-gaming as well as the ongoing fascination with monsters, angels, and demons. The analyses are not superficial, and the conclusions about the interactions of American religion and popular culture are well thought through.

The authors show how profoundly popular culture has been absorbed into American religious life, a good example being their discussion of the evangelical children's video *Bibleman,* about a scripture-quoting superhero with obvious roots in comic books, movies, and video-gaming (11). More interesting is their discussion of how popular culture, in its turn, has influenced American religious views and experience. More Christians have seen Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* than have ever read the Biblical account of Christ's death, and, even though this movie is a harmonized summary of gospels and Roman Catholic legend, for many Americans that movie is their "real" story of the Christ event (115).

Most interesting of all might be their discussion of how popular entertainment has inspired Americans to think on their own theologically. Television's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* inspired internet chat boards, fan fiction, and discussion groups around issues surrounding good, evil, the state of the soul, sacrifice, love, existential

despair, and "meaning" itself, in ways "not typically discussed within the structures of much American Christianity" (152).

Rescripting makes an excellent case that through the pervasive power of popular entertainment, in the digital age more than ever, Americans are formulating and sharing important personal and corporate beliefs, not under the careful supervision of pastors or in pews, but at the ball game, on the bus looking at the ads on the wall, listening to music in their ear buds, going to the movies, relaxing in front of their televisions, or creating their own rules in their own worlds in a video game. Anyone interested in the power of popular culture will want to know more about this *Rescripting*.

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Bucciferro, Claudia, ed. *The X-Men Films: A Cultural Analysis*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. Print. 264 pp.

The X-Men Films: A Cultural Analysis, edited by Claudia Bucciferro, is a collection of essays which analyzes the cultural relevancy of the X-Men films. While the introduction and epilogue suggest that this work explores the films' challenge to the dominant discourse by "paying attention to representations of gender, race, sexuality, and disability," the individual essays do not support a unifying thesis or argument (xix). Instead, the contributions, varied in focus and coming mostly from authors in the communications field, explore the way the X-Men films and superhero genre "call us to imagine a world that is more just for more people, more of the time" (228). While the separate pieces may not form one coherent argument, individually, they are often strong and compelling, and the work's overall focus on marginalized characters and identities is refreshing.

The book is organized into five parts: Utopia and Immersive Experiences, Agency and Authority, Women and Power, Masculinity and Race, and Passing and Otherness. This presents some organizational challenges, as essays in some parts seem almost unrelated, while others are redundant. For example, the first section pairs

Matt Yockey's piece, which places the films in the sociopolitical context of post-9/11 America, with Nicolo Gallio's essay on the immersive marketing campaign for *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. By documenting rather than analyzing, Gallio's piece fails to connect with broader cultural themes like Yockey's, making its inclusion in the chapter confusing, and the two feel unrelated. Gallio's contribution ultimately fails to have the impact that some of the other essays have as well. Meanwhile, the last few sections of the book all examine intersections of race and gender, but with seemingly arbitrary distinctions. Essays on "passing," where one is perceived as white or straight without technically being either, necessarily reflect on race, and those on otherness from the majority by way of race, gender, or ability necessarily involve discussions of power. Where the first part is not cohesive enough, the concluding parts are overly so, with some pieces, like those from Carolyn Cocca on the "X-Women" and Julie Davis and Robert Westerfelhaus on the character of Rogue, reading almost too similar.

The next section, Agency and Authority, contains a more coherent selection of essays. Evan Hayles Gledhill analyzes how the films "engage with difficult notions about what it means to be a subject under the law, and within the medical framework of concepts such as pathology and normativity" (45). Gledhill argues the X-Men films represent a nuanced depiction of the Nazis which doesn't sensationalize but rather contextualizes the science fiction of the films' stories. Ron Von Burg and D. Stokes Piercy's essay examining the films in the context of transhumanism is particularly insightful concerning the character of Magneto, though problematic in its historical comparison of genocidal series villain Magneto to civil rights figure Malcom X.

The selections then turn to gender in the films, with Carolyn Cocca's essay, "Containing the X-Women," as a standout in the collection. Cocca argues convincingly that the films have significantly de-powered women in the franchise by charting the core storyline of *X-Men: Days of Future Past* from original comic to the recent film. Cocca notes that in 1981 "all of the key roles are played by women" but in the 2014 film all are played by men (81). This compelling essay highlights not only the ways that the films have

failed their female fans but also the superhero genre more generally. Shifting to race and masculinity, David C. Oh's essay asks, "Why is Wolverine consistently matched against technologically enhanced Asian villains?" (151). Examining race, masculinity, and disability, Jessica Benham explores "Xavier as Marvel's Supercrip" and analyzes the privileged status the character's wealth and race create. The essays that comprise the last sections of the book expertly present an intersectional analysis of the films, deftly including race, gender, and disability in their conversations.

Despite this, the work suffers from one glaring omission--the absence of any significant queer analysis of the films despite the fact that several essays acknowledge the importance of a queer reading. Jason Zingsheim writes, "While historically the comic franchise has been described as presenting a metaphorical portrayal of the civil rights movement, the films are often mentioned as a stand-in for the LGBT movement" (102). Other essays mention director Bryan Singer's identity as a gay man and how he has said his sexuality informed his direction of the films, but other than these scattered references and Cocca's discussion of the women being de-queered, the volume fails to make significant connections to the LGBT movement. This is a critical missing piece to the cultural analysis done in the volume and stands out because the selections do an otherwise admirable job of including intersections of race, gender, and ability. Despite these shortcomings, the volume overall is a well-written, engaging exploration of the X-Men films and is sure to delight both scholar and fan alike.

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Correction: In the Spring 2017 (39.2) issue, Chris Flynn was cited as the reviewer of George Plasketes' *Warren Zevon: Desperado of Los Angeles*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. The correct reviewer is Christopher Ramsey, Full Sail University.

STUDIES IN POPULAR CULTURE