CRITERION

A JOURNAL OF LITERARY CRITICISM

“If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of ‘sublimity’ misses the mark. For it is not the ‘greatness,’ the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts.”

T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
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Editors’ Note

Before we get into thanking all of the incredible people who made this issue possible, Chelsea would like to take a personal moment to say goodbye to the journal she has been working with for the past three years. Chelsea started working with Criterion in her sophomore year at the suggestion of Emron Esplin, our previous faculty advisor. Looking back on that moment now, she reflects, “I had no idea how much of my time and passion I would be putting into this journal, nor did I know what an amazing experience it was going to be. I have loved seeing the way that the journal has evolved with each issue, and I am excited to see the new directions it takes in the years to come.”

Criterion is an entirely volunteer-run student journal at Brigham Young University. We have had an incredibly dedicated staff of students this semester, and this issue would not have been possible without them. Each person brought a level of skill and enthusiasm which was invaluable to the publication process. We also want to express our thanks to Mike Taylor, who took up the helm of faculty advisor this year.

This journal would not be where it is today without the support of the BYU Department of English, and we are grateful every day for the resources and guidance we receive from them. We wanted this issue to be about pushing our boundaries, and we are glad that we are able to accomplish our goals with the support of the English Department. We are also grateful for our partnership with BYU’s Annual English Symposium. All of our papers in this Fall 2017 issue were taken from the English Symposium earlier this year, and we want to show our appreciation for all of the authors who had the courage to share their work with us.
It is nearly impossible to adequately thank every single person who contributes to the production of a student journal. That being said, we would like to thank Maddie Calder for designing our cover. We would also like to thank all of our readers for their interest in our journal. We hope that you will be inspired by the pieces that we publish. We really tried to push ourselves with this issue, and we are excited to present you with papers on various interesting topics from a Jungian analysis of a ballet to a comparative investigation of Lemony Snicket and Edgar Allan Poe. Through this issue, we hope to bring to you some of the most poignant and engaging highlights from the symposium.

Without further ado, we are proud to present our readers with the Fall 2017 issue of Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism.

*Chelsea Lee and Makayla Okamura*
On May 29, 1913, Igor Stravinsky’s highly anticipated ballet score, *The Rite of Spring*, premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in Paris. This production combined the efforts of Stravinsky, the composer; Serge Diaghilev, the director of the Ballets Russes; Nikolai Roerich, the designer of set and costume; and Vaslav Nijinsky, the choreographer. After months of effort, the contributors had high hopes for *The Rite*, but the opening night appeared to be a failure. The un-balletic movements of the dancers and the unsettling dissonance of the music incited a riot, and the audience shouted insults and profanities at the ballet company. Their clamor quickly overwhelmed the orchestra, forcing Nijinsky to bellow out counting sequences, so his dancers could proceed with their routine (Hill 30). At first, Stravinsky was disgusted with the audience’s response and felt that he and the company had been slighted. However, news of the riot swept the world, and he was pleased to find that *The Rite’s* debut was declared chaotic, controversial, and scandalous. The night of the premiere was not what the company expected, but according to Diaghilev, it was “exactly what I wanted” (qtd. in Hill 31).

Historical accounts of *The Rite’s* premiere primarily document the pandemonium in the theatre and the outrage of the audience who
witnessed what seemed like an assault on music itself. However, there
are those patrons who appreciated the magnitude of *The Rite* from
the onset as it ushered in a new era of modernism. Gertrude Stein, for
instance, regarded *The Rite* as the latest avant-garde sensation and
praised the performance’s ability to awaken the crudest of reactions
among listeners (Heisler 696). T. S. Eliot also praised *The Rite* after seeing
a revised performance in 1921. In the October 1921 issue of *The Dial*,
Eliot celebrated the masterpiece’s “quality of modernity . . . the scream of
the motor horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the beating
of iron and steel, the roar of the underground railway, and the other
barbaric cries of modern life” (qtd. in Heisler 697). Eliot’s publication
helped transform *The Rite* into a symbol of modernist culture. The
performance’s sacrifice of the Chosen One became representative of the
painful genesis of a new, abrasive aesthetic (697), while its composer
inherited the identity of “an avant-garde scandal-maker” (Butler 35).

While composing the score, Stravinsky was unquestionably
modernist in his aversion to melody, rhythm, and the European system
of tonality. Despite his potential among modernists and avant-gardists,
Stravinsky explained that he did not write music for the sake of
experimenting or promoting a radical change in the existing social order.
Rather, he considered himself “the vessel through which Le Sacre passed”
(qtd. in Toorn 155). This detachment from intention created authenticity
and liberated *The Rite* from the conventions that domesticated music
(Adorno 107). This reduction produced a phenomenon in its purest
essence, a chaotic spirit that surpassed the composer’s immediate skill
and forced a violent encounter of sound upon the audience. Although
Stravinsky regarded himself as a mere emissary of *The Rite*’s sheer force,
he nonetheless created a visceral effect that awakened troubling images
and stimulated an encounter with the shadow, a Jungian archetype that
embodies the darkness and wildness of character that exists outside
the light of consciousness (Jung, “Psychology” 88). *The Rite* produced
a powerfully unsettling experience but intentionally so—it entreated
its audience to not only acknowledge the shadow that blackens human
character, but to also recognize its potential to enrich a world that is
unfettered by convention and formality.
The Shadow Archetype

Archetypal theory and the concept of the shadow owe allegiance to C. W. Jung, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who devoted his life to studying the collective unconscious. Jung describes the collective unconscious as “a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn” and possesses “contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals” (“Archetypes and Collective Unconscious” 3–4). The contents of the collective unconscious are called archetypes, which reveal the hidden secrets of the soul through profound images (7). The shadow, one of Jung’s main archetypes, implies “the ‘negative’ side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the contents of the personal unconscious” (“Psychology” 87). People unknowingly subdue their shadow because it represents the darkest aspects of the psyche that hearken back to animal ancestry. The uncertainty and wildness that follow the shadow are disconcerting, but Jung cautioned that if the archetype is not acknowledged, it will become even darker in its state of impoverishment (88).

The shadow contains “a vast domain of . . . primitive tendencies” that, while disquieting, stir a fascination with the exotic (“Psychology” 88). This exotic spirit is suggested in the full title of Stravinsky’s piece, *The Rite of Spring: Pictures of Pagan Russia in Two Parts*, which speaks of the unknown story of modern Russia’s prehistoric roots. Accordingly, *The Rite* depicts a group of primitives who participate in ritual dances and eventually elect the Chosen One, a virgin who dances herself to death and is offered as a sacrifice to the god of spring. *The Rite* had potential to secure immediate popularity on the night of the premiere because an excitement for the primitive already existed in the modernist imagination (Heisler 697). Annegret Fauser, a cultural musicologist, elaborates, “Virginal sacrifice and pagan rite were in the mainstream of Parisian theatrical topics. . . . The ballet [*The Rite of Spring*] seemed designed to satisfy a local hunger for exotic primitivism, although in the end it proved too brutal for the opening-night audience to handle” (qtd. in Ross 3). While the stomp of the dancers, the unusual set, and the clashing polytonality certainly contributed to the unrest, the sheer brutality of the
performance and the immediacy of the audience’s reaction actually resulted from the provocation of the shadow archetype. This provocation forced the bitter realization that the boundaries separating modern life and the primitivism on the stage were “absolutely artificial” (Clifford 558).

The Collective Unconscious

In his Philosophy of New Music, Theodor Adorno, a fundamental European philosopher and musicologist, recognizes these darker undercurrents in The Rite and even connects the piece with Jungian philosophy. Adorno writes that while it is unlikely that these two contemporaries knew each other, there is a remarkable connection between Stravinsky’s collective authenticity and Jung’s doctrine. The Rite is the musical counterpart to the collective unconscious because it is the gateway to primordial origins (Adorno 111). Jung theorizes that the initial manifestation of the primordial appears in dreams, visions, or fantasies. He describes these visions as “assaults of the unconscious” and emphasizes the importance of seeking understanding because their “contents are not dead, outmoded forms, but belong to our living being” (“Confrontation” 79, 75). Jung did not dismiss his own dreams as foolishness but assumed a responsibility to awaken the signified meanings within the dream material. Similarly, the archaic images of The Rite unexpectedly assaulted Stravinsky’s unconscious. He stated, “The idea of Le Sacre du printemps came to me while I was still composing The Firebird. I had dreamed a scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin danced herself to death” (qtd. in Hill 3). Even as Stravinsky composed, he had fleeting visions of an old augur among the tribe of primitives (15). Troubled by these dream sequences, Stravinsky sought the professional opinion of Nikolai Roerich, Russia’s leading scholar in tribal art and ancient ritual, to help interpret these visions (5).

Although Roerich’s expertise was undoubtedly helpful in informing the staging and costumes of the ballet, a textbook history of Russia’s origins could not adequately articulate Stravinsky’s glimpse of the collective unconscious. Commenting on the struggle of this task of translation, Jung revealed the following from his own experience: “Since I did not know what was going on, I had no choice but to write everything down in the style selected by the unconscious itself” (“Confrontation” 79). It is in this manner that Stravinsky proceeded to translate the archetypal symbols and compose The Rite. In analyzing the original score manuscript, many
scholars have noted the unusual nature of Stravinsky’s handwriting. Peter Hill, a musicologist and scholar on the composition of *The Rite*, clarifies, “The handwriting is curious, as though Stravinsky had devised the rhythm before finding a tune to fit in—in line with the description he gave to Roerich of the old woman: ‘...I see her running in front of the group, stopping them sometimes, and interrupting the rhythmic flow’” (Hill 15). As Hill indicates, Stravinsky’s method of composition was certainly unorthodox, but it fell in line with Jung’s philosophy to work in the language of the unconscious itself. Stravinsky, in fact, stated that he was not guided by any compositional system, and his approach was more instinctive (qtd. in Hill 15).

The Language of the Shadow Archetype

Every element of *The Rite of Spring* conforms to the style of the archetype. The ballet begins, for example, not with the typical grace and agility of ballerinas, but with the ritual dance of savages who celebrate the coming of spring. They dance with a mechanical precision that is disciplined but seems, at the same time, inferior to the modern mobility of the human race. This depiction, while unusual, supports Jung’s theory that the primitive savage is a manifestation of the shadow (“Psychology” 87). The appearance of *The Rite*’s primitives is alarming, but they do not play a significant role in any narrative. Rather, their presence contributes to an overall archaic effect (Adorno 116). In order to maintain this effect, *The Rite* is not motivated by plot so that it can present the raw immediacy of prehistoric rite. Thus while Nijinsky’s original choreography appears mysterious and disjointed, it was designed “to depict a series of primitive ceremonies” rather than “describe such rites in the form of narration or story” (Toorn 3). Stravinsky left Nijinsky with specific instructions to dance for the entirety of the performance and never pantomime (4). *The Rite* would deliver a presentation rather than a representation of pagan rites; it “would not tell a story of a pagan ritual; it would be that ritual” (Taruskin 865). Any attempt to civilize the depiction of ancient rite would erode the archetypal language and repress the coarseness of the shadow. Therefore, in a striking paradox, the disorder and savagery of the presentation renews *The Rite* with authenticity that preserves the visceral spirit of the shadow archetype.

The choreography is not the only element of *The Rite* that defies tradition and is unorthodox. The rhythm that is rigidly maintained in the composition evokes the mechanistic, bodily movements of primitive rite and
is most apparent in “Augurs of Spring” in which layers of dissonant, melodic fragments burst forth in pulsing beats. Peter van den Toorn, a professor of twentieth-century music, suggests the reason why the rhythm seems so harsh is because it is completely detached from any principles of musicality, such as harmony and timbre. Because the rhythm is reduced to meter or “mathematical groupings,” it lacks any relation to the compositional whole (60). This detachment comes at the expense of equilibrium and leaves the audience with a constant feeling of anxiety.

In addition to the rhythmic structure, the orchestral composition follows in the pattern of the archetype by completely rejecting the European principles of tonality. In this system, musical pieces are composed according to a hierarchy of tones. One note, called the tonic, is the tonal center of the piece, while all of the other notes eventually resolve towards this center. The tonal system creates music that is unified and harmonious, and it heavily influenced musical composition from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century. The Rite was composed during a time in which classical composers were more innovative in how they approached harmony and melody, but even this age of experimentation could not have prepared the audience for The Rite’s premiere. Perhaps what was most alarming to the premiere audience was the repetition of the Augurs chord, a double chord that plays two diatonically unrelated triads simultaneously and is notorious for its overwhelming dissonance. This chord sounds over two hundred times in the second section of The Rite, “The Augurs of Spring,” where the chord derives its name (Heisler 703). This feature of The Rite produced an immediate reaction among listeners and critics who said that the Augurs chord’s absolute renunciation of tradition was an affliction on music, and it transformed The Rite “into something other than music, into sheer barbarousness and cacophony” (703).

However, Ezra Pound explains in his ABC of Reading how elements that unify a piece such as melody are artificial because they are “furthest removed from anything the composer finds THERE, ready in nature” (24). Melody and the reconfiguration of rhythm that embellish the composition and harmonize elements of discord domesticate the shadow through the destruction of the archetypal language. What Stravinsky finds in nature and presents to his audience is mysterious, dark, and potentially violent. It presents “a side of man who is less ideal and more primitive than we should like to be” (“Psychology” 88) and offers a glimpse of an “exotic alternative,”
the other reality that asserts a constant influence on the psyche (Clifford 542). Knowing that this alternate reality should not be ignored, *The Rite* utilizes music and dance in a way that stimulates an encounter with the shadow in order to render the strange and incomprehensible familiar (542). This familiarization is possible only if the audience recognizes the reality of the archetype and its frequent influence on the ego (Jung, “Shadow” 91).

**Conclusion**

Despite the wildly visceral energy of *The Rite*, Stravinsky was discontent with the piece’s final chord and described its abrupt conclusion as “a noise” (qtd. in Hill 89). This ultimate noise, however, epitomizes the spirit of *The Rite* because it eludes resolution. The British musicologist Arnold Whittall explains that the piece’s “contrary tendencies clash inside without ever finding their way to a complete synthesis” (95). *The Rite*’s finale—an assault of sound, images, and energy of unprecedented ferocity—deeply troubled the audience because it never resolved (Hill 89). Their hope that plot climaxes would arrive at their conclusion and music would resolve towards its tonal center is synonymous with the hope that the shadow could be subdued within their consciousness. Such resolution was sought after in subsequent renditions of *The Rite* that streamlined Stravinsky’s score (Ross 3). Musicians became more skilled in undertaking difficult repertoire and performed *The Rite* with flawless precision and clarity. These renderings, however, detract from the spirit of the piece. Music critic Alex Ross asserts that unblemished representations of *The Rite* reduce the piece from a profound, “unholy mess” into a product that is “[removed] from the wildness of the original” (3).

When musicians and listeners render *The Rite* more lifeless, they simultaneously attempt to repress and isolate the shadow, as if their neglect could kill the monster. What they fail to understand, however, is that the more humanity tries to subdue the shadow in their conscious life, “the blacker and denser it is” (Jung, “Psychology” 88). *The Rite* attempts to break the artificial barriers by giving listeners a glimpse of exotic realities that embellish the world by stirring dark and primitive tendencies that thrive within human character. It forces the audience to not only hear the shadow’s music, but to also allow the soul’s participation in the symphony.
Works Cited


Fairy tales are frequently viewed as purely for children, yet they can hold value for adults as well. C. S. Lewis understood this dual audience for fairy tales, and used this knowledge to craft stories, such as the *Chronicles of Narnia*, that have broad appeal for adults and children alike. Another such audience-bridging story is “Zerinda—A Fairy Tale,” a largely forgotten British fairy tale found in Maria Jane Jewsbury’s Romantic miscellany *Phantasmagoria: Sketches of Life and Literature* (1825). “Zerinda” straddles and complicates the divides of child and adult audiences in its use of innocent, childlike wonder and rigid, adult hegemony. In this tale, Jewsbury uses heteroglossia to build a world of wonder. Heteroglossia is a term from Mikhail Bakhtin that essentially means multiple voices or polyvocality. The idea is that different voices are present in all texts, and that these include the voice of the author along with the voices of the individual
characters, the narrator, and occasional others. This paper explores the tensions of innocent wonder and experienced hegemony within “Zerinda,” and examines how Jewsbury uses phantasmagoria, various types of humor, and the heteroglossia of the text that signals an appeal to both adults and children.

Maria Jane Jewsbury’s 1825 Phantasmagoria; or, Sketches of Life and Literature is a two-volume collection capturing varied thematic concerns of its time while offering self-critique, allowing the text to reflect and comment upon Romantic civilization’s polyvocality while simultaneously embodying it. The Oxford English Dictionary defines phantasmagoria as a “vision of a rapidly transforming collection or series of imaginary (and usually fantastic) forms, such as may be experienced in a dream or fevered state, or evoked by literary description” (“Phantasmagoria,” def. 2). This vision-like quality is present throughout Phantasmagoria, and in “Zerinda” specifically. Jewsbury’s work is intensely concerned with print culture, and particularly with ideas of readership and the importance of readers to literature, Romanticism, and the miscellany. These concerns enhance the heteroglot nature of the text generally and highlight the links between heteroglossia, phantasmagoria, and wonder evident in “Zerinda” and present in varying degrees throughout Phantasmagoria.

Understanding the material location of “Zerinda—a Fairy Tale” furthers the importance of heteroglossia to the text, given the nature of the larger work in which it is found. Phantasmagoria is a miscellany, essentially a collection of poetry, short fiction, essays, anecdotes, and, in this case, literary criticism. Abigail Williams describes eighteenth-century miscellanies as follows: “Many poems were published individually, but they went on to enjoy an afterlife in the miscellany culture of the period. Poetic miscellanies are vital to understanding the diversity of eighteenth-century literary culture, reflecting fashions, popular taste, and the literary market” (166). Phantasmagoria differs slightly from these more purely poetic, eighteenth-century miscellanies, but is developed out of that tradition. The nature of the miscellany in combining work from various genres and authors resonates strongly with Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia and dialogism. The linkages between Jewsbury’s miscellany and Bakhtin’s ideas of heteroglossia highlight the collected, or cultivated, nature of “Zerinda” within Phantasmagoria. The collected nature of a miscellany creates a tighter resonance between “Zerinda” and the collected and translated tales that Jennifer Schacker discusses, illuminating the heteroglossia of these collections of fairy tales.
This shared feature of collection, and the heteroglossia that entails, suggests that something about the polyvocality (or multiple voices) is intrinsic to nineteenth-century British fairy tales.

This polyvocality, and its connection to wonder, is related to the idea of phantasmagoria, as illuminated by Jewsbury’s choice of title. As highlighted in the previously cited definition, phantasmagoria could serve as a definition of wonder—a “vision of a rapidly transforming collection or series of imaginary (and usually fantastic) forms,” “evoked by literary description” (“Phantasmagoria,” def. 2). Again, “collection” is important to the ideas at play. It suggests heteroglossia, but perhaps more interestingly, also alludes to an agent who collected the tales or forms. The presence of the agent suggests that there is a motive for the collecting, and therefore motivations to examine behind the bringing about of wonder and hegemony. The hegemony and wonder exist without the agent per say, but the existence of an agent provides another entry into the analysis of that wonder that is being used.

In “Zerinda,” Jewsbury creates a distinctive persona for the text, while also writing what functions on some level as two stories—one intended for adults and one intended for children. Indeed, what Jewsbury does is described aptly in Bakhtin’s description of heteroglossia:

The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [raznorecie] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [raznorecie] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (263)

Creating the persona of a narrator allows Jewsbury to distinguish her “authorial speech” from “the speeches of narrators” as well as the “speech of characters,” all of which function together to create the atmosphere of heteroglossia. In “Zerinda,” this heteroglossia is even more complex as the narrator expresses multiple voices without the need for other characters.

Schacker finds this same heteroglossia in the tales she examines in National Dreams. In discussing Croker’s Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland, Schacker writes, “In the collected tales and notes, Croker has blurred the distinction—which had initially seemed so clear—between
oral and literary storytellers, listeners and readers, reflecting on the art of storytelling” (56). Schacker argues that Croker tells these stories with multiple, blurred voices. As she examines specific tales, it becomes clear that Croker tells most of the stories as if he is relaying them directly as he heard or transcribed them; however, there are frequently odd interjections where the narrator of the tale seems to shift into Croker, rather than remaining the “old woman” that he points to as the origin of all these sorts of stories. Jewsbury’s appeals to children and adults throughout “Zerinda” similarly blur these lines, winking at part of the audience (perhaps those doing the telling), while also acknowledging the other listening audience.

The doubling of appeal is most evident through textual examination. A brief plot overview of “Zerinda” is likely useful given the tale’s virtually unknown nature. “Zerinda” is the story of a princess, Zerinda, who at birth is granted extreme beauty along with a fault selected by her mother—vanity. The Fairy that granted the wish returns when Zerinda turns twenty-one. However, prior to that day, both her parents die. Zerinda then interacts with the Fairy, confronts her vanity, undergoes a radical transformation, and rules in peace and prosperity for decades. Jewsbury describes the Queen’s reason for choosing vanity as Zerinda’s one fault as follows: “Vanity was the fault she selected, for she determined, after a few minutes reflection on the subject, that vanity was such an amiable, well-bred fault,—merely a feminine weakness,—a trivial speck in character,—that it was really uncharitable to consider it a fault” (254). The gender commentary here is worthy of a full examination on its own (as is the tale itself), though that particularly route is not the most fruitful for our exploration of heteroglossia. There is undoubtedly humor in this passage beyond the sexist commentary, and that intonation could signal humor to children even though the text itself suggests a more adult audience here.

Understandably then, a consideration of the audience of “Zerinda” seems fruitful in determining the heteroglossia present in the text and the potentially competing ways that wonder is functioning. Shavit notes that “since the child was perceived in any case as a source of amusement, adults could enjoy elements of the child’s world while openly or covertly considering them part of the world of children, part of a culture different from that of the upper classes” (323). Adults were able in part to enjoy this world of wonder that was primarily aimed at children because children were viewed as a source of amusement for adults. Indeed, the fairy tale may
depend on this relationship that inherently is one of heteroglossia. There will always be multiple voices—the voice for the child, the voice for the adult, the voice of wonder, the voice of hegemony. “Zerinda” occupies an odd liminal space given this assertion about fairy tales and the tale’s moralizing and didactic tone.

Indeed, the framing of *Phantasmagoria* as a whole is suggestive of an intended adult audience. The book opens with a quote from Wordsworth on the title page, before the dedication, which reads, “To William Wordsworth, Esquire, these volumes are most respectfully inscribed as a testimony of grateful feeling, for the high delight, and essential benefit, which the author has derived from the study of his poems.” This dedication is followed on the next page by a poem written by Jewsbury (signed simply, MJJ) to Wordsworth. The book is clearly meant to be for Wordsworth—a love letter of sorts to him and his poetry, contained in a variety of sketches. This focus on Wordsworth suggests an adult audience, who would have read and been familiar with Wordsworth rather than a primarily child audience.

This confusion about audience is only deepened by a closer look at the tale. Perhaps this is because the wonder of the fairy tale is linked with the hegemony that it exercises. Bacchilega notes that “the fairy tale’s dominant or hegemonic association has been with magic and enchantment” (5). Magic and enchantment evoke wonder, and are suggestive of the phantasmagoric visions that “Zerinda” strives to inspire. However, it is important to recognize that “hegemonic and counterhegemonic uses of the fairy tale are not in binary opposition to each other” (107). Not only are wonder and hegemony not in binary opposition to one another, but the appeals to children and adults are not binaries. In fact, the relationship between the two seems to complicate the dichotomy between child and adult that we have embraced.

The child-adult dichotomy can be traced to early beliefs about fairy tales and childhood’s sole ownership of imagination and make-believe. Warner writes that “The Romantic vision of childhood led to the triumph of the imagination, but also to the belief that the faculty of make-believe was a child’s special privilege. . . . Grown-ups yearned to regain that paradise—the land of the lost boys—and evoking this secondary world became a powerful spur to new fairytale fictions” (103). For Warner, adults yearn to “regain that paradise,” yet they seem perpetually distanced from it. However, texts like “Zerinda” bridge some of that gap—bringing wonder to adults as well as to children to suggest that the imagination of adults is not that different after
all. This may be because “the further back one goes self-mockery and fairy tale have been deeply interwoven” (Warner 148). The adult sense of wonder is often tied up in self-mockery, in an awareness of what is expected or how the tale differs starkly from reality. This sense of self-mockery feels present throughout “Zerinda,” but a brief moment will serve to illustrate it: “For a full hour she wept without ceasing, not entirely for the loss of the diamond mine, though diamonds justify any woman in weeping” (265–66). The humor here would likely be lost on the youngest children, or those engaging with the wonder of the story, but would be present for adult readers. The language is also visual—creating a rough sketch of imaginary forms, invoking the phantasmagoria that seems to define the wonder of the tale.

This sense of self-mockery may be viewed slightly differently, perhaps due to the heteroglossia of the tale and the adult/child divide. Shavit quotes Warner concerning the illustrations of the Grimm Brothers’ tales in England, that “Fairy tales shifted to a comic register—‘pills for melancholy’ . . . Cruikshank set a mood of jolly good fun, or silly, whacky nonsense” (105). The combination of visual storytelling with “jolly good fun, or silly, whacky nonsense” that was meant to protect, educate, and mold seems to result in a unique outcome that is reflected in “Zerinda.” As Jewsbury describes Zerinda’s vanity, some of this “jolly good fun, or silly, whacky nonsense” comes through. “During childhood and youth, vanity developed itself in its usual forms; but as she approached womanhood, its exhibitions became so enormous and ridiculous, that the envious were hourly gratified with the exposure of her folly, and the charitable were constrained to hope she was insane” (Jewsbury 255). The description starts off fairly standard, but again shifts into a comic register towards the end. The gratification of the envious is a little surprising, but not incredibly so. However, the idea that “the charitable were constrained to hope she was insane” is guffaw-inducing though admittedly displaying an insensitivity to those with real, debilitating mental disorders. If seen as “jolly good fun, or silly, whacky nonsense” this seems to be appealing to children, yet if viewed as “self-mockery” the appeal is to adults.

Another instance serves to further suggest the jolly good fun of “Zerinda.” As a consequence of her vanity, she is displeased with the bards and minstrels and poets. The text notes that “In time she tired out the tuneful tribe,—for they found it impossible to invent any fiction which Zerinda considered sufficiently true” (256). These creators could not develop “any fiction which Zerinda considered sufficiently true.” Given that the tale is found in a
book and that there are some efforts to maintain the historicity of the story, Jewsbury’s comment here feels like a wink to knowing readers and other writers that they may be critiqued at times for failing to produce fictions that are “sufficiently true,” but that those who question the veracity of the fictions are simply too vain to realize what they are missing. The joke seems aimed at the adult audience, straddling the line that Warner suggests fairy tales frequently do, forcing readers to live in a liminal space caught “between accepting them [wonders and enchantments] (as the ideal child reader does) and rejecting them (as the adult reader can be expected to do)” (150). The idea of sufficiently true fictions speaks to an audience that feels compelled to both accept and reject the wonder that is being displayed, again invoking a sense of self-mockery. Sufficiently true fictions also speak to the heteroglossia of the text which is sincere and moralizing, while simultaneously being self-aware and self-deprecating.

In addition to humor of either the jolly good fun or self-mocking variety, wonder in tales was targeted towards children through illustrations. Warner writes that “the illustrated book is an essential dynamic in the history of fairy tale, for since the nineteenth century the stories have been principally transmitted through visual storytelling” (98). While Warner is talking about book illustrations here, it seems that this emphasis may have demanded that fairy tales become a staple of television and film, two strongly visual mediums of narrative storytelling (and perhaps part of the reason that Disney has become the representation of fairy tale for many today). Yet, “Zerinda,” a nineteenth-century fairy tale, does not have any specific visual component beyond the use of figurative language to create mental images. In fact, Jewsbury seems to go out of her way to downplay possible visual elements in a few key instances. In the tale, she writes:

> It is now time to say something of Zerinda herself. As every one has a different standard of beauty, instead of giving any detailed account of her personal charms, I shall simply state that she was the most beautiful creature ever shone upon by sun or moon, and then, each of my readers can imagine her beautiful after his own taste. (254–55)

Jewsbury not only chooses not to describe Zerinda or her beauty, but explicitly informs the audience that she is refusing to do so, in order for the audience to create their own mental image of her. Here, Jewsbury also explicitly references a male reader. This may be simply due to conventions of the time,
or perhaps is suggesting that Jewsbury intended the tale for boys rather than girls. The moralizing nature of the tale and the frequent references to the feminine nature of vanity complicate this intended audience, but the gender concerns are likely best suited for a separate discussion.

The labeling of the pieces within *Phantasmagoria* as “sketches” strikes me as worth examining in relation to the importance of illustrations and the nature of phantasmagoria. While “Zerinda” and the other stories and articles are not themselves illustrated, they are described in language that evokes illustration—albeit hasty and preliminary—but illustration nonetheless. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines “sketch” as “rough drawing or delineation of something” (“Sketch,” def. 1) There’s an emphasis on roughness here, the suggestion that what is seen is only the beginnings of what could be. As “phantasmagoria” is a “rapidly transforming” vision of a “collection or series of imaginary (and usually fantastic) forms” this roughness evoked by the sketches seems fitting. The rough outline allows for readers’ imagination to fill in, fully inviting the phantasmagoric vision of wonder. The OED later defines sketch as Jewsbury likely intended it, as “A brief account, description, or narrative giving the main or important facts, incidents, etc., and not going into the details; a short or superficial essay or study, freq. in pl. as a title” (“Sketch,” def. 2). Even though this is undoubtedly Jewsbury’s intended primary meaning, the layers of meaning created in part by the use of heteroglossia, are evocative.

“Zerinda’s” lack of illustrations complicates any assertions to a purely or primarily child audience and highlights some of the complicated power dynamics between the adult and child audiences. Cristina Bacchilega notes that “Story power flows—though not equally—in more than one direction” (74). Jewsbury seems determined to play with the flow of story power by shifting between adult and child, wonder and hegemony. As she describes a source of information for the tale, she writes, “Indeed, the annals of the kingdom (to which, as rather apocryphal I have not paid much attention) hint” (260). Jewsbury here relates some information about Zerinda, but does so in a fashion that would likely not be of interest to most children, instead playing with adult expectations. The adult can be expected to reject the ideas of wonder and Jewsbury knowingly incorporates some of that skepticism into her tale, appealing to that adult reader or the adult tendencies of readers.

The heteroglossia at work throughout “Zerinda” allows for a doubling of audience—appealing to both and adults. Wonder and awe are used in
a winking fashion throughout “Zerinda” to suggest Jewsbury’s awareness of this double-audience and the complicated nature of the adult-child dichotomy. As Warner argues “fairy tale, while aimed especially at modern children, hovered as a form of literature between them and adults” (104). The heteroglossia present in “Zerinda” highlights this hovering. The humor used throughout the story evokes varied responses from adults and children. Wonder is brought into the tale through its rough descriptions and sketch-like qualities, that allow it to more effectively function phantasmagorically, suggesting visions of “imaginary (and usually fantastic) forms” to readers. “Zerinda” highlights the relationship between self-mockery and fairy tale, suggesting that wonder is found in both and that the fusion of the two can serve as expanding the audience of fairy tales. The moralizing of “Zerinda” is made resonant for adults by the way that the tale’s self-mockery and absurdity undermine the very moral that the tale is arguing for. The heteroglossia within “Zerinda” brings wonder to adults and children through less neatly defined uses of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

The reception of the tale is still unclear, though it appears to be remarkably unknown, and could work to trace the influence and impact that the tale has had, beyond republication in an anthology of forgotten moral fairy tales from the nineteenth century in 2010. Further work could be done exploring the nationalism in "Zerinda," as well the text’s relationship to other fairy tales, including another tale that features a character like Zerinda prominently. A feminist reading of the tale could yield interesting insights, particularly given Jewsbury’s efforts to appear masculine as the author and the satirical tone that she uses in other sketches and may be in place throughout “Zerinda.” Further analyses of “Zerinda” could shed light on how wonder has been used to appeal to both children and adults in fairy tales and other stories. Gender dynamics, class issues, or other angles could also provide further insight into the intersections of these various issues. “Zerinda” in particular is useful in such analyses because its unknown nature allows it to be seen afresh. The text is also longer than other fairy tales and is more clearly working towards appealing to both adults and children (something present in most fairy tales, but not always as obviously working as it is throughout “Zerinda”


The Sexual Spectrum of the Androgynous Mind in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway

Sylvia Cutler

Can human sexuality really be explained through definitions, labels, and constructs? Is the essence of what drives human desire and identity really summed up in one distinction over another? Regarding questions of human sexual experience, Virginia Woolf was perhaps one of the most revolutionary and remarkable thinkers of her time. Woolf turned the pages of sexually repressive, Victorian writing to the unexplored chapter of human experience in the twentieth-century, a groundbreaking foray into the workings of the inner mind and the constant flux of sexual desire. Woolf would determine through her writing that constructions of sexual identity and desire are more fluid than textbook, more wholesome than restrictive. In uncensoring the construction of the body and its experiences in Cixous-like fashion, Woolf proved the necessity of writing the sexual self.

At the first half of the twentieth century, Woolf found herself among the inner circle of what is commonly referred to as the Bloomsbury Group (Goodwin 59), a network of radical twentieth-century artists and intellectuals who developed and collaborated on insights ranging from class struggle
to the economy, philosophy to the visual arts, and—perhaps the most taboo topic of the time—sexuality. This group was well at ease discussing topics of sexuality, many of the members themselves participating in non-monogamous sexual relationships between each other. A current definition of both heterosexual and homosexual behavior would also describe the nature of the sexual experiences many members in the Bloomsbury group enjoyed, Woolf included. Scholars and biographers have often defined Virginia Woolf as a predominantly lesbian bisexual, and it has been suggested that the sexual abuse she experienced at the hands of her half-brother as a child resulted in a fear of male sexuality (Buchanan 123). The theme of sexual orientation appears often and even unabashedly in Woolf’s novels and writing, however, and there can be little doubt that Woolf’s experiences with both sexual abuse and the sexual freedom of the Bloomsbury Group impacted the way Woolf experienced her sexual orientation in one way or another.

Woolf uses sexuality as a lens to portray the inner-workings of her characters’ thoughts, and it is this fluidity of sexual orientation in Woolf’s characters and writing that sets them apart, enabling freer expression of self and more powerful introspection. Androgyny, which combines both masculine and feminine characteristics, plays an important role in Woolf’s aesthetic as a writer, particularly in the modes through which her characters find expression. Examining what Woolf calls the “androgynous mind” in her fictional narrative *A Room of One’s Own*, the audience gets a sense of the function of sexual fluidity in portraying androgyny in Woolf’s novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Furthermore, Woolf’s exploration of varying degrees of sexual orientation in the characters of Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway works to illustrate both the concept and value of the androgynous mind and its capacity to overcome obstacles presented by a patriarchal, masculine mode of writing reality. Addressing the sexual orientation of Woolf’s Septimus and Clarissa through the sexual spectrum of experience within the body, I will ultimately evaluate the androgynous mode’s indispensability as a tool to overcome a paradigm of phallocentric language—a tool not unlike French feminist Hélène Cixous’ theory of *écriture féminine*—and its capacity to transcend oppressive definitions of bodily experience, sexuality, and identity.

To more fully understand what is at stake for the characters of Septimus and Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* in relation to androgynous writing and sexual fluidity, it is crucial to understand Woolf’s own definition of androgyny and androgynous writing as defined in *A Room of One’s Own*. At the beginning
of chapter six, Woolf’s narrator observes two individuals, a young man and a young woman, entering a taxicab together on the street below her window. Woolf says that the scene relieves the mind of “some strain” (100), a strain caused by the effort of distinguishing one sex from the other. When the two sexes enter the same taxicab, this symbolizes what Woolf would call a “unity of mind.” In this moment Woolf concludes that there is “no single state of being” (101), that the mind is continually altering its focus and thereby “bringing the world into different perspectives” (101). These different perspectives apply to the mind as well as the body’s spectrum of sexuality. I use the term “sexual spectrum” here to describe what contemporary language would label as “sexual fluidity,” that is to say, experiencing varying degrees of sexual attraction toward both men and women. I specifically use this concept of a spectrum of sexuality to describe sexual experience because Woolf would ultimately condemn institutionalized definitions of hetero- and homosexuality in an epistemology of sexuality.

Woolf’s own distaste for definitions of sexuality, such as homosexuality versus heterosexuality, perhaps results from an observation that casting one side of sexual experience as “other” or unnatural creates a hierarchy of experience through which sexual experience that is not heterosexual is somehow inferior. It is here that Woolf’s definition of androgyny presents itself as a solution to hierarchies of understanding. Of the current status of writing, for example, one that stems from an androcentric, masculine tradition, Woolf laments, “All this pitting of sex against sex, of quality against quality; all this claiming of superiority and imputing inferiority, belong to the private-school state of human existence where there are ‘sides,’ and it is necessary for one side to beat another side” (110). By this definition, one could argue that this pitting of “sides” against each other is reminiscent of defining homosexuality as somehow deviant from the norm. It suggests that in a hierarchy of sexual experience, the “quality” of homosexual epistemology is the “other.” Creating definitions of male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, interferes with how reality is experienced. And according to feminist critic Brenda Sue Helt, Woolf largely believes that “women’s love for other women is a highly desirable and empowering emotive force common to most women, and not an identifying characteristic of a rare sexual type” (262-263). This notion that love or sexual attraction for a member of the opposite sex does not constitute a “rare sexual type” harnesses the power of deconstructing sexuality. It
reflects the power of fluidity, the idea that there should be no bifurcation in our understanding of sexual epistemology. What one might deem as perversion from the norm of heterosexuality is in reality an androgynous expression of sexuality, one that is not confined by definitions, and to one degree or another is experienced by everybody.

Woolf’s concept of writing sexual fluidity into identity is further amplified by Cixous and the theory of *écriture feminine*. Cixous asserts that non-linear, cyclical writing unhindered by social inscriptions of gender and patriarchal modes of language frees individuals to write the true essence of the self. Drawing on Cixous’ concept of feminine writing posited in her 1975 essay, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” it is clear that Woolf’s own concept of androgynous writing both demonstrates and complicates the ultimatum of Cixous’ essay, one in which she challenges women to write from the experience of their bodies. The theory of Cixous’ *écriture féminine* significantly resonates with Woolf’s spectrum of experience found in androgynous unity, ultimately demonstrating that Woolf truly was ahead of her time as a feminist thinker. Cixous would also suggest that it is the over-masculinization of human experience, most especially in writing, that has repressed woman’s experience and capacity for complete self-actualization. Both Woolf and Cixous recognize that favoring one side more than the other (i.e. masculine or heterosexual experience) limits the capacity of expression, and thereby the creation of a truer, more inclusive epistemology of sexuality. Cixous writes:

> Until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural-hence political, typically masculine-economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that’s frightening since it’s often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction. (879)

To dismantle a masculine economy of writing, therefore, it is imperative to challenge the traditional with bodily, sexually fluid modes of expression. To write from one’s bodily experiences gets at the essential, a significant and emotive force that rejects the mediation of societal constructs of identity.

In this light, Woolf’s own fiction as a female writer does the work that Cixous suggests dismantles the locus of repression brought about by a masculine epistemology of human experience. To overrun a
paradigm that has been ruled by a “libidinal” and masculine economy, Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* provides readers with a full sexual spectrum in the conceptualization of her characters’ inner experiences, a work that ultimately castrates a phallocentric center of expression through non-traditional writing. Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* follows the style of *écriture féminine* in her use of stream-of-consciousness as a narrative mode, writing that breaks entirely from the more logical, rigid, “infertile” (Woolf 104), masculine writing and instead draws from the inner experiences of the body and the mind. In Woolf, there seems to be constant crying out for the need of a full spectrum of ideas and a refusal to place limits on experience through institutionalized labels grounded in patriarchal experience, logic, and hierarchically codified language, and this is evident in the ways Septimus and Clarissa find expression in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

*Mrs. Dalloway* also comes as a tragic example of the harm done to individuals when identity and sexual experience are repressed through hierarchal and patriarchal definitions of identity. The character of Septimus lives in a society that represses the experience of sexual orientation through narrowly defined definitions, and it is ultimately through Septimus that Woolf shows the need for a world in which sexual epistemology is defined by spectrum or fluidity rather than definitions that posit sides or “others.” The message is simple: repression of any sexual orientation results in the death of self, which is of course represented by Septimus’ suicide at the end of the novel. But what brings about this repression, or rather, this fear in Septimus to embrace his sexual fluidity? In one flashback into Septimus’ young adult life, Woolf introduces the character of Miss Isabel, a woman he falls in love with that introduces him to Shakespeare and Keats. It is her influence that awakens the poet within him, for he dreams of her, “thinks her beautiful” and believes her “impeccably wise” (Woolf 113). “Was he not like Keats? she asked,” and it is here Woolf alludes to a reference found in *A Room of One’s Own* in which she argues that Keats was an androgynous writer (107). It is telling that Woolf should link the character of Septimus to the androgynous Keats, especially since Septimus fails to embrace the full spectrum of his sexual orientation in a healthy way toward the end of the book. Perhaps here Woolf is hinting at what could have been for Septimus, had he, like Keats, fully embraced an androgynous mode of expression.
The example of Septimus’ interest in Miss Pole shows that he does at least partially harbor an attraction for women, but this is soon complicated when Septimus leaves to fight in World War I and meets Evans, his officer. Woolf describes this friendship in a highly erotic passage in her portrayal of the following scene:

He developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name. It was a case of two dogs playing on a hearthrug; one worrying a paper screw, snarling, snapping, giving a pinch, now and then, at the old dog’s ear; the other lying somnolent, blinking at the fire, raising a paw, turning and growling good-temperedly. They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other. (114-115)

It is worth noting here that the very language of the passages in which Woolf’s characters experience sexual fulfillment produce a change in tone, and this is remarkable in Septimus’ attraction to Evans. It is clear that there is sexual energy here, heat that emanates from a hearth of friendship and desire. There is also a similar passion in the image that Woolf describes as two animals rough housing together, an image that suggests submission to a natural, carnal passion found within the most natural urges of the human body. Indeed, Septimus’ experiences come alive in this recognition of his sexual identity, which is why Woolf’s following move is all the more provoking as Septimus recalls Evans’ sudden death and the impact it has on him. Woolf writes, “When Evans was killed, just before the armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably” (Woolf 115). This passage is almost jolting after coming down from the erotic experience that occurs in the description of the friendship of Septimus and Evans just moments before. Here Septimus is congratulating himself for not mourning his friend and love interest’s death, exhibiting pride and even relief in his ability to cut himself off from feeling anything for a man he once loved. But what is producing this reaction, one might ask? It is often suggested that this lack of emotion and cutting off of feeling is a result of shell-shock — which is certainly what Septimus appears to be going through after the war — yet this lack of feeling for a former sexual interest could also be construed to show
Septimus’ fear to embrace an androgynous sexuality by nature of an awareness of the inferiority placed upon those who do not possess the “natural” attractions of a patriarchal definition of heterosexuality.

Woolf further complicates Septimus’ sexual experiences through the stultifying moment of marriage to Lucretia —perhaps for Septimus an action that cements his sexual experiences into the heteronormative institution of marriage. This contention is felt as Woolf ends the passage with “to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him . . . he could feel nothing” (Woolf 115). Septimus’ inability to feel in the context of this passage could be read in two ways. On the one hand, his inability to feel in this moment is compounded by the fact that he has just engaged himself to a woman, an action that troubles him because he is aware of the spectrum of sexual feelings he has felt toward another man. That this duality of attractions can reside within him is startling, and this deadening of feeling after his tying himself to a woman through marriage might feel like an institutionalization of only one side of his sexual orientation, a limitation to the spectrum of erotic desire he has now experienced from male friendship. On the other hand, it could also be read as the deadening one must feel when obligated to perform a societal duty against one’s sexual orientation. He can no longer feel because he has not honored his androgynous self, the identity that knows no bounds through the order of patriarchal language—the Keatsian androgyny harbored within. He must subscribe to one sexual epistemology—that of what sexologists would define as heterosexuality—so that he might not be found guilty or condemnable of being “the other.” However, by doing so he must experience a small death, and even a continuation of small deaths as he stays within the marriage without honesty about the spectrum of his desires, until finally he reaches the moment of complete self-destruction; he cannot live within the confines of strict sexual definition, and cannot harbor the guilt that this patriarchal language inscribes upon his experience.

Like Septimus, Clarissa similarly demonstrates moments of self-actualized freedom in embracing a sexual orientation that feels natural to her. One of the most poignant scenes of this experience occurs between her best friend, Sally Seton, in a flashback from her days as a young woman at Bourton. Passages with Sally are filled with energy,
magnetism, and at times recklessness. Clarissa recalls the night Sally kisses her as the night her life changed. Woolf writes:

She seemed . . . all light, glowing, like some bird or air ball that has flown in, attached itself for a moment to a bramble. . . . She stood by the fireplace talking, in that beautiful voice which made everything she said sound like a caress. . . . She and Sally fell a little behind. Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! (73)

Here Woolf describes a scene nearly identical to the energy experienced in Septimus’ encounter with Evans. There is fire again, suggestive of this energy of desire, of passion. Sally is light and glowing, and the energy in this language shifts the tone of the writing, coloring the scenery in erotic vitality and almost euphoric description. There is also the image of the flowers in an urn, a symbol of fertility, perhaps, and here Sally offers one to Clarissa just before she kisses her on the lips. Nothing is clearer than Clarissa’s response, that “the whole world turned upside down,” and it is this moment that Clarissa will cherish as she enters into the institutionalized union of heterosexuality through her subsequent marriage to Richard Dalloway. The contrast of the scene with Sally to other mundane thoughts circling the head of Mrs. Dalloway is the perfect embodiment of Woolf’s androgynous mode of writing. The vitality felt here suggests that as Clarissa fully embraces these moments of sexual fluidity, there is a feeling of self-actualized joy and harmony in her inner world.

By contrast, what Clarissa does to guard her sexually fluid self is a denial of her true identity in its own right; yet she does not seek to repress it and shame herself from guilt as Septimus does. Rather, she craftily finds a way to enjoy her attraction to women, albeit secretly. In Virginia Woolf scholar Eileen Barrett’s “Unmasking Lesbian Passion: The Inverted World of Mrs. Dalloway,” Barrett argues that Clarissa’s subsequent rejection of Peter Walsh’s marriage proposal is done to protect herself from a heterosexual life that might cloud her memory of her sexual awakening with Sally. She argues that in Clarissa’s choice to marry Richard Dalloway, she avoids the passion and lack of individual privacy that she would have experienced with Peter Walsh, a former love interest (158). It is here that I would contend that in this respect her character is established in direct contrast to Septimus in that she
does not as overtly try to repress her sexuality, but rather, uses a patriarchal institution such as marriage in her favor to allow a surprisingly safe space for her attraction to women. It is this play on the institution of marriage to find sexually fluid fulfillment that harkens back to the advantages Woolf sees in deconstructing heteronormative institutions, and Clarissa’s decisions as a character seem to reflect that.

This is, however, another denial of identity in Woolf’s advocacy for living in and acknowledging the whole spectrum of one’s sexual experience through an androgynous orientation toward reality. For though Clarissa is free to secretly enjoy her attraction to women in private moments of contemplation, unadulterated by a sexless marriage, there develops a scathing hatred for the character of Doris Kilman (her daughter’s history tutor and open lesbian) when she observes Kilman’s freedom to overtly acknowledge her lesbianism. Many critics have noted that Kilman is Clarissa’s alter ego, and it is in this light that critic Kenneth Moon also argues that “Kilman both provokes the fierce hatred from Clarissa and becomes at the same time the externalizing and informing image of what Clarissa detests and fears in herself” (149). Through Kilman and Clarissa’s strong, near homophobic reaction toward her, therein lies yet another example from Woolf of the agonizing crisis of identity that arises from sexual repression. In this case then, Clarissa is hardly different from Septimus. She too has chosen marriage as an escape from her true sexual identity, and it is in this neglect that she continues to suffer inwardly and silently, trying frivolously to fill her life with material meaning through parties and praise. Yet it is ultimately the spectrum of her full orientation that she must embrace if she wishes to live a full life, and it is in this regard that Clarissa is still haunted, left forever fatigued, sprawled out on her daybed, hidden away silently in her attic, and constantly wanting from life what she denies herself out of fear. These moments of pent up anger and repression reflect the strain Woolf mentions of limiting one’s whole being to sexual labels and hierarchies of sexual orientation. That there is anger toward the individual who openly embraces one side of this sexual dichotomy while she hides under the label of another is a keen example of the complication these labels pose to understanding and embracing the complexity of sexual identity.

Woolf’s explorations of sexuality in her writings demonstrate a profound understanding of the complexity of the inner-workings of human nature and the fluidity of sexual orientation. Examining what Woolf calls
the “androgynous mind” in her fictional narrative *A Room of One’s Own*, it is clear that the function of sexual fluidity in portraying androgyny in *Mrs. Dalloway* allows for greater exploration of the spectrum of sexual orientation in the novel’s protagonists. Both characters’ downfalls and suppression of sexuality ultimately work to illustrate the value found in embracing an androgynous reality. It is by shaping the world through the unity of experience rather than the patriarchal positing of the “other” that the capacity to overcome oppressive institutions becomes essential. Sexually fluid experience, or rather, a spectrum of sexual experiences uninhibited by a value system of patriarchal definition, is crucial to overcoming masculine language and androcentric realities. In this light Woolf coincides with the theory of Hélène Cixous’ *écriture féminine*, and it is Woolf who serves as a feminist figure and novelist that encompasses a solution to combat patriarchal language through the experience of the body. It is writing like Woolf’s that needs to permeate the world, indeed, our very understanding of the world and its epistemological complexities. When the value of androgynous experience is recognized as a framework through which harmful, repressive, patriarchal definitions of sexual experience and orientation might be dismantled, the “other” will cease to exist. There will be no more strain, but rather, a compatible and all-encompassing definition of experience that will know no bounds, for men and women alike. Cixous says as much when she states, “Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth” (880).
Works Cited


It’s no mystery that Edgar Allan Poe is the virtually undisputed father of modern Gothic, horror, detective, and even science fiction stories. Though much has been said on the influence of Poe across film, literature, and other forms of media, hardly anything has been said about how his ideas might translate to a young audience. Considering the nature of his work, however, it seems counterintuitive that his decidedly dark and often morbid themes could appeal to children still young enough to believe in the boogeyman. Yet in Lemony Snicket’s (a.k.a. Daniel Handler’s) acclaimed *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, Poe’s fingerprints are all over the place in ways both obvious and obscure, including similarly grim and serious subject matter. How, then, does Snicket pull it off? That is, how does he adapt such grotesque ideas into a form that leaves his young readers not crying and shivering beneath their covers, but mentally stimulated and clamoring for more? The answer lies, at least in part, in the way he presents his morbid messages. Like Poe often does, Snicket uses a quaint combination of seriousness and satire, which allows his books to entertain rather than become overbearingly grave. Snicket justifies this paradoxical relationship between gruesome themes and children’s stories through the tactical application of a number of Poe-inspired elements. Catered to serve Snicket’s satirical purposes, these elements include Gothic themes and plot devices, morbid narrative style, and Poe-inspired characters and symbols.
Snicket’s unconventional application of Poe’s dark material complicates our entire conception of what Gothic literature is supposed to accomplish, and what kinds of stories can resonate with young minds.

One of the most significant parallels between Poe’s and Snicket’s narratives is the thematic content—chiefly, the Gothic and grotesque which is abundantly present in both corpora, but in Snicket’s case is tweaked to be less depressing and more meaningful to young readers. Myriam B. Mahiques, writer of “Architectural Space in the Gothic Novel,” defines Gothicism as “the interest in the non-rational experience . . . [and] a Romantic reaction against the hard rationalism of the Enlightenment,” while Fred Botting, simply calls it “what happens when rules are broken.” However one defines Gothicism, it is found in abundant supply within the corpora of both Snicket and Poe. David R. Saliba, author of A Psychology of Fear: The Nightmare Formula of Edgar Allan Poe, provides a systematic way of analyzing the form Gothicism takes in each corpus. He identifies five key indicators of the Gothic mode, including “a victim who is helpless against his torturer”, a setting which is set “at some point within impenetrable walls”, “a victimizer who is associated with evil and whose powers are immense or supernatural”, an atmosphere that is “pervaded by a sense of mystery, darkness, oppressiveness, fear, and doom”, and a victim who “is in some way entranced or fascinated by the inscrutable power of his victimizer.” All of these components are used by both Poe and Snicket—though to very different ends.

Poe’s works set a precedent for how Saliba’s Gothic indicators were to be used. His stories “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “The Cask of Amontillado” demonstrate helpless torture victims in mind-bendingly agonizing ways. His stories also literally incorporate impenetrable walls with underground dungeons, sealed-off wine cellars, and a sepulcher which entombs one protagonist’s sister alive. Additionally, the evil, supernatural victimizer can be found in the vengeful murderers of “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat.” In order to achieve a dark atmosphere, Poe portrays both literal crypts and mental darkness, such as creepy houses, unusual rooms, and the physical and psychological entrapment in “The Premature Burial.” He also provides a plethora of oppressive natural environments like maelstroms and a manor sinking into a tarn. And for examples of victims being fascinated by their oppressors, one need look no further than Fortunato in “The Cask of Amontillado” or the king’s court in “Hop Frog,” who appear disbelieving even in the midst of being buried and burned alive, respectively. In all of
these cases, Poe incorporates such dark materials in order to produce the singleness of effect that he often championed, which in these stories meant darkness, fear, and often madness.

Snicket, on the other hand, utilizes Saliba’s indicators with a younger audience and a lighter purpose in mind. He does place the Baudelaires in a position of relative helplessness, but to provide at least some sense of hope for his young audience, he also empowers the orphans with the faculties to escape some of the worst consequences of their enemies’ designs. They also find themselves in enclosed spaces with a sense of entrapment, like a dark elevator shaft or an underwater cavern. But perhaps the strongest form of entrapment for these heroes is psychological; no matter how hard they try, how many times they stop Count Olaf, how many guardians die for their sake, or how many clues they uncover about their lives’ mysteries, they seem forever unable to escape from the cycle of unfortunate events that controls their lives. Yet with that cycle, comes hilarious coincidences and colorful new settings, characters, and challenges, which make otherwise terrifying ideas and situations viable for child consumption. Snicket’s victimizer comes primarily in the form of Count Olaf, who is as relentless and murderous as Poe’s madmen, but at the same time is consistently outsmarted by the orphans’ creative problem-solving skills. This allows readers to learn something from the villain’s evil antics while enjoying the debacles of the Baudelaires’ lives all the same. Snicket also creates dark atmospheres, but unlike Poe, he offers hope in the end against seemingly insurmountable odds. Even with all kinds of environmental obstacles—violent thunderstorms, blizzards, poisonous mushrooms, sea monsters, leeches, snakes, and lions—the Baudelaires find a little light at the end of the tunnel which is just enough for them to go on. That light is what Snicket uses to inspire readers with hope as powerful as the Baudelaires’ despair.

Finally, the Baudelaires also play the role of entranced victims because while despising Count Olaf and everything he stands for, they are extremely curious to know what connects him to the organization their parents belonged to (V.F.D.), the meaning behind the eye on the man’s ankle, and how such a psychopathic serial killer consistently gets away with his crimes scot-free in a society of continually unfulfilled justice. Snicket separates the Baudelaires’ fascination from that of Poe’s disbelieving victims by depicting his heroes as active thinkers determined to pursue their questions until they are answered and until their
lives are no longer threatened by mysterious forces—as opposed to simply succumbing to gruesome deaths. Because Snicket incorporates the Gothic trance in this way, it becomes an unconventional source of uplifting empowerment for his audience, again breaking from tradition in a surprisingly effective way. In doing this, Snicket applies each of Saliba’s five Gothic themes, but he softens his material somewhat and provides hopeful sparks that successfully immerse young readers in the stories and themes without drowning them in morbidity.

In addition, Snicket’s tone as an immersed yet distanced narrator within the story gives him a distinctive voice that is recognizably morbid like Poe’s, although Snicket’s ultimate aims are to entertain and instruct his young audience rather than instill psychological terror. The character, Lemony Snicket, considers himself a private investigator. He collects information and evidence to piece together an account of the lives of the Baudelaire orphans and their various misfortunes, all the while attempting to understand the motives and inner cogs that led to everything ending the way it did. In many ways, this persona compares with the detective figure of Dupin in Poe’s mystery tales such as “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Purloined Letter.” However, while adopting some of the same analytical strategies as Dupin, Snicket assumes a rather blunt and downcast attitude toward his tasks. In fact, he is so up front about the morbid nature of the story that he actually discourages potential buyers from reading on, addressing readers on the back cover of each novel with a sense of formal pessimism. “Dear Reader,” he says in The Bad Beginning, “I’m sorry to say that the book you are holding in your hands is extremely unpleasant . . . but there is nothing stopping you from putting this book down at once and reading something happy, if you prefer that sort of thing” (Snicket, back cover). However, Snicket is clearly speaking with verbal irony here and in most of his narrative commentary throughout the series. Even children catch on that they will not actually have a miserable time reading the book if they defy his grim recommendation. Thus, the promise of Poe-inspired morbidity is manipulated into an actual hook to draw young readers in with its cleverness and multiple layers of meaning rather than turn them away like a gory trailer for a bad horror movie. Ashley Starling states, “What sets Handler’s masterpiece apart from other works for children is that he does not censor or filter what he wants children to be exposed to. There are a limited number of children’s novels that deal with the issues that Handler puts forth: death, misery, misfortune, orphanhood—all aspects that detract from a possible happy ending” (Starling 5). Because morbid children’s books
are in such short supply, as Starling points out, Snicket’s books serve as a kind of model for how these dark subjects can serve a nontraditional audience. The negative topics addressed by Poe for various psychological and artistic reasons are handled by Snicket to accomplish an entirely different aim: to provide an enjoyable and instructive experience for young readers.

The Gothic plot devices implemented by this bemoaning speaker are no less indicative of Poe’s influence. Although specific plot details do not exactly match those of Poe’s works, the particular trope of puzzle solving calls especial attention to their Gothic origins. For instance, the popularity of cryptography in Poe’s day inspired the author not only to regularly challenge subscribers of his journal to send in difficult word puzzles for him to solve, but to incorporate such ciphers as key elements in some of his stories such as “Some Words with a Mummy” and “The Gold-Bug.” A Series of Unfortunate Events, in similar manner, relies heavily upon code-cracking in many instances: when a fake suicide note from the Baudelaires’ grammar-loving guardian requires them to extract grammatical errors to assemble her true message (Snicket, The Wide Window 111–16), when they are confronted with anagrams that lead them down a trail of breadcrumbs toward discovering the hidden identities of villains and secret organizations (Snicket, The Hostile Hospital 76, 151–62), and when they must rescue their kidnapped friends by deciphering couplet riddles delivered to them by an unknown source (Snicket, The Vile Village 67, 87, 142, 193–96). In this respect, Snicket has no real need to soften up the material for his audience since unraveling ciphers has its own natural appeal, but he does simplify the codes from Poe’s intensive cryptography to be more accessible, and he also adds witty humor in the process of solving them (like misinterpreting V.F.D. to mean “Very Fancy Doilies” or “Village of Fowl Devotees”). This light-hearted accessibility in turn lends the material to appeal to children and even teach them a few things along the way.

On another less obvious note, A Series of Unfortunate Events honors Poe’s nurturing of the Gothic doppelganger (a dark, duplicate version of oneself) in at least a couple ways. First, in The Penultimate Peril, there is a hotel with its reflection mirrored in a lake below (Snicket, The Penultimate Peril 20–23). However, it turns out that this “reflection” is actually another hotel built underground and perfectly concealed by the reflection. It represents the noble principles engendered by those with the Baudelaires’ best interests at heart even while its counterpart, filled with corruption, secrecy, and destructive mob psychology, burns to the ground, reminiscent of some of Poe’s self-destructive
doppelgangers. Second, most, if not all, of the books feature a dualistic contrast between the orphan’s present guardians and the dastardly villain Count Olaf, which usually results in the disposal of the naïve or unfortunate guardian. This dualism harks back to Poe stories such as “William Wilson” in which William’s double seeks to negate and oppose his every effort. Snicket’s doppelgangers, as opposed to Poe’s, aren’t intended to inspire raw fear, but to pique curiosity and to convey simple but profound symbolic meaning to readers. The dual hotels and guardians serve as a basic representation of good versus evil—with the added nuance of villains who have complex reasons for their evil acts and heroes who are often weak and fail to act at all. They are doppelgangers with an ethical purpose rather than simply an emotional one: a purpose that teaches readers about a world filled with darkness, light, and every shade in between. In this way, Snicket channels a plot trick that was championed by Poe into A Series of Unfortunate Events with a levity that has yielded over 60 million copies sold worldwide.

In addition to narrative and plot connections, the series is rich with character allusions to Poe both in name and demeanor. The most obvious of these is the recurring character Mr. Poe. According to Starling, “When considering the banker Mr. Poe in relation to the poet from whom he is named, the reader will find that the allusion is perhaps the most suitable of all for the character.” She goes on to point out that every time Mr. Poe appears, it’s shortly before or after someone’s death. Furthermore, “His very first appearance establishes him as a signal of misfortune. . . . In fact, Mr. Poe can be seen as a grim reaper of sorts, as wherever he appears death is sure to follow” (Starling 9). Considering Starling’s “grim” suggestion, to think of Edgar Allan Poe as a sort of herald of death in Snicket’s series seems simultaneously appropriate and chilling. However, the seriousness of Mr. Poe’s foreboding role is eased by Snicket’s choice to portray him as a well-meaning, bumbling, chronically coughing ignoramus. When faced with Mr. Poe in the story, readers are more likely to facepalm and perhaps laugh at his quirky mannerisms than fear his appearance—even when they know the man will never be the bearer of good news. Another of Snicket’s major shout-outs to Poe is the last name of the protagonists: Baudelaire. Charles Baudelaire was the French author who drew upon Poe for inspiration more than any other, becoming a sort of “French Poe” himself. In The Vile Village, even Dupin makes an appearance as one of Count Olaf’s rather conspicuous disguises. It is an ironic parody on Snicket’s part that results not in the detective identifying and apprehending the murderer, but in Olaf framing someone else in order to
conceal the fact that he committed the crime himself (153–70). Contrasting these connected characters reveals how Snicket uses similar names not just to give a neat shout-out to his Gothic predecessor, but to personify Poe’s Gothic themes through individuals who convey these themes in a manner that is appropriately lighter for Snicket’s audience.

Snicket’s characters also frequently exhibit the traits of deformity and madness so beloved by Poe in various forms while still accomplishing the author’s purpose of appealing to his young readers. These deranged characters range from sociopathic murderers to almost unbelievably ignorant citizens, from circus freaks to a woman so paranoid about her safety that she has come to harbor irrational fears of stoves, doorknobs, and realtors. Unlike the unsettling speakers of stories like “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat,” however, Snicket mitigates the shock value of these woe-begotten characters by infusing their descriptions and personalities with unusual yet very human idiosyncrasies. The murderous Count Olaf, for example, dons ridiculous disguises that seem impossibly transparent, which is why we laugh when no one except the Baudelaires recognizes him as a peg-legged sea captain, ill-reasoning detective, or female receptionist. They are just human enough for us to sympathize with and just strange enough to distance our emotions from their misfortunes and misdeeds. It is this tricky balancing act of believability and outrageousness that allows Snicket to convert Poe’s dark content into manageable morsels which both please and nourish Snicket’s audience.

With that same deliberateness, Snicket employs some of Poe’s trademark symbols, such as ravens and eyes, to create foreboding psychological effects. In The Vile Village, the Baudelaires find themselves at the mercy of a town of people who all but worship the hundreds of resident ravens. Here Snicket reaches a high point of un-concealed acknowledgement of the series’ Gothic roots—possibly a dual reference to Alfred Hitchcock’s The Birds and Poe’s “The Raven.” Starling expounds on this idea by pointing out how in the cases of the village of ravens and Poe’s “The Raven,” birds are used to convey messages. In Poe’s case, the narrator and the raven interact through questions by the former concerning his lost loved one, Lenore, and the latter’s inevitable response of “Nevermore.” In Snicket’s case, he has the Baudelaires receive messages from the crows roosting in the Nevermore Tree every night. These messages, which come in the form of couplet riddles, are from the Quagmire triplets, the Baudelaires’ lost loved ones. Starling concludes that the allusion contributes to “an overall feeling of hopelessness” (17). With Starling’s thematic
connection in mind, the similarities between the birds’ roles are uncanny. Yet while one blackbird instills dread and provokes the imp of the perverse within its addressee, the other just unwittingly delivers paper scrolls to the Baudelaires while roosting in the conveniently named “Nevermore Tree” and enjoying a near deified state of protection by the village’s hundreds of ridiculous, raven-venerating rules. Starling adds that “the young reader can relate to the sense of bereavement felt by the Baudelaires,” mainly through the characters’ sense of simultaneous closeness and distance from their friends when they receive messages at the base of the Nevermore Tree. She asserts that “the coherence comes out of the shared emotional turmoil for children at that age” (Starling 19–20). It’s a connection that occurs not at a literal level, but at an empathic one. Thus, despite the completely unrealistic premise of the book, Snicket wins the emotional investment of his readers by adapting Poe’s version of loss to one that is more relatable to children.

In addition to the symbolic raven, eyes play a large part in arranging the ominous sense of mystery that is predominant throughout the series. The Baudelaires’ preoccupation with the recurrence of this symbol on ankles, documents, containers, and even wallpapers (as featured in the film adaptation) compares with the speaker’s obsession in “The Tell-Tale Heart” with the bulging eye of his enemy and intended victim. It even shares some symbolic relevance with Poe’s maelstroms, which typically signify a sublime descent into the unknown charged with fear and awe. For the Baudelaires, the eye represents a link to solving the mystery of their parents’ death and the organization their parents belonged to, something the children long to unravel in spite of the perils they must inevitably surmount in the process. They are drawn to the center of their lives’ mystery just as Poe’s doomed vessels are drawn to the center of the deadly whirlpool. While this symbol remains fairly serious for the duration of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, a sense of ridiculousness is again conveyed by the bizarre placement of the eye tattoos on ankles as well as the eventual discovery of the symbol’s core meaning—as opposed to the gruesome murder of the eye’s owner in “The Tell-Tale Heart” or the lingering unresolved mystery of the maelstrom’s victims. This ridiculousness once again contributes to the lighter tone that allows the books to entertain and instruct as Snicket intended.

Though there is much more that could be said about the numerous similarities between Poe and *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, it is clear even from this limited sample of comparisons that Snicket drew upon Poe’s
brilliance to make the Gothic genre accessible to children and young adults. Suffice it to say that although Snicket drew heavily from his predecessor, he still had to formulate a very different strategy to successfully cater to his audience—a strategy that fused humor and horror in a truly innovative manner. When describing Gothic elements, Poe scholar Ecaterina Hantiu asserts that “poetry and cruelty are intermingled with laughter and horror in the works of the American writers attracted by such issues” (34). Clearly, Poe and Snicket were two such writers. Both were masters of the literary hoax, which according to G. R. Thompson, “attempts to persuade the reader not merely of the reality of false events but of the reality of false literary intentions of circumstances” (10). Indeed, though their approaches and purposes were quite different, surely we can appreciate the careful artistry requisite to pull off such a delicate balancing act, baffling and captivating readers who are not usually expecting to be manipulated by the narrator to feel normal emotions for unusual things and unusual emotions for normal things. Truly the Gothic tale is as elusive and versatile across diverse times and situations as Poe’s immortal black cat is with its unstoppable quest to bring light to the darkness of its master’s devious deeds and as Count Olaf is with his various disguises. These stories can be manipulated to serve their author’s purpose just as the stories themselves can manipulate us. Snicket’s Poe-inspired stories particularly manipulate the author’s young readers into developing a deeper understanding of our world’s dark realities—even while they are convinced they’re just turning the pages for some light entertainment.
Works Cited


First published in 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *The Woman’s Bible* was a product of Stanton’s dissatisfaction with the way women were oppressed in society; Stanton blamed religion—particularly the Bible—for this inequality. Stanton was a prominent suffragist in the early fight for women’s rights, and although fellow suffragists often felt her views were quite radical in her time, modern feminist scholars see her behavior as warranted given her heavily gender-restrictive society. *The Woman’s Bible* was a collaborative effort of intellectual women and sympathetic men, spearheaded by Stanton, to retranslate misleading passages of the Bible, provide commentary to clarify and insert a historical perspective on womanhood as presented in the Bible, and emphasize woman’s undervalued role in scriptural history. Stanton’s dissatisfaction with religion was not unfounded. While Christianity—and by extension the Christian usage of the Bible—is not intrinsically or doctrinally sexist, many individuals throughout history have used the Bible to justify unequal and unfair treatment of women.

Largely because of corrupt translations and misogynistic interpretations of the Bible, women have been viewed as subservient to men. The inability for a word-to-word translation in language has necessitated multiple
translations and retranslations of the Bible, beginning with the English translation from the Latin Vulgate in 1384 ("History of the English Bible"). This imperfect translation leaves room for intentional or unintentional misogynistic ideas because translators did not prioritize equality towards women when considering word choice. For this reason, Elizabeth Cady Stanton saw the need to specifically identify areas in the Bible that treated women unfairly as a result of translator bias, and retranslate (with accompanying commentary) in order to depict women in a more positive light. Stanton understood that the public opinion towards women could not shift unless the religious opinion towards women also began to shift. While Elizabeth Cady Stanton may have been a bit drastic with her reinterpretation of the Bible, her publication of *The Woman’s Bible* is an attempt at righting age-old wrongs and using the Bible as a tool for progress—one that fosters equality and emancipation. This is certainly not the first time the Bible has been used for good, but it was a monumental step forward in gender equality because of the religiously influenced cultural traditions of the nineteenth century world in which Stanton lived.

In the years leading up to Stanton’s creation of *The Woman’s Bible*, American Protestantism—the dominant sect of Christianity at the time—underwent a revitalization. Award-winning professor of history and gender studies Ellen DuBois provides context for Stanton’s work in this religious backdrop when she explains that in Stanton’s time, Christianity came to represent a more active form of social charity in order to eliminate tyranny and injustice; however, that pointed effort to uplift the less fortunate did not extend to helping the dependent class of women who were required to rely on the unreliable goodwill of men, a point that feminists worked hard to remedy (166). In addition to being influenced by Protestantism, Stanton had several affiliations with offshoot religious and philosophical movements that largely dealt with the need to revise and reinterpret the Bible to be more inclusive of women. As DuBois points out, “General developments in Biblical criticism, the publication in 1881 of a new revised version of the Bible, and the growing tendency of Biblical scholars to treat the Bible historically rather than metaphysically no doubt inspired her” (165). These factors combined with Stanton’s diverse mixture of religious and philosophical studies prompted Stanton to seek understanding of the origins of Christian oppression of women. While Stanton did not identify as a devoutly religious woman herself, she did not intend to tear down religion; rather, she wanted
to use religion as a tool to build women up, recognizing that the same sacred text that was used as evidence for subjugation could also be used to liberate. Stanton took on the project in order to encourage readers to think critically about the Bible and “respect the right of individual opinion” (DuBois 165). The combination of Protestant Christianity with the emerging philosophies of seeking self-expression and looking to historical and critical contexts laid the groundwork for *The Woman’s Bible*.

While progressive in its day because of its unique perspective of showing that religion could empower women, the publication of *The Woman’s Bible* alienated many seekers of woman’s emancipation, particularly key members of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), an organization that Stanton headed before becoming involved in the publication of *The Woman’s Bible*. These women felt that the woman’s suffrage movement should avoid using religious material or criticizing the Bible because of the potentially controversial effects. In fact, almost all of the women in NAWSA refused to participate in creating the new Bible, including Stanton’s close friend and fellow suffragist Susan B. Anthony, who feared that the project would “divert attention from the fight for suffrage” by focusing too much on religion (DuBois 165). The clear opposition Stanton faced, even by her own close friends and co-laborers in the suffrage movement, is evidence that by going forward with the publication of *The Woman’s Bible*, Stanton essentially alienated herself and her work from NAWSA. Lisa S. Strange explains that scholars contemporary with Stanton, and even some scholars today, assert that the whole project was a failure that backfired, only serving to divert attention from the overarching agenda of women’s liberation and political reform (16–7). Even Stanton’s children “expunged all references to *The Woman’s Bible* from the 1922 edition of her autobiography” in order to prevent their mother’s reputation from being tarnished (Strange 16). Because of the dissatisfaction with the publication and criticism received from all sides, many suffragists and scholars agree that *The Woman’s Bible* was an impediment to the movement for suffrage.

But in hindsight, observers can see that when the injustices of the past are considered, Stanton saw the popular translations of the Bible in her day as the real roadblock to woman’s emancipation; therefore, her desire to reinterpret the Bible can also be seen as a calculated maneuver to turn a tool traditionally used for oppression into a tool of liberation. Stanton sought to reimagine the Bible by putting together a committee of women who were well
versed in biblical scholarship, women who were knowledgeable of Greek and Hebrew, and women who could comment on the English versions of the Bible (Mace 9). Unfortunately, this project was not executed as planned because many women who were asked to participate did not want to be involved. While Stanton’s intent was to subvert tradition by reinterpreting the ultimate representation of heavily gendered Christian culture—the Bible—in order to clarify the inherent right that women have to be treated and viewed as equals, the reality of *The Woman’s Bible* was too far from expected outcomes for it to have immediate effect on the suffrage movement. While the radical publication of *The Woman’s Bible* may have been a barrier to the suffrage movement at the time, the lasting effects of Stanton’s actions in publishing *The Woman’s Bible* leave an indelible impression on the annals of history. Stanton’s successful reimagining of the Bible turned a tool of oppression into a window of liberation, ultimately opening closed minds to the potential for equality that the Bible depicts, by encouraging future feminist scholars to translate and interpret the Bible through a feminist lens.

Stanton’s far-reaching effect on modern feminist criticism had its roots in the criticism of her own day. In order to understand how Stanton’s reinterpretation of the Bible was a response to the forces around her, it is important to examine the popular religious philosophy of Higher Criticism operating within Protestantism at the time. Presbyterian minister George P. Hays explored the history of Presbyterianism in America in a book published just three years prior to *The Woman’s Bible*. According to Hays, Higher Criticism is a rational theological approach to studying the Bible in which one looks to the historical and literary interpretations of the Bible in order to interpret the meaning of scripture; although the movement traces its roots to the mid-1700s, German theologian Johann Gottfried Eichhorn popularized it in the late 1800s (387). Higher Criticism is described as “bearing upon the doctrine of inspiration [and] is at present one of the leading questions before the mind of the Church” (Hays 386). The passage defines Higher Criticism as describing the study of the Bible as literature, particularly investigating the historical accuracies of the Bible and reinterpreting biblical truths through a historic and literary lens (Hays 386). In the late nineteenth century, this popular, emerging field of study would have been widely discussed, particularly in the circles in which Stanton moved.

Stanton was certainly influenced by Higher Criticism, and her resulting publication of *The Woman’s Bible* reflects that influence; Stanton infused the desire to understand the Bible in a historical and literary context with
her desire to understand woman’s place in the Bible. While Stanton explains that she did not set out to write strictly following Higher Criticism (“Part 2” 8), there is no doubt that that field of study influenced her. For example, scholars in Higher Criticism distinguished between different writers of scripture, suggesting that there are differences between authors labeled the Elohist and the Jehovist, among others (Hays 387). Likewise, in her description of the two creation narratives, Stanton discusses the Elohistic and Iahoistic (Jehovistic) accounts in Genesis, terms she clearly borrowed from Higher Criticism. Stanton compares the two accounts and concludes that it isn’t possible for both stories to be true, finally stating her preference for the Elohistic narrative (“Part 1” 18). While Higher critics sought to discern the identities of these authors, Stanton contented herself with the distinction that there are clearly different voices narrating within the same books of scripture. The overlap between Stanton’s efforts to interpret the Bible and the analyses of Higher Criticism is evidence that Stanton’s ideologies about reimagining the Bible stemmed from the inspiration of her environment. In other words, Stanton was not alone in the desire to reinterpret the Bible. Stanton achieved her goal of portraying women in a positive light by exploring more of a literary and historical explanation to biblical passages, rather than relying on metaphysical or spiritual revelation.

As part of her historic and literary retelling of the Bible, Stanton attempted to use translation and informed commentary to bring to light the stories of women whose achievements are often overlooked in the Bible. One example of a woman that Stanton celebrated in The Woman’s Bible is Deborah from the book of Judges. Stanton sets up Deborah as an individual that women can look to as a strong female example. Of Deborah, Stanton says: “Indeed, Deborah seems to have had too much independence of character, wisdom and self-reliance to have ever filled the role of the Jewish idea of a wife” (“Part 2” 18). In other words, Deborah is a progressive example of a woman moving outside of her designated role in society to fulfill God’s plan. This example, noted by Stanton, embodies the fight for female equality and independence, particularly because Deborah was someone who was regularly consulted on matters of government and religion. Stanton points out the injustice inherent in the historical accounts as recorded in the Bible by explaining that Deborah’s name is not on the list of judges in Israel because “men have always been slow to confer on women the honors which they deserve” (“Part 2” 19). Thus, in The Woman’s Bible,
Stanton attempts to elevate the status of lesser-known biblical characters like Deborah, while simultaneously calling out observed societal flaws (like man’s hesitation to credit women with non-motherhood-related positive qualities) that add to woman’s subjugation.

In addition to showing biblical women in a positive light, Stanton points out and discredits passages in the Bible that appear troublesome in their treatment of women. This isn’t to attack the foundation of Christianity, but to shift the understanding of Christian examples and doctrines to include a more inclusive historical perspective that diminishes man’s ability to misuse biblical examples as evidence for woman’s subservience to men. For example, in his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul talks about a woman’s need to cover her head so that she might show reverence before God (“Part 2” 157). Stanton’s commentary discusses the historical context of this mandate, showing that it dealt with local customs of the time, not with eternal truth. She also notes the significance that this verse has had on generations of women who have been required to cover their heads, including female servants in Europe who were still required to wear caps to that date (“Part 2” 157). Stanton then goes on to encourage women to “rebel against a custom based on the supposition of their heaven-ordained subjection” (“Part 2” 158). While Stanton does not directly challenge the Bible’s authenticity, her invitation to rebel against a tradition that encourages a hierarchy between men and women encourages readers to stop taking the Bible as the direct word of God, instead beginning to critically read the text in order to find out which pieces are doctrine and which are less inspired. Thus, while some of Stanton’s work in The Woman’s Bible was intended to uplift and inspire women—as with her work in celebrating Deborah—other portions of her commentary were intended to deconstruct, analyze, and question supposed truths in the Bible that had remained unquestioned for centuries. Stanton’s approach focused on breaking down the logic of Paul’s argument, and encouraged women to see how it was no longer applicable to them. To this end, Stanton advocated for critical understanding and a seeking for personal inspiration rather than blind acceptance and obedience to tradition.

While Stanton did not challenge the authenticity of Paul’s revelations, another contributor to The Woman’s Bible commentary on 1 Corinthians, Louisa Southworth, directly challenged both the inspired nature and the authorship of Paul’s revelations (“Part 2” 158–9). Southworth explains that Paul likely got his revelations from “an absurd old myth” that warned
women to keep their heads covered in protection against angels who would steal them away (“Part 2” 158-9). By looking to myth as part of the historical context—an approach influenced by Higher Criticism—Southworth was able to unearth the beginnings of part of the oppressive hierarchical structure of the nineteenth century. Stanton and her collaborators realized that to understand and change the subjugation of women, they needed to go to the source of the issue—the Bible—and discredit the origins of oppressive societal traditions. While the Bible was not the source of all oppression, it was a major contributing factor to shaping nineteenth-century culture, and so by rewriting the origins of contemporary Christianity, the tradition of oppression would be rewritten as well. Thus, Stanton’s work not only celebrated women, but also sought to liberate them by challenging the origins of subjugation. Clearly, this could have been offensive to many religious individuals who felt the Bible was the direct word of God. For this reason, Stanton’s work was divisive amongst those in the suffrage movement. Not all suffragists agreed that the correct road to equality was to discredit the Bible; however, many of Stanton’s contemporaries and successors agree that reinterpreting the Bible is a crucial step to moving beyond oppression.

While the commentary in *The Woman’s Bible* attests to Stanton’s attempts to reimagine the Bible, the work of several of her contemporaries show that Stanton was not alone in the opinion that women needed to be represented more fairly in biblical criticism. Notably, the public speaker and abolitionist Sarah Grimké received criticism for identifying the priesthood—namely, the religious authority figures in organized Protestant Christianity—as one of the sources of moral corruption, leading Grimké to encourage women to rely on their own interpretations of the Bible (DuBois 57). In fact, in her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* Grimké challenged the assertion that pastors are better suited to religious interpretation than women, stating: “Now this is assuming that pastors are better qualified to give instruction than woman. This I utterly deny. I have suffered too keenly from the teaching of man, to lead any one to him for instruction” (19). She continues by explaining that the invitation from Jesus Christ is for all to come unto him to learn of him. DuBois explains that Grimké’s radical teachings encouraged women to step outside of their home sphere, something that would have scandalized societal contemporaries as much as hearing a woman speak in a public forum—another social crime for which Grimké was guilty (56). Despite harsh criticism, Grimké continued to teach that by looking to instances in the
Bible like the Sermon on the Mount, readers can clearly see that “whatever is right for man to do, is right for woman” and that men and women were created equal by God (16, emphasis in original). Clearly, Stanton was not the only person insisting on religious reform; Grimké spent years publicly advocating for the equality of the sexes in religion. Grimké’s *Letters*, published approximately sixty years prior to Stanton’s *Bible*, was a clear precursor to Stanton’s biblical criticism, just as Stanton’s work is a precursor to further feminist Bible study. Grimké’s radicalism stands as striking evidence that other women contemporary with Stanton were pushing against the expectations of the day in order to reinterpret woman’s role in religion.

Another of Stanton’s contemporaries and collaborators, Matilda Joslyn Gage, joined Stanton in the opinion that the fields of law and religion should be linked; they believed that religion was and is essential to facilitate a lasting cultural change, and only cultural change can segue into legal action. According to scholar Kathi Kern, Gage and Stanton agreed on many things, and despite her dislike of Christianity, Gage was part of Stanton’s revising committee for *The Woman’s Bible* (140). While many of Stanton’s assertions in *The Woman’s Bible* would have been quite radical for her time, Gage’s opinions and recorded teachings support the idea that this radical ideology was not unique to Stanton. In fact, Gage’s involvement in Stanton’s life is further evidence that there were those around Stanton who saw the need for *The Woman’s Bible*. One of the radical notions shared by the two women was that there must be both a Heavenly Mother and Father if Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. While it was certainly not a doctrine then sermonized about in Christianity, there was some discussion about a feminine Deity in the circles in which Elizabeth Cady Stanton moved. In fact, at the week-long conference for the International Council of Women in Spring of 1888, there was a religious symposium in which Gage gave a speech informing women that by celebrating a masculine Deity and ignoring a Divine Motherhood, they were holding back the emancipation movement and that there could not be a revolution in law until there was a matching revolution in religion (Kern 118–9). Both Gage and Stanton linked the fields of law and religion together because equality in one would necessitate equality in the other.

While there were certainly women who aligned their views with Stanton, others saw Stanton’s work as infringing on the quest for suffrage because of the radical assertions that womanhood was divine because of the possibility for a female divinity, not because of the elevated position of motherhood.
Certainly, the publishing of these seemingly radical beliefs acted as a barrier to woman’s suffrage at the time. Women, especially suffragists, who were opposed to Stanton’s project included women like Ednah Dow Cheney, who said, “That woman is handicapped by peculiarities of physical structure seems evident . . . but it is only by making her limitations her powers . . . that the balance can be restored” (DuBois 166). By limitations, Cheney meant woman’s reproductive role in motherhood, which she argued could be reformulated as her crowning glory. Stanton agreed with some of the elements to this argument; however, she disagreed that women needed to take on a vulnerable role in order to gain suffrage, instead believing that women should fight for independence in order to be seen as equal to man (DuBois 167). These sentiments are reflected in the text of The Woman’s Bible, which fights to assert that women are the total equals to men, not vulnerable dependents who should be given rights on the basis of the weakness of motherhood. Because Stanton’s viewpoints were fundamentally different from the way suffragists were accustomed to discussing matters of equality, she did not receive support from NAWSA and the leaders of woman’s suffrage, which made her work seem to contrast with the things those women were fighting to achieve. In this way, The Woman’s Bible was a roadblock because it did not support the attempts at persuasion that most suffragists pushed for, specifically equality on the grounds of the divinity of motherhood and the need for women to be protected.

While Stanton’s interpretations of the Bible were radically different than accepted Christianity in her time, later Bible critics and feminist scholars would use Stanton’s publication as a standard for feminist Bible scholarship. Thus, although Stanton’s work may have slowed the fight for suffrage by being divisive and creating some disharmony amongst suffragists, by looking to the broader history of feminist criticism, it is clear that The Woman’s Bible paved the way for advancements in the manner women are seen in relation to biblical criticism. In order to see the far-reaching effects of Stanton’s work, it is important to examine some of the modern advances to feminist biblical criticism that have been made possible because of the contribution of The Woman’s Bible to the feminist canon of biblical interpretation.

Because The Woman’s Bible did not receive much critical acclaim in its time, it was largely set aside throughout the first half of the twentieth century. However, in 1974 female publishers reprinted The Woman’s Bible for mass circulation in order to highlight its historical significance and its lasting contributions to feminism, as described by professor of religious studies...
and American history Emily R. Mace (11). These second-wave feminists saw in Stanton’s work the transcendent ideals that could be applied to their own search for woman’s equality to man. One of the feminist groups that republished *The Woman’s Bible* met in 1973 specifically to discuss why this work was relevant to feminist scholars almost one hundred years later. Mace explains, “Answers to these questions centered on the similarities between Stanton’s feminist concerns and their own, and on the committee’s ability, as women in possession of the tools of biblical and religious scholarship, to further the work Stanton had started” (12). As a result of this meeting, feminist scholars began to use modern tools to continue Stanton’s work and reinterpret the Bible to include the voices and viewpoints of women (Mace 12). Stanton’s vision for a group of women with the knowledge and ability to apply historical and literary interpretations on the text of the Bible was finally being realized. Clearly, second-wave feminists took inspiration from Stanton’s efforts to inject a female voice into Bible criticism, and they used her work to advance the field of feminist Bible criticism. While the label “feminist Bible criticism” encapsulates a variety of beliefs and ultimate goals, all who identify themselves by this term have “claimed the right to reinterpret the scriptures from a woman’s perspective” (Strange 18). That was Stanton’s purpose in creating *The Woman’s Bible*, and that purpose remains the driving force of current feminist Bible critics. Stanton’s work served as a precursor to fights for religious equality to come. In this way, what may have appeared to be an impediment to suffrage at the time of its publication would later prove to be a key text in the expanding view of women as equals, especially in a religious context.

Religious experts and biblical scholars have long debated the implications of Eve’s creation; Stanton understood Eve as the pinnacle of womanhood, and thus her contribution to the scholarly discourse on Eve is particularly significant to the overarching message of *The Woman’s Bible*. W. E. Phipps, professor of religion and philosophy, presents an interesting argument in which he evaluates the evidence that Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib may suggest either her necessary submission to man or her equality beside him. Phipps explains that Eve’s creation can be viewed as an afterthought—she was created because no other thing on the earth could satisfy man (268). However, just as easily, Eve’s creation can be described as a culmination. Evidence of Eve’s superiority to man includes her ability to be decisive and progressive while Adam requires her promptings in order to take action (269).
While this more modern understanding of Eve has begun to take root amidst contemporary scholars, for much of the history of the world—and particularly the era in which Stanton was living—Eve has been regarded as a sinful creature, and her daughters have therefore received “justified” treatment as lesser humans. Stanton warned against the teachings of the Bible in this regard, believing that the story of Adam’s rib reinforced woman’s subjugation to man by teaching that woman was made after, of, and for man, placing Eve as inferior and subject to man (Phipps 267-8). In her commentary on the book of Genesis, Stanton points out that even if we accept woman’s secondary creation to man as evidence of her subservience, we would have to accept that “the historical fact is reversed in our day” and Stanton asks whether, since “the man is now of the woman, shall his place be one of subjection?” (“Part 1” 20). This clever logic reaffirms Stanton’s opinion that man and woman were “created alike in the image of God—The Heavenly Mother and Father” and that one cannot look to the creation narrative as evidence of an intended hierarchy between man and woman (“Part 1” 21). What appeared to be a radical opinion by Stanton at the time would later become a respected interpretation of the Bible. Accordingly, Stanton’s work was not fully appreciated in her time, but in contemporary scholarship it is.

Stanton’s clear contribution to the modern conception of Eve has contributed to Eve’s pivotal nature in biblical scholarship. By taking into account the developments that continue to be made by Higher Criticism, and thereby considering the historical contexts of the Bible rather than the purely metaphysical applications of scripture, current Bible scholars look to Stanton’s observations of Eve’s equality with Adam. According to feminist Bible critic Rebecca Styler, it is important to isolate and examine female characters in the Bible independent of the biblical narrative in order to see them as significant apart from their male counterparts (72). Styler suggests that Stanton’s way of looking to the Bible logically and critically is a crucial element to contemporary Bible scholarship, as are Stanton’s interpretation of the different creation narratives and her separation of Eve and other female characters in the Bible in order to understand how they function independent of male influence. In this way, Stanton’s work in composing The Woman’s Bible helped to begin and perpetuate a now expanding field of critical scholarship of the Bible. While Stanton may not have lived to see the cultural equality of men and women in her day, the
expanding possibilities of rewriting traditionally hierarchical relationships between men and women in scripture holds the promise that changes in religion can influence needed changes in culture.

Nineteenth-century female writers, like Stanton, felt that it was especially important to push against John Milton’s interpretation of Eve in *Paradise Lost*—an interpretation that places Eve as entirely subordinate to Adam and that shaped the treatment of women for centuries (Styler 73). According to Styler, women were encouraged to take after Milton’s Eve by being wholly absorbed in the identity of their husbands; a fate which nineteenth-century female writers sought to rewrite. Contemporary feminist scholars are still seeking to overthrow the supposed scriptural authority of Milton’s work with its misogynistic overtones that have influenced the canon since the seventeenth century (73–4). Elizabeth Cady Stanton was one of these nineteenth-century female writers that Styler credits for rewriting Eve in order to provide a more equality-based standard for feminine behavior. In this way, *The Woman’s Bible* served as an early catalyst that sought to change the tide of public opinion of Eve. While it was not wholly successful in its day, the efforts of Stanton and others have had lasting effects, because feminist scholars today are still looking to the pattern of dissent established by Stanton to reinterpret female biblical characters in a way that more fairly represents them and comments on the nature of womanhood.

Another branch of contemporary feminist Bible criticism influenced by Stanton comes from the Jewish perspective of the Hebrew Bible. While many blamed Judaism for woman’s status, Jewish historian Setzer points out that Stanton disagreed and “avoid[ed] the common dodge that women fared better in the New Testament than the Old. In her autobiography, Stanton protests at the twisting of her ideas to cast blame on Judaism” (Setzer 75). Stanton’s work doesn’t fault Judaism for woman’s portrayal in the Bible, and consequently her work is used by several contemporary Jewish scholars who assert that by reinterpreting the Hebrew Bible through a Jewish lens, the status of women can be restored to its intended place as equal to men. Using *The Woman’s Bible* as a guide one of these contemporary Jewish scholars, Amnon Shapira, reinterprets the Hebrew Bible in order to show how “the Jewish religion, as portrayed in the Bible, contains the elements which form the theological and historical base of equality” (7). By using Stanton’s feminist framework to interpret the Hebrew Bible, the Bible becomes a “manifesto of ‘equality’” that demonstrates the sometimes superiority
of woman over man (Shapira 10). While Stanton’s project focused on rewriting the Christian interpretations of the Bible, modern scholars are using her work as a template to apply the needed retranslations to Jewish interpretations of the Bible as well.

These efforts attempt to put Judaism back into its intended historical context, which, according to Shapira and Setzer, places men and women as equals. In fact, by looking back to Hebrew language and culture, the seeming inequities between man and woman can be rectified. Setzer looks to Hebrew translations in order to clarify significant meanings. For example, “Eve” comes from the Hebrew word “Chava,” which translates to “Life,” making her role as the mother of all living a significantly elevated position (Setzer 74). Adam’s naming of Eve, when interpreted with this understanding, does not represent a hierarchy between man and woman, but a celebration of the potential woman has to create—an attribute which makes Eve even closer to God in power than Adam.

In addition to her impact on feminist Bible criticism, Stanton is also situated in the long line of scholars who have seen the need for further translations of the Bible in order to illuminate its intended message by translating the original languages with greater accuracy. Since Stanton’s publication of The Woman’s Bible, subsequent versions of the English Bible include the American Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, The New International Version, and The New King James Version (“History of the English Bible”). In addition to these further translations of the Bible, the tradition of interpreting and finding personal application in the Bible, particularly for women, has expanded over time to include more books and criticism than can be cited in this paper. Notably, the position of women in the more recent translations of the Bible seems to improve as scholars attempt to recreate the intended diction and meaning of God’s word. For example, as previously described, Stanton pointed out the important distinction that God created man and woman at the same time, evidence of woman’s equality to man (“Part 1” 15). Likewise, in comparison to the King James Version of the Bible, which refers to both man and woman by the descriptor “man,” today’s New International Version of the Bible replaces “man” with “mankind,” stating:

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”  
So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (NIV, Gen. 1.26-7; emphasis added)
While the King James Version is typically interpreted to include both women and men within the generic term “man,” the NIV makes it clear within the context of more contemporary usage that God created both man and woman in his image. Substituting “man” with the more inclusive term “mankind” accomplishes this. It should be noted that both the KJV and the NIV make use of the plural “us,” “our,” and “them” to refer to a plurality of Deity and mankind, respectively. However, the NIV replaces “him” with “them” in one instance, solidifying the interpretation that God is referring to the creation of Adam and Eve as occurring at the same time, rather than as occurring in sequence. It also solidifies the notion that Adam and Eve have joint stewardship over the earth, and neither of them has dominance over the other. Stanton’s work, therefore, is reinforced even today by contemporary biblical translations, vindicating her work and the idea that it was only perceived as radical because of her cultural and social position—and because most of her contemporaries were reluctant to challenge tradition.

The translation of the NIV is evidence that there is a continued interest in translating scripture precisely, particularly to choose the words that most closely encapsulate the translated meaning intended by the authors of scripture. The NIV attempts to make clear this meaning by translating directly from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Clearly, there remains a demand for scriptural interpretations that strive to represent truth in its intended form. The work of Stanton continues today, demonstrating that her efforts at translating the Bible to create space for woman’s voice are merely a piece of the larger human desire to have the clearest possible meaning from the Bible. In this way, Stanton’s work stands as an example to those who would come after her and attempt to subsequently retranslate the Bible.

The advances made by scholars in the fields of feminist Bible criticism and further translations of the Bible attest to the far-reaching effect that Stanton’s work has had on scholars. Critics are using Stanton’s work not only as foundational material, but also as a template for further study of woman’s place in history and in contemporary life. Stanton’s work is vindicated by the continued contemporary use and emphasis of the importance of The Woman’s Bible to understanding woman’s place. While Stanton did not see how her crowning publication made an impact on feminist biblical criticism, the lasting importance of The Woman’s Bible now stands alongside her monumental advancements in the early suffrage movement as she radically organized women in the United States to begin what would become a battle
for equal rights that continues today: “Just as Seneca Falls inaugurated a decades-long public debate over the question of suffrage, Stanton’s *Bible* put religion on the feminist agenda. Now, more than a century after the publication of her *Woman’s Bible*, Stanton appears prophetic” (Strange 32).

While her work was rejected in its time for being too radical, radical change is exactly what her time necessitated. Stanton probably never imagined the revolution in feminist Bible theory that began in the second wave of feminism, but she would be pleased that its origins really link back to Stanton herself. While at the time of its publication it was believed that the final piece of Stanton’s literary output was a tool of hate against organized religion—and it undeniably was a topic for which Stanton would be highly criticized for the remainder of her life—*The Woman’s Bible* has withstood the test of time. Her work’s fitting place in history as an example of a significant translation of the Bible and a pillar in feminist Bible criticism justifies Stanton’s radical words.
Works Cited


Voluntary and Involuntary Isolation in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*

Jessica Pope Mudrow

When one picks up Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* for the first time, it is safe to assume that at the very end of the novel only one man will remain alive to tell his story. The ultimate isolation of Lionel Verney may seem obvious to most, but the way Shelley uses the deadly plague to transform Verney into the last man causes the reader to wonder why such devastation and heartache is necessary. Shelley’s novel explores two types of isolation over the course of the story: voluntary isolation and involuntary isolation. Most readers tend to focus on Verney’s involuntary isolation as he becomes the last man alive, but I believe that voluntary isolation may play a larger role in his final state. The people who choose the path of isolation quickly learn that isolation does not assure them immunity from the plague. Fuson Wang explains that death “wins out” against “constructed human agency,” as exemplified by those that choose to isolate themselves in order to prevent the disease from advancing (241). The plague therefore represents a universal crisis that could be dealt with in two ways: complete quarantine or universal cooperation. The initial response for many may be to close off and avoid getting involved in the crisis, but Shelley’s novel refutes this
by exposing the damaging effects of inaction. Choosing to withdraw from society in the face of hardship is more harmful in the long run because it leads to silent suffering without the hope of aid. Shelley effectively shows how voluntary isolation cuts people off from any comfort and help they may have received in their suffering, while those that cooperate with others permeate a hope for survival and a greater call for humanity to find success as they come together. If the voluntary isolation status is not changed, involuntary isolation and the consequent suffering becomes the intolerable consequence of ignoring the basic human needs of society as a whole.

Using the plague to expose the futility and danger of voluntary isolation, Shelley challenges the immediate reaction of many citizens to seclude themselves in the face of crisis, ultimately resulting in their tragic demise. In *The Last Man*, many rich families assume that seclusion will protect their families from deadly disease, and thus seclude themselves when the plague first enters England. However, they soon find that walls, physical or otherwise, cannot stop the unpredictable plague. According to the leading scientists in Shelley’s day, plague was transmitted through the air, and there was therefore no identifiable reason why some people were infected, while other people remained healthy. Shelley, who followed the plague debate closely, includes this belief in her novel as the plague ravages through the cracks in the defenses of the naive citizens. This theory is supported by Peter Melville as he explains that the plague “with its miasmatic etiology” may have been “considered the result of poor environmental conditions,” such as poor sanitation and ventilation (832). This widely held belief might have been rational if the plague had followed these rules. However, the plague works according to its own chaotic whims and no one is excluded in the fallout. As various characters attempt to find refuge from the contagion by isolating themselves in their homes, the disease passes undeterred through the walls of each home. Indeed, all of the efforts of the people to prevent contagion prove useless against the deathblow of the plague. Those who seek to evade it behind closed doors are especially exposed to the futility of voluntary isolation.

Even though England initially seems isolated both socially and geographically, the inhabitants soon find that they cannot escape the crisis, which further exposes the naivety of solitude as a way to avoid disaster and encourage the administration of relief as soon as possible. Verney articulates this belief as he discusses the solidarity of England, explaining that “we on
our stable abode could not be hurt in life or limb by these eruptions of nature” (Shelley 183). As there are multiple barriers between the plague and England, including the English Channel, many of the British people are unconcerned with the danger, and believe that as long as they stay in England and do not come in contact with plague victims, no harm will come to them. While this is a reasonable belief, it is undeterminable who would or would not contract the disease. Melville argues that there is “ostensibly no possibility in the novel for direct infection,” because the nature of the plague did not allow for it (831). Shelley’s plague needed to be deadly enough to wipe out the human race, and a contagion or disease passed by direct or indirect contact would not be powerful enough to wipe out the human race—at least not according to the leading scientists of Shelley’s time, who insisted that the plague was transmitted through the air. Shelley asserts this belief through Verney when Verney explains that the plague was not “commonly called contagious,” further elaborating that if “infection depended upon the air, the air was subject to infection” (182). Shelley constructs the plague into an anti-contagion that destroys any possibility of isolation, geographic or otherwise. This means that it is no longer an issue to stay away from infected areas because the dangers are the same in any part of the world. What, then, is left to stop the people from banding together to stave off as much suffering as possible? If there is no further danger in providing aid, then providing that aid should become a priority as society is engulfed in crisis. As the people of the novel work together to provide much needed comfort and gratitude, those involved draw closer together and ease some of the pain of the situation, while those that stubbornly remain in solitude are forced to suffer in silence.

Using examples that stem from voluntary isolation, Shelley redefines isolation as tragedy for those that choose to remain in seclusion, despite the warnings. This situation becomes far worse for the isolated as they contract the disease. Isolation puts them out of the reach of help and they are left to suffer alone. As the plague ravages through Europe, this isolation proves to be a grievous mistake, causing death to sweep over various households, and leaving very few survivors to help with the disaster. In *The Last Man* a highborn Duke ridicules the idea of danger being found in seclusion, and he hides himself and his family inside their home in order to save his household from disease. The Duke realizes his mistake too late, and “the destroyer” overthrows “his precautions, his security, and his life” (Shelley 223). The sorrow of this scene goes much deeper than the fact that
almost all of them sicken and die due to their isolation. In an effort to save himself and his family, the Duke cuts himself and his family off from all other contact with society, rendering them all completely helpless when disease finally strikes. No one outside of the household is aware of their plight until disaster is upon them, and the Duke’s daughter Juliet is the only one able to escape and tell their story. Juliet, unlike her Shakespearean counterpart, may possibly be the sole survivor of the family because she remains emotionally tied to her lover, who rescues her from isolation, and brings her into the comforting arms of other people who are able to help her and whom she is able to help in return. Voluntary isolation turns an already dreadful tale into a complete tragedy as the deaths of the family go unnoticed, meaning that no relief is provided in their dying moments.

Shelley further uses these sorrowful instances to extend the futility of quarantined isolation to include the various untold stories of those that suffer in silence, heightening the tragedy of isolation and why isolation is not a logical solution for those people who are facing danger. The tragedy of isolation is intensified by the sparse encounters of those that do manage to come out of seclusion with the traveling party. One encounter that is brought to light in this desperate moment illustrates the long and individual plight of an old grandmother. Removing herself from all contact with society, the old grandmother ventures out at night to scavenge for food, but it eventually becomes more difficult for her to scavenge as food becomes harder to find. Even though she is “threatened by famine” the old woman fears the plague so much that her “greatest care” is to “avoid her fellow creatures” (224). Here, a very old woman suffers alone both physically and emotionally because of her fear of catching the plague. Her solitude makes it harder to find food and other necessities until the danger of starvation becomes greater than that of disease. It is not until she encounters someone who is infected that she seeks help. In other words, when she fears it is too late and subsequently contracts the disease. As the old woman realizes the futility of continuing to hide, she is able to come out and receive the benefits of cooperating with others in her last moments of life. Now, instead of being alone and slowly dying of starvation and cold, the old woman is able to die in some comfort at the very least, and surrounded by people who care. Whether alone or in company, she is dying and unable to prevent it. Her only consolation is that in the end she chooses to die where people can provide what help they can and record her story when she is gone. She is lucky because she remains so close to
society and is therefore able to change her mind about her decision to isolate herself. However, many others are too far removed, suffering unnecessarily. These stories are only two of many instances where people may have suffered because of their choice to isolate themselves. They would have had no comfort or support in their deaths, which may have been terrifying and heartbreaking as they pass on without notice. Quarantine could not save these people from plague, and if there is no justifiable logic behind who will contract the disease next, then isolation is not a safe or logical solution.

The contrast between those that isolate themselves and those that desire human collaboration ultimately shows that voluntary isolation can lead to involuntary isolation, eventually resulting in hopelessness for the future. Verney faces involuntary isolation when he finally becomes the last man on earth; he has no knowledge of anyone else alive in the world, and believes they have all died. Shelley shows the degradation of Verney’s spirit as he yearns for companionship and aid. Because he becomes immune to the plague, Verney is uniquely spared when others are not. He becomes the pathetic example of what life would be like for those who had sought isolation—if they had been spared from the plague. Alone and emotionally weak, Verney must face the prospect of traveling the world alone, without any excitement or hope for the future. What makes life worth living when there is no one to share it with? This is the question that Verney faces as he descends into misery, frantically but hopelessly beginning his search for any other human life. He is alone in a deceased and rotting world that contains only memories of a civilization. Verney has no one to speak to, to give him comfort, or to confide in. All communication with humanity is lost. Communication and its importance for men and women is emphasized by Charlotte Sussman as being vital to “human identity,” explaining that a “nation” without human voices is “barren ground” (295). Scavenging for food and sleeping outdoors, Verney also loses his human voice as he becomes more and more animal-like. He becomes “a kind of anti-Adam” as he sees only shadows of humanity through books or in his dog, which he finds faithfully guarding its master’s sheep even though its master is no longer coming back (295). Without the comfort of human companionship, Verney has no hope for the future. He even contemplates suicide because his world becomes so bleak and hopeless. Verney explains, “I long to grapple with danger, to be excited by fear, to have some task, however slight or voluntary, for each day’s fulfillment” (Shelley 367). Verney is expressing that even though he survived the plague, losing
the rest of humanity is too great to endure, leaving him purposeless and with nothing to lose. He seeks out menial tasks to occupy his days in order to try and restore the shadow of the life he had. Through Verney’s seclusion, Shelley again shows the damning nature of isolation as it removes help and, in Verney’s case, hope for the future.

Shelley uses the image of Verney’s bleak seclusion to illustrate isolation as a terrible consequence of excess human solitude, because while some seclusion and privacy can be beneficial, humans are still meant to interact with one another. Shelley’s technique of taking a simple idea and enlarging it to the point of disbelief gives readers the chance to re-examine the idea. Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor writes that Shelley “suggests the invigorating pleasures of sublime horror,” while encouraging “the pleasures of solitude, not society” (769). The extremity to which Shelley extends solitude in the novel makes solitude terrifying and undesirable. Isolation can be considered beneficial for a time, but when pushed to the extreme it becomes emotionally harmful. The extremity that Shelley expresses is the absence of hope, which is stifling to anyone who is alone for too long. Isolation, therefore, is not only illustrated as an undesirable choice, but as an intolerable consequence if ever a destruction of humanity were to take place.

Shelley further portrays voluntary isolation in any form as dangerous, with emotional damage being a deadly consequence of that isolation. The emotional damage that voluntary isolation causes is exemplified through Verney’s sister Perdita; Perdita experiences emotional upheaval as she quietly deals with the personal crisis of her husband’s betrayal. It is important to note that crisis is not limited to grand worldwide disasters, but can also happen on the individual scale. Perdita goes through personal turmoil and suffering when her husband, the Lord Protector Raymond, becomes distant from her due to his numerous encounters with another woman. Distressed, she keeps her sorrows to herself until they completely consume her. She declares, “I must weave a veil of dazzling falsehood to hide my grief from vulgar eyes, smooth my brow, and paint my lips in deceitful smiles—even in solitude I dare not think how lost I am, lest I become insane and rave” (Shelley 153). Many people have found themselves in similar situations and are forced to deal with the emotional upheaval and struggle that comes with overcoming the hardship. Depression and other mental health problems are a crippling individual crisis that can be extremely difficult to overcome without help. In fact, many continue to suffer in silence because they don’t want to be a
burden to anyone. Perdita feels this way and continues to suffer alone until it consumes her so much that she becomes emotionally unstable. In the end, Perdita’s grief and loneliness are too much to bear and she intentionally gives up her daughter into Verney’s care, committing suicide a short while later. Had Perdita been forthcoming with her personal trials, she may have been spared some of the heartache and pain she was facing and be able to take care of her daughter, using service to work through her grief. Instead, she allows her grief to take over her emotions, resulting in more tragedy.

While one may initially desire to withdraw when facing trouble, it is more beneficial to band together with others facing the same crisis, even if the crisis is not immediately present in the individual situation. While isolation cuts people off from society’s aid, cooperation strengthens and supports them in times of trouble. The addition of the family’s friend Lucy to Verney’s family party exemplifies this principle. Lucy’s mother is found dead and Lucy is adamant about staying with her mother, choosing voluntary isolation in order to grieve. However, Verney is aware of the danger that will face Lucy if she remains behind. It becomes vital that Lucy go with the family, and since Verney had become a single father with children to care for it makes sense that that Lucy should join Verney’s household. Verney explains that she “never resisted the call of duty” and so closes “the casements and doors with care” and accompanies Verney back to Windsor (Shelley 286). By giving her a chance to provide aid to someone in need, Verney enables Lucy to find the will to survive, in spite of her previous hardship. This gives her purpose and meaning to continue on despite her grief. In this way, both Lucy and Verney find support in cooperation and service. Service then provides a purpose for those that are suffering, and gives them a chance to do something besides grieve because of their troubles. People who have lost much in the wake of environmental disaster and even emotional hardship are able to find solace and new purpose in life as they lose themselves in service toward their fellow beings. Some travel far to help those in need in foreign countries like Africa or South America, while others stay closer to home to aid those who may have gone through similar situations and feelings. Many people find that individual grief is easier to deal with when they keep themselves busy by helping others. Instead of focusing on their individual suffering, individuals are able to put their grief into perspective as they look outward to help and support others. The more people work together
the more likely they are to survive and the greater the chance they have to succeed, despite the sorrow that surrounds them. Thus, banding together gives strength and meaning to continued existence.

Shelley’s promotion of collaboration with others in the face of a crisis such as the plague presents the redeeming qualities of compassion and kindness that represent what it means to be human. As more and more people contract the disease in other countries, most of England’s inhabitants understand what Jonathan Elmer calls “their common humanity” and they choose to reach out to those in need (356). Verney acknowledges their charity as he observes that it is impossible to see crowds of “wretched, perishing creatures” and not want to “stretch out a hand to save them” (186). In the wake of the plague, many English natives open their stores to the refugees that are fleeing from other countries, and as they band together to relieve some of the suffering of others, they set a precedent based on this common humanity. Aid is distributed on the basis of being human and is freely given to any who come to receive it. Shelley contrasts the cruel and heartless nature of the plague with the compassion of the English citizens in order to show that every life is precious and should be treated well, regardless of origin or circumstance. We are drawn to the stories of Verney and his friends as they work to save what they can of humanity because as humans we want to see humanity succeed, and those that cooperate and work together in the face of crisis often find the greatest success in their efforts. With humanity at stake, it becomes important to try to save every life because each life can then become a new contributor to humanity’s continued existence.

Mary Shelley’s novel exposes the damaging consequences of isolation as the plague ravages through the world, spreading the message that individuals cannot hope to avoid crisis because it will befall each of us eventually. Every person will have hardships and trials, some on an individual scale and some on a global scale, but Shelley helps us to understand that trouble is unavoidable, and accepting that knowledge is one of the first steps to looking for a solution. In isolation, not only is there no chance of support from others when one is in need, but it becomes maddening as the isolation becomes permanent, whether intentional or not. The plague represents more than just disease. The plague can take the form of any world or individual emergency and will present the option to either isolate oneself or assist others. As both the novel and recent history suggest, voluntary isolation cannot stop a universal catastrophe from striking anywhere and everywhere, regardless
of how prepared one is. In *The Last Man*, hope for the future remains until there is no other human left on earth except for Verney, who becomes trapped because of involuntary isolation. Without human interaction, Verney’s only relief is found in books, which connect him to the shadow of human society. For Verney, hopelessness arises from complete isolation. His experience, as well as the experience of the people who voluntarily choose seclusion, serves as a warning to those who would choose isolation over cooperation. Shelley’s novel presents isolation as a self-destructive entity that creates helplessness as people suddenly rely upon themselves alone to get out of crisis. Isolation makes people feel forgotten because they have no one to tell their story to or to remember them, they feel hopeless as they battle alone. However, hope comes as people put aside their fears, come out of isolation, and work together for a common goal. Thinking outward towards others fosters hope. As more people work together in the wake of crisis there is more likelihood of success and they draw strength from each other. People find new purpose as they work with others to work beyond their grief and see a bright future. Shelley invites us to look to that future, and to turn to each other in the wake of crisis rather than suffer in the silence of isolation. Though it seems easier to withdraw in the face of a crisis, we are able to draw hope from the helping hands around us. As humanity chooses to extend a hand and open doors to those in need, the likelihood of positive growth for all can be achieved, even in the wake of potential disaster.
Works Cited


“We must have units before we have union,” declares Margaret Fuller, an early nineteenth-century women’s rights activist (119). Fuller envisions a world where male and female individuals are provided with a climate that allows all to reach their full potential. This helps them become complete as individuals, so they can improve their community. In the 1840s, when Fuller published Woman in the Nineteenth Century (hereafter Woman), women and men were limited to their separate spheres. Such expectations were reinforced by the difference in educational experiences girls and boys were receiving. Schooling for girls and young women was limited to academies and seminaries, which did their best to train girls for domestic roles. These roles were “restricted and inferior” in comparison to the educational opportunities for men, creating a gap between the education that forward-thinking people expected of modern women and the education women were actually receiving (“Women in Education”). In a climate where women were limited to learning by self-culture, or learning by one’s self for one’s self, Fuller’s promotion of an individual and complete unit demonstrates the need for an approach that extended women’s education to their communities.
Unfortunately, Fuller’s suggestions for educational reform were dismissed because she used an informal, conversational tone that often lacked clarity. While conversational tones were seen as informal, a modern feminist scholar Rula Quawas noticed that Fuller increased a feeling of community and active participation by using a more casual tone (131). Early critics, quoted and studied by rhetorical analyst Annette Kolodny, defined *Woman* as a long talk instead of a book or treatise (139–141). Third-wave feminist critics, who worked to deconstruct and re-define early feminist notions, have since separated Fuller’s content from the form to help readers see the validity of the text. David Robinson, who studied Fuller’s *Woman* in the context of nineteenth-century self-culture, has done an extensive look at the content of *Woman* and the ethos portrayed. He argues that Fuller desired men and women to be able to win the war between their current self and their ideal natures (85). Robinson’s perspective remains focused on the individual and his or her own potential. At the same time, by examining Fuller’s conversational form, Kolodny finds *Woman* to be an effort to avoid appearing aggressive, “break[ing] away from things ‘taught and led by men’” (142). Both Robinson and Kolodny’s perspectives on *Woman* maintain Fuller’s purpose for self-culture: to accomplish union and enable an individual to serve a community. An examination of Fuller’s use of conversation as a rhetorical tool in her community and in *Woman* demonstrates that all men and women must realize self-culture to contribute to their community. This realization will give individuals the influence to act in ways that equalize opportunities for males and females, causing individuals to use their unique experiences to create a critical space to evaluate their community.

As a teacher, Fuller used conversation to engage the individuals in her classroom, giving them a sense of self-culture by requiring them to share and develop their original thoughts. In a study of Fuller’s life, Paula Blanchard describes how Fuller, once invited to teach at the Greene Street School in Providence, Rhode Island, faced a problem that was not unique in female classes: her sixty students were not at the expected performance level and their minds were inactive (121). Realizing that their current learning patterns would not help her students strengthen their inactive minds, her thoughts turned to reform. In a classroom culture that favored memorization and recitation, Fuller used practices that focused on discussing and applying the lessons they had learned. One of her students described the classroom as a place where they “must talk and let [Fuller] understand our minds”
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(qtd. in Blanchard 121). Fuller would assign texts to read with themes to think about, and students were responsible for sharing their reactions and their questions that came from their reading. This encouraged them to educate themselves by their own effort, so they could expand on the prior knowledge that self-culture gave them in class. After weeks of practice, Fuller saw improvement and success, and she concluded that “the standards [the conversational method] set were higher, not lower, than the ones they were used to” (qtd. in Blanchard 122). As Fuller constantly challenged her students and asked them to answer tough questions and defend their answers. This activated the students’ minds and led to better application of knowledge gained by self-culture.

Though conversation led to success in Fuller’s classroom, the individual effects of self-culture recorded by students better describe how classroom conversations resulted in personal growth. Marie M. McAllister compiles many journals to understand Fuller’s teaching methods; many entries describe the students’ feelings about their own abilities. When Fuller was introduced to the classroom, a young student named Mary Allen noted, “I love her already but also fear her . . . and think she should be very severe” (McAllister 127). For the first week, Fuller was severe as she “show[ed] them what was ‘defective in their acquirements and methods’” (129). Though students were shown their weaknesses, much of their work became better as they spoke about and comprehended the material. This method was hard for some students. Another student named Ann Brown complained that “it was harder to think of something to say on the subject than to learn a lesson by heart” (qtd. in McAllister 130). Brown continues to note that Fuller required students “to have distinct ideas” while interpreting texts, letting “‘nothing pass from you in reading or conversation that you do not understand, without trying to find out’” (qtd. in Fergenson 83). After practice, one student wrote, “‘We owe you so much for showing us we can become something better; we are still stupid but we feel we are going in the right way. Help us to do more and better. You have given us hope’” (qtd. in McAllister 130). The writer uses first-person plural to speak of a hope that is given to multiple individuals. The tone tells of students interacting with each other and talking about Fuller’s methods. They realize that although they have been pushed in their studies, they are better for it. Most importantly, they crave more knowledge. In her classroom, Fuller creates a community of individuals who were becoming more capable of critical
thinking and sharing their thoughts. Through interacting with each other, they reinforced what they learned through self-culture by applying what they learned during critical conversations.

Because Fuller’s conversational method succeeded in helping individual pupils, Fuller proposed a plan to have formal conversations in Boston for adult women to discuss their thoughts and feelings. The women in Fuller’s circle, who had been educated and knew how to read, were “seeking satisfactory outlets for their intelligence” (Albert 464). Up to this point, women had autonomy in that they were teaching themselves, but there was no way to practice communicating that intelligence. In these gatherings, Fuller hoped to create a space for women to develop intellectually. Her audience, as Capper explains, were rather homogenous; they involved Fuller’s acquaintances who were all educated, wealthy wives or daughters from successful families. Many spoke multiple languages and were religiously liberal. Fuller gathered her circle “to answer ‘the questions—What were we born to do? How shall we do it?’” (Capper 513). In this intellectual space, women explored art, literature, and mythology to define abstract topics like “faith” or “beauty” (Capper 516), and add their voice to the bigger dialog concerning these topics by sharing their perspectives. These conversations were called the Boston Conversations.

The Boston Conversations worked to parallel the open conversations and dialog that men were allowed and welcome to be a part of. In many ways, as Fuller organized the Conversations, she was trespassing on the culture of male intellect. As McAllister notes, Boston was a space for reform groups such as Abolitionists and the Temperance Society, which gave frequent stimulating lectures and discussion groups like the Transcendental Club or the Saturday club, which were attended and sponsored by many men (143). Fuller compared the experiences of women, who were denied opportunities to apply their education, to the experiences of men, who from the beginning of their education were asked to use what they had learned (Capper 514). Fuller’s intent was to use the same format men used in their discussions to frame their female discussions with the goal to create a collective female intellect.

The Boston Conversations impacted the growth of self-culture in the attendees, helping them to grow as individuals and yet be stimulated by the group’s discussion. As women were making use of their new sphere, they were reinforcing and applying the knowledge that they had already received
by self-culture. Capper quotes attendees Esther Mack and Ednah Littlehale Cheney in an effort to understand their perspective on the conversations. Mack wrote that “‘[she] would rather not have doubts and difficulties suggested to [her] which [she had] not yet met with in [her] experiences of life’” (qtd. in Capper 519). That Mack would say this shows that during the conversations, women were discussing issues and events in a way that required them to confront the social difficulties they had always set aside. While Mack was pessimistic about the conversations, Cheney describes her reaction: “‘I was no longer the limitation of myself, but I felt the whole wealth of the universe was open to me’” (qtd. in Capper 520). The limitations that were forced upon Cheney because she was limited to her sphere no longer bound her, and Cheney could think freely and critically about the universe. Whether or not the attendees were ready to confront the knowledge that they gained through this experience, they were overcoming a “sense of intellectual isolation” by interacting with a community (Quawas 135). This new space, which asked attendees to apply their prior knowledge, reinforced self-culture by both using the individual’s own past experience and education and their current and original perspective.

Fuller’s use of a conversational tone in Woman uses the same patterns that her dialog-centered teaching and Boston conversations used. Fuller success in using conversation to strengthen the individual by working with a community provides her with the tools she needs to achieve a tone that connects with her audiences for her work on Woman. As mentioned before, this tone has been criticized for being unclear; however, Kolodny hints that Fuller used this tone to “prompt readers to their own independent truth” (150). Fuller needs to apply the same patterns she used in her smaller circles of conversation to her essay. Conversation is a tool that Fuller uses in her writing to create room for readers to make meaning from the text. They can then compare their perspective to Woman and to the greater conversation that the community is having about women’s rights. Fuller supplies the background and examples, and her audience is to sift through the information critically and come to their own original conclusions. This pattern of giving information, letting the audience form their own opinion about it, and shaping the experience that the audience has while sharing that opinion follows the technique she used to reinforce self-culture as a teacher and mentor. Fuller’s efforts develop women’s self-culture through conversational tools aimed to affect the larger community.
Fuller knew that to impact changes concerning female liberty, she would have to include a male audience for Woman to enter influential social conversations. She addresses this in the preface of Woman, first, asking for women to actively seek liberty, and then, “from men . . . ask a noble and earnest attention to anything that can be offered on this great and still obscure subject.” She also explains that when she writes “man,” she uses it meaning “both man and woman,” and that she “lay[s] no especial stress on the welfare of either” (101). These sentences show that Fuller values women and men as equal members of her audience, placing responsibility on each party as readers. That is, they must reflect on past experiences and their current educational and social climate to give attention to the matter of women’s rights. Communicating her need for male support is particularly important because they had the social power to give weight to the topic of female liberty in the larger communal conversation. Bringing both men and women to the subject of female liberty requires Fuller’s audience to do their own critical thinking and follow the process that she exercised in Providence and Boston.

Fuller’s plea for both men and women to work toward their full potential is essential in her effort to reach into an already-established dialog about women’s rights. To reach into the ongoing conversation, she cannot talk about women’s potential only; she needs men to see that even they have not become the most complete human beings yet. After establishing her desire for men and women to be the audience of Woman in the preface, she explains that both men and women have not created a culture where people can reach their potential. She first claims that man—“by man I mean both man and woman”—has not “fully installed his powers” (102), and that he is “still a stranger to his inheritance” (101, 103). This assertion ensures that the audience realizes that there is a lot more to themselves than what they have thus far developed. After establishing the argument that men have not reached an ideal state, she calls for a “universal, unceasing revelation” that makes a path for all human beings to answer the call, “‘Be ye perfect’” (103). By calling every individual to become an ideal, Margaret Fuller expands her audience immensely. Without an address to men, Woman might have hurt the cause for women’s rights instead of helped it. Instead of a plea for social reform that would benefit everyone, Woman would be a mere explanation of how society limited women. Though women were at a huge disadvantage, the needed conversation cannot happen between men and women if they were not already on some common ground with
a common goal. Fuller establishes a universal need from the beginning for men and women to think of the human whole and to fill the social gaps that prevented full potentials to be reached.

Including men in the conversation on how to make society a place for humankind to reach its ideal state is also a clever way to avoid being combative. Kolodny acknowledges that by using the conversational tone, Fuller avoids pointing a finger at men, causing them to recoil and argue back (142). Fuller realizes that she needs to include them in this new conversation, without being in any way accusatory. This brings the subject of women’s betterment to a shared table. The conversational tone creates that space for men to see that there was a lot of work to do to create a better society, and that there are needs that were not being filled all around. Fuller makes it clear that her argument is not just for women, but for all humankind. Thus, the effect of the conversational tone goes beyond prodding her audiences to think critically, but achieves “a collaborative process of assertion and response in which multiple voices could—and did—find a place” (Kolodny 159). In other words, Fuller’s conversational approach creates a space where men and women could collaborate and respond to her message.

From Fuller’s conversational tone sprouts the inclusion of written conversational dialog that depicts the points of view of two individuals and further engages her universal audience in questioning the current social position of women. During these conversations, the audience is invited to overhear dialog that questions the roles of men and women, making apparent the sphere that women are limited to. The results of these conversations between two voices is that it “opens a potential site for critique” without Fuller openly stating her opinion, and it requires the audience to put forth effort (Zwarg 176). The first of these overheard conversations in Woman particularly striking. The audience overhears a conversation between a husband and his friend. The husband is against his wife being at the polls, insisting that he gives his wife all she needs by providing her indulgences. This is questioned by the friend, who asks if the husband has ever asked if his wife is “satisfied with these indulgences” (106). To this, the husband replies that he knows that she satisfied, that he is the head of the house, “and she the heart” (107). The reply of the listener begs the most attention from the reader; the listener replies that if the woman is the heart and the man is the head, then “the head represses no natural pulse of the heart, there can be no question as to your giving your consent. Both will be of one accord, and
there needs but to present any question to get a full and true answer” (Fuller 107). This conversation calls into question the widely accepted roles of men and women, and the established relationship requiring women to submit to the consent of men. Fuller utilizes this metaphor to explain that if men should work in spheres of knowledge and women in spheres of feelings and emotion, then naturally, what happens in the men’s sphere should follow what women desire—an equal opportunity to learn and contribute. The mind does not stop the heart from working for the body, therefore, men should not stop women from contributing to their communities. A body depends on the mind and heart together, just like a community depends on men and women. At the end of the conversation, Fuller subtly situates her logic that men and women should work together to understand truths, making a space for the audience to draw their own conclusions about whether they agree.

Fuller also uses conversation to secure her evidence regarding the limitations of social spheres by addressing possible counterarguments in a conversation between a husband and wife. The husband does not want their daughter to be too educated because “if she knows too much, she will never find a husband.” To this, the wife replies that their daughter should know as much as she can, no matter if it helps her find a husband or not. The husband replies that he “wants her to have a sphere and a home,” and a husband to protect her when her father is gone (Fuller 123). Regarding this exchange, Zwarg notes that this conversation highlights how “a woman is caught in a double bind, first through her father’s ‘protection,’ which keeps her from developing her skill, and then through her future husband, who will likely refuse to consent to any deviation from her prescribed role as wife and mother” (176). Fuller addresses this double bind by bringing up a possible counter argument in conversation against better education for women—that it makes them less marriageable. Both the male and the female contribute their perspectives, accentuating the differences between a man and woman’s experiences trying to gain an education. While society requires men to gain every possible means of education, opportunities for women are limited to fit socially-constructed expectations enforced by those with power.

Fuller uses moments of conversation in Woman to call into question the expectation of different male and female spheres in the home. She creates a dialog that reacts to the current situation of social relationships. Limited to two opposing voices on the spheres and abilities of women, the conversations make socially-established inequalities between men
and women clear. The simple but powerful tool of dialog forces men and women to confront the inconsistencies caused by double standards (Urbanski 135). While one of Fuller’s characters is often the voice of reason and suggests possible solutions to the issues presented in the conversations, Fuller leaves the dialog open, giving the impression that readers only know a fraction of what is said. This leaves the audience space to insert their own opinion and experiences into the conversation. In many ways, these conversations call for a “reevaluation of the bearing that [the terms ‘female’ and ‘male’] had on the culture of the self” (Robinson 93). Throughout Woman, Fuller argues that female and male are no longer adjectives describing people but labels for separate spheres of opportunity in the home and in the workplace. In these small conversations, she subtly asserts that these spheres are constructed and maintained by years of socialization, and that they will no longer benefit men or women if they do not lead the individual to realize their ideal nature. Fuller uses conversation to point out that limiting individuals to certain spheres damages the ability for every human being to develop self-culture, and those in power need to act in ways that open opportunities to develop knowledge and experience for each person.

The inclusion of conversational tone and conversational dialog in Woman supports Fuller’s argument for the development of self-culture in human kind. If Woman involves men in constructing conclusions about the limitations of spheres, then men and women will work to build a space for personal development for both groups. The self holds high value, and as one’s opportunities and abilities are increased, they will be prepared for “every relation to which it may be called” (Fuller 118). Fuller values human beings and their development and sees conversation as critical to the idea of selfhood. Ellison, as quoted in Zwarg, explains that for Fuller, the self is the combination of many conversations in the mind; hence, reading and participating in dialog beyond that of the self is critical to self-culture (167). Woman demonstrates the value of the individual and to help women realize their potential to develop their ideal self. While early critics separated the form and content of Woman, the conversational form of Woman reflects the desires that Fuller has for women and for the betterment of society by reinforcing her argument that intelligent people would only make society stronger. The audience cannot ignore their exposure to these ideas no matter what experience they are bringing to this text.
Though Fuller uses all of the conversational tools that she has known and mastered to communicate the need for self-culture, she also uses these tools to help establish positive relationships between many self-cultured individuals and their community. After arguing for education and opportunities for women, she states, “Woman the poem, man the poet! Woman the heart, man the head! Such divisions are only important when they are never to be transcended” (Fuller 115). By using contrasting metaphors, Fuller illustrates her conclusion that division is not a transcendent way to live. Division is not ideal. Fuller explains the ideal relationship between the individual and their community by saying, “we must have units before we can have union” (119). The idea that an individual becomes their ideal self in order to participate meaningfully in their community is not unique to Woman. Fuller paraphrases Plato’s belief that “man and woman [are] the two-fold expression of one thought” (119). Men and women work united as two different but equally valuable parts of humankind. Later, Fuller says, “As this whole has one soul and one body, any injury or obstruction to a part or to the meanest member, affects the whole. Man can never be perfectly happy or virtuous, till all men are so” (130). In other words, men and women are part of a community that has different parts that work together. The community, that is here represented as a whole, cannot be complete without each of its parts working and working together. Again and again, Fuller describes the relationships between the individual and his or her community as one where the community provides the individual with what they need to become his or her ideal self. Then, after making use of those tools, the individual becomes a meaningful part of the community who can pass those opportunities to the next individual who has yet to discover his or her potential.

A major part of being a meaningful member of society is having the education and the knowledge necessary to make connections with and build relationships between other people. This reinforces the established community, while making room for others. Fuller addresses the claim that women need education for the sole reason of being better wives and mothers. Fuller states, “Give the soul free course, let the organization both of body and mind be freely developed, and the being will be fit for any and every relation to which it may be called” (118). Though Fuller is speaking primarily about female education, it fits into the conversation that she has established to include men. If any soul, meaning any being, is allowed to develop and reach their full potential, in body and in mind, then that individual will be prepared
for any relationship that the members of their community offer them. Here, Fuller moves from the potential of the individual and extends it to a potential for the community, implying that if there is an individual ideal, there is also a communal ideal. She moves past the idea of individual knowledge for the individual only and suggests that individuals properly equipped with knowledge, may discover truth and share it “for the good of all men” (Fuller 118, italics added). She acknowledges that self-development and self-dependence might lead people to never get married, and that women might become “old maids” and still be useful people. In other words, self-culture makes it possible for a person to depend on their own resources; however, self-culture can only lead one to reach their full potential if that person can evaluate and increase their knowledge within a community. Realizing this truth, it follows that every individual, male and female, needs to be given the space and the tools to become his or her ideal self and participate in multiple kinds of relationships in his or her communities.

Once these relationships are formed, they are maintained by conversation, making dialog a necessary instrument in an individual’s community. As Fuller realizes after her experiences teaching at the Greene Street School and organizing the Boston Conversations, conversation is a constructive way to bring people together to discuss and make meaning of life. It requires participation from all individuals, and makes it necessary that those individuals involved understand the relationship between actions and consequences. These consequences that affect society do not impact only those making the decisions; they impact the community. This makes it necessary for those with social power to be a part of the conversation. Fuller notes,

Many women are considering within themselves what they need that they have not, and what they can have if they find they need it. Many men are considering whether women are capable of being and having more than they are and have, and whether, if so, it will be best to consent to improvement in their condition. (107)

Here, Fuller points out that in the current state, although women are subjects of the conversation, they have yet to be a part of it themselves. Women need to participate in the dialog and insert their own experiences and original ideas. Fuller shows that it is important for the community, not just for self-culture, that women are included in these dialogs or are at least given space to insert themselves. Marie Mitchell Olesen Urbanski realizes that Fuller has
modelled how to get involved in the conversation as an individual, while involving the collective body. She points out that Fuller’s constant switching between “we” and “I” shows Fuller’s efforts to use her own experience as representative of all women (136). The use of “we” and “I” also shows her efforts to have a collective conversation that is not limited to one social group, but is relevant and important to every individual in the larger community.

Fuller’s idea of how to attain self-culture does not separate the unit from the union, but prepares individuals to evaluate their relationships, considering how their community provides them with resources to become a complete unit themselves. Establishing a unit and a union through conversation is futile if the individual cannot make meaning of their life situation. In many ways, having a whole unit is not possible without understanding of the individual relationships established outside of the self. Robinson has quoted Alcott’s idea of self-culture as “‘the art of revealing to a man the true idea of his being—his endowments—his possessions—and fitting him to use these for the growth, renewal, and perfection’” (85). If self-culture is defined in part by an individual’s endowments and possessions, it follows that individuals must consider where these endowments and possessions come from, their community, in order to define themselves. This definition also, in a time where women “[do] not hold property on equal terms with men” (Fuller 108), denies a large group of the community the ability to achieve self-culture, and raises the question of who is withholding the female’s opportunity to examine their relationships with others in an effort to understand their own relationships. Fuller’s argument for the community and the individual to work together towards a more perfect union built by stable units requires some endowments and possessions to come from the community.

Conversation in Fuller’s writing not only results in giving females a space to think critically about their experiences in their community, but it also gives women a space in the conversation about their rights and freedoms. They can require their communities to give them the tools that they need to gain self-culture and self-reliance. Self-culture is more than education that impacts the individual; it requires relationships to be developed. From those relationships come the endowments women need to identify and culture themselves. Though in Fuller’s time they did not have the ability to have possessions of their own; their endowment (or knowledge) could come from their relationships and meaning that they were drawing from the community. In the examples of Montague, Somerville, and Staël, despite the
limitations put on females, they drew on their community’s relationships and applied what they gained from self-culture in a way that removed many obstructions to the ways they could contribute to their society (Fuller 117). As discussed earlier, Kolodny has noted that Fuller’s use of conversation “prompts readers to come to their independent truth” (150). Fuller’s use of conversation also prompts readers to realize that unless they act on the truth about the damage of limiting spheres, achieving ideal unity in society will be impossible. Fuller’s conversation creates a space for women to realize they had a right to equality and to understand that they could claim that right for themselves, gradually opening an entrance point for the women of the community to be meaningful members of a successful union.


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Charlotte Brontë’s novel Jane Eyre was written at the height of the British Victorian Age, a time known for its strict adherence to the social norms of the day. Though filled with mid-Victorian mannerisms and lifestyles, the novel takes on its own air of mystery—a governess catches her master’s eye, and a strange person wreaks havoc in the household. Themes related to the Victorian period fly throughout the novel, such as the concept of the angel of the house and of the ideal or less-than-ideal woman. While some might try to fit Jane Eyre into one of these categories, Jane is more than a product of her time. Her character transcends the social roles of the period and soars to new heights as a result. One way that this is demonstrated is through the analogy of the life of pet birds, locked inside a cage to be domesticated. As an orphan left in the hands of relatives who did not care for her, Jane Eyre grew up like a “caged bird,” unable to truly make her own decisions. Though her physical, economic, and social movements are carefully controlled by her aunt, Jane’s mind is her own, carefully growing and maturing in a way unbeknownst to her until she leaves the situations chosen by her family for those she chooses for herself. Ultimately, she is able to reach the freedom she desires through the education, knowledge, social standing, and love that she acquires in the novel. It is through this
imagery of a “caged bird” that readers are able to see Jane Eyre as more than a product of the Victorian era; she is an individual that transcends the social norms of the day.

Jane’s desires to gain freedom and knowledge stem from an early age. Raised as an unwanted orphan in her aunt’s household, Jane only knows cruelty and hatred at the hands of relatives. Her inquisitive and different nature is represented from the beginning, as she did not acquire the “more sociable and childlike disposition” which her aunt attempts to impress upon her (Brontë 5). Instead, she is a reader, and far more interested in learning about the world outside her aunt’s home than her cousins are. In the novel, this is demonstrated through the theme of birds that is introduced early on, in Thomas Bewick’s *History of British Birds*. As Jane sits in the window seat reading this book and gazing at the outside world, she is at an in-between point—neither in the house or outside—on the threshold and therefore on the verge of change. Jane is drawn to the way the birds live, identifying with their “solitary rocks and promontories,” “bleak shores,” and “forlorn regions of dreary space” (6). This connection to birds is further illustrated through her surname, Eyre, which is derived from “eyrie,” meaning “the nest of a bird of prey . . . on a mountain or cliff” (“Eyrie”). It is at this point in her life that Jane aligns her living situation with that of birds: solitary, bleak, and forlorn. Jane is incapable of flight at this time, however, the birds she identifies with have the capability to fly. It is this contrast that sparks Jane’s desire for freedom and her initial pull on the chain that secures her to her cage.

Shortly after this point, Jane is sent away to Lowood School, where she receives a classical education, but also gains knowledge and new experiences that become stepping stones for her future life and growth. This knowledge becomes important to Jane’s freedom as it gives her the power to define herself. Before Lowood, Jane was only what others made her to be; she had no say or voice in any matter and was subjected to punishments due to how others defined her and her actions. The kindness of friends and teachers at her school enable Jane to find herself and unlock the societal cage that had hitherto ensnared her. Miss Temple is an important character who teaches Jane that in order to be free, she needs to experience friendship, love, and a sense of home. Indeed, Miss Temple makes the school a place for Jane to call home, and “from the very day [Miss Temple] left [Jane] was no longer the same: with her was gone every settled feeling, every association that had made Lowood in some degree a home” (Brontë 71).
This experience allows Jane to learn that life needs to contain more than just static living: it needs friendship and a sense of home or belonging. It needs love, an emotion that had not surrounded her upbringing. Additionally, Jane’s acquaintance with Miss Temple acts as a taste of what she would ultimately need to be free from the oppressive cage she was still chained to, the cage of hierarchical social structures.

One of the key factors in Jane’s growth is her decision to change her life by leaving Lowood School and finding a position elsewhere, for her “reason for tranquility was no more” and she remembered that “the real world was wide” (72). Without connections to help with the process, Jane puts an advertisement in the paper and then actively proceeds along her chosen path. This bold move enables her to receive another degree of flight and freedom through the opening of the door to her cage. However, though the door is open, she is still chained inside her cage. At this point, Jane finally moves out of the situations set up for her by her relations, namely her aunt’s household and Lowood. While she does consult briefly with her uncaring aunt about taking a new position, the decision is ultimately left to her. Here, after eighteen years, Jane finally breaks free from the chain holding her to her cage, enabling her to gain freedom from the oppressiveness of her mostly unfeeling familial and social relationships. This decision ultimately leads to further freedoms that are not fully realized until the novel’s end.

The position that Jane takes upon leaving Lowood is unique; though hired as a governess, she is treated by the master as a social equal. This approach is far different than any that Jane has previously experienced. At her aunt’s, Jane was an orphan and less than a servant. Though she felt love at Lowood, Jane was stuck socially, unable to change the situation that had been impressed upon her by her aunt. Going to work at Thornfield is Jane’s choice: and in that choice, Jane could more easily find her place in society and soars in her attempts at doing so. Her main companion, Mrs. Fairfax, “turned out to be what she appeared, a placid-tempered, kind-natured woman, of competent education and average intelligence” (92). But eventually even Thornfield felt to her a “return to stagnation” (99). While Jane enjoyed living in this new situation, and though Mrs. Fairfax was kind, and her society and company a welcome change, Mrs. Fairfax was not the right person to encourage Jane’s departure from the cage for she did not have the intellectual stimulation which Jane required to leave her societal cage.
Mr. Rochester’s return from his travels brought the intellectual stimulation Jane needed to develop the necessary courage to free herself from her cage. Upon Mr. Rochester’s unexpected return to Thornfield, he learned of how she was able to situate herself amongst the household and with Mrs. Fairfax, and he could see that there was something quite different about her. As a result, he frequently desired her company in the evening, and declared that “there is something singular about [her]” (112). Rochester is drawn to Jane’s clear and unfiltered remarks and conversations, for her social situation is different from his. Most likely those of his own social standing were like Adele, his charge: privileged, used to finery, and unwilling to compromise. This certainly meets the description of the eligible Miss Ingram.

Miss Ingram is certainly a product of the Victorian period, for she stands tall in the same cage that Jane continuously tries to break free from. This is demonstrated through the “lightness and buoyancy” of the actions of Miss Ingram that remind Jane “of a flock of white plumy birds” (145–6). Brought up as a member of the social elite, Miss Ingram is considered by many, Mrs. Fairfax and Jane included, to be the perfect match for Rochester. However, Rochester has other ideas in mind. At a point in the novel, he discovers that Jane can draw well, and asks to see her work. Upon bringing it, readers learn that she draws birds, one of which is a cormorant, which some critics see as her self-portrait. This “connects her character with Bewick’s textual characterizations of the species through two areas of voraciousness and hunger in Jane’s life: her passion for Rochester and her desire to surpass the limits assigned to her gender and social class” (Taylor 9). It is this connection to the cormorant that brings together the dueling aspects of Jane’s life which strive to be resolved, but which are hindered due to the social norms of the day. Further, this connects “the instances in the novel in which she articulates a hunger for intellectual, creative, and social outlets denied her because of her class and gender” (10). While Rochester appreciates her work because he is also caged down by his own social expectations and private life, those visiting from his social sphere do not deem the drawings as anything special.

Unlike Jane with her desires for freedom, each of Rochester’s visitors was busily living in his or her sphere, wrapped up in the social contrivances and expectations of their day. The moment they falter in their social privileges, however, is when a gypsy appears and they choose to listen to their fortunes. This is a turning point in the novel for Jane in particular, as she realizes Rochester’s feelings for her and her feelings for him. Those who choose to
visit with the gypsy and receive their fortunes return, some subdued and others thrilled. Jane almost does not go, but the gypsy will not leave “till she has seen all” (Brontë 166). Jane’s meeting with the gypsy then demonstrates how much Rochester truly has seen of Jane, for the gypsy is Rochester, who “stepped out of his disguise” (172). He knew of her desires for freedom and for more, of the fire that was within her, though closely watched and monitored. Rochester could see and feel Jane’s passion for life, though curbed by her childhood and upbringing at Lowood. Most importantly, Rochester could see how Jane felt about him, even though it was hidden to her in some cases, due to not only her innate temperament, but also due to the societal norms of proper relationships between master and servant in that time period. It is the hidden nature of Rochester, however, that eventually becomes problematic to their relationship, because the man that Jane is meant to marry is still in disguise.

Through the novel, readers learn that Jane also needs love in order to be free, as can be seen in the freedom that she felt upon entering Lowood and meeting Miss Temple. But the love that she receives from Rochester is not yet liberating, because he is still in disguise. Rochester chooses to go about marrying Jane in the wrong way, for had their marriage proceeded, it would have been illegal even while filled with passion. Jane could not live in that sort of situation, for she knew that in order for her truly to be free, she needed legality, love, and candor, aspects that had not been a part of her upbringing before Miss Temple and were not always considered by society when it came to finding someone to marry. Many, Rochester’s family included, solely desired the dowry gained in a wedding. This desire for the “thirty thousand pounds: that sufficed,” led to aspects of Rochester’s marriage being hidden from him (260). In contrast, Jane had no dowry, which therefore resulted in a transparency between her and Rochester that broke the social norms of the day. Even with this transparency, had Jane not learned of his marriage, all efforts on her part to break free from her cage would have been pointless, for she would have entered into a situation that was not fully liberating.

Jane’s desire to be free on her own terms flies forth at this point, shown in her decision to leave Thornfield, for Jane felt that while “birds were faithful to their mates” and “emblems of love,” she had no place with Rochester (274). After a long distance traveled, Jane ends up outside the home of St. John. Here, he and his sisters take her in and help her heal, for the sisters have “a pleasure in keeping [her] . . . as they would have a pleasure in keeping and cherishing a half-frozen bird” (297). The family, consisting of two sisters and
one brother, is kind to her, and Jane feels at home, similar to how she felt at Thornfield. As time passes and Jane stays with the family longer, a sudden discovery alters Jane’s social standing and position, further freeing her from her cage: she has an uncle, Mr. Eyre of Madeira, who died and left Jane “all his property” (325). Shortly following this discovery, St. John determines that Jane should be his wife, for she now meets the prerequisite temperament and class level he desires in order to consider someone eligible to marry.

However, St. John and Jane’s views of a marriage governed by society differ, for St. John considers marriage to be a social marker while Jane views it as further trapping her in her societal cage. This idea has been further discussed by critics such as John Hagan, who stated, “For Jane, liberation without human love is impossible” (352). Jane did not love St. John, and after the childhood experiences that had shaped her knowledge of love and life, Jane knew that to marry without love would be just as confining as to marry someone who is already married. She would return to the cage that she was so close to fully escaping, and that was unacceptable for Jane. She chooses to turn away from St. John and refuse his offer of marriage, for it was better to “break free of the successive glass cages into which convention and society’s disdain would place her” (Marchbanks 12), such as marriage, than to be confined to a cage. If Jane remained restricted to the cage, she would be unable to gain the ascendancy brought about “each time Jane [would fly] free of her successive confinements” (1). This decision became the second turning point for Jane. She knew then that after Thornfield, her cage had not been just her own. Rochester shared her cage because he was confined to his marriage, unable to marry Jane for “a marriage was achieved almost before [he] knew where [he] was” (Brontë 260). But now he was free, and she was ready to join him and share his freedom. Thus began Jane’s return to Thornfield and to the man who held the key to her freedom.

Her arrival is unexpected, but brings about the culmination of her break from the cage-like institutions that have heretofore been established and oppressively placed on Jane. She finds Rochester “helpless, indeed—blind, and a cripple” with an arm amputated, an eye inflamed, and an eye knocked out (365). However, he is free from the marital cage that had bound him, though “in his countenance [she] saw a change” for “the caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson” (367). Though Rochester’s experiences had changed him, Jane is able to look past his outward appearance, for now they are able to
free each other through marriage. Some critics argue that “Jane’s finally and voluntarily delivering herself into matrimonial bondage at the story’s close undermines any sense of freedom she might have demonstrated” (Marchbanks 13), but this is not Jane’s view. Marriage to the man she loves ultimately gives Jane the freedom that she desires, which is later echoed in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s epic poem *Aurora Leigh*:

She had lived  
A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,  
Accounting that to leap from perch to perch  
Was act and joy enough for any bird.  
Dear heaven, how silly are the things that live  
In thickets and eat berries! (304–309)

Jane shares the poem’s view that acting like a caged and senseless bird is silly, particularly when one can leave the cage as Jane did, finding freedom through education and marriage. Leaving her aunt’s house to go to Lowood enabled Jane to escape the thickets, spread her wings, and fly from the gilded cage. Upon leaving St. John and discovering Rochester’s state, Jane was able to realize there was more joy to life than she had known before. That joy was brought about by the similarities Jane found with Rochester and through the knowledge and education she received and gained in each stage of life.

Thus, the continual references to cages and birds in Brontë’s novel symbolize Jane’s desires for freedom from the cage-like institutions to which she has been subjected throughout her formative years. Ultimately, Jane truly reaches the freedoms symbolized by the birds throughout the novel through the knowledge she obtains and for the love that she finds. Jane would have remained a “caged bird,” forever having tasted of freedom but unable to attain it, were it not for her ability to transcend the social norms of the day and become more than what society dictated. By breaking free from the oppressiveness of society, her actions enable an escape from the cage that truly renders it uninhabitable for the future.
Works Cited


On Symbols and Shadows
Flannery O’Connor’s Jungian Concept of Grace

Joshlin Sheridan

While participating in a literary circle discussing whether or not the Catholic Eucharist was purely symbolic, the fiery Flannery O’Connor famously responded, “Well, if it’s a symbol, to hell with it!” (*Habit* 125). O’Connor, a deeply devout Catholic, reveals through her short stories and personal letters a strong desire to prevent religion from becoming merely symbolic or explainable phenomena. Especially frightening to her was the notion that psychology would replace religion, because she viewed psychology as “not an adequate instrument for understanding the religious encounter” (*Mystery and Manners* 165). In a June 1962 letter, she expressed disdain that the modern world would “gradually . . . turn religion into poetry and therapy” (*Habit* 479). Yet, a deeper study into O’Connor’s personal life reveals her fascination with psychology, particularly the works of Carl Jung. She records in her notes that she had read several of his books, including *Modern Man in Search of the Soul*, *The Undiscovered Self*, and books about Jungian psychology by Victor White and Josef Goldbrunner (Rowley 92). Several of these heavily annotated books were even in her personal library at the time of her death (Wehner 299). Her studies of Jungian psychology were not a replacement of her religion but a supplication to her understanding of “psychic realities” (qtd. in Beaven 19). However, literary theorists suppose that these very realities bleed into O’Connor’s religious reflections and subject her works to be viewed through psychoanalytical
persistence. Despite authorial objections and “given the nature of her work,” writes James Mellard, “what surprises one . . . is how infrequently a [psychoanalytical approach] has been taken” (628). By studying Jung’s theories on symbols and the unconscious shadow, O’Connor’s works reveal themselves to be highly psychological in nature and execution. In this paper, I will explore how Flannery O’Connor’s concept of grace closely parallels Carl Jung’s description of individuation, meaning the development of one’s self out of the unconscious in order to become a well-functioning individual. Although the concept of grace is spiritual and the concept of individuation is psychological, both act as forces intended to save mankind from the darkness of his own unconscious.

One of Jung’s greatest contributions to psychology is his study on archetypes and symbols. According to Jung, every person has, in addition to their unique “immediate consciousness,” a “collective unconscious” comprised of inherited “collective, universal, and impersonal . . . pre-existent forms and archetypes” (qtd. in Beaven 28). This is to say that every person unconsciously understands the same systems of symbols. Jung wrote about symbols that apply to all walks of life, including symbols of Christian theology. In his book *Aion*, Jung explains how Christ’s resurrection is symbolic for men’s struggle to overcome psychological failure and achieve individuation, or the highest state of being:

> The God-image of man was not destroyed by the Fall but was only damaged and corrupted, and can be restored through God’s grace. The scope of the integration is suggested by . . . the descent of Christ’s soul to hell, its work of redemption embracing even the dead. The psychological equivalent of this is the integration of the collective unconscious which forms an essential part of the individuation process. (*The Collected Works* 39)

This quotation explains how just as Christians view grace as redemption from fallen mankind, understanding symbols of the collective unconscious will lead to a process of individuation through overcoming the “fall” that every human experiences. While Flannery O’Connor would certainly not agree with the resurrection of Christ being purely symbolic, interestingly enough, her stories are filled with symbols and archetypes that Jung identifies as part of the collective unconscious. Thus, when her characters receive divine grace, it actually mirrors the same process that Jung describes in achieving individuation.
A prominent way that this symbolic acceptance of grace presents itself in O’Connor’s work is through her use of imagery of the natural world. Most of O’Connor’s characters have a moment of revelation when they are in pastoral settings, as opposed to urban environments. Carl Jung would not see this use of natural imagery as purely a rhetorical or religious device but rather as a reflection of the unconscious self. In *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, Jung argues that “all the mythologized processes of nature . . . are in no sense allegories . . . rather they are symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to a man’s consciousness by ways of projection—that is mirrored in the events of nature” (Jung 6). This means that O’Connor’s use of natural imagery represents man’s desire to achieve individuation, equivocal to redemption. In O’Connor’s speech, “Novelist and Believer,” she talks unfavorably about how the modern reader, “if he believes in grace at all, sees it as something which can be separated from nature” (*Mystery and Manners* 165). This is evidence of her view, concurrent with Jung’s, that nature coincides with moments of divine grace. A prominent example of this is O’Connor’s repeated use of the setting of forests in her fiction.

In the psychological and mythological world, trees are often symbolically equivalent to “growth” and “inexhaustible life . . . a symbol of immortality” (Cirlot 328). This principle is apparent in O’Connor’s “The Enduring Chill” wherein divine grace, as facilitated in a forested setting, is Asbury’s only means of overcoming his atheism and having a chance at receiving exaltation, an inexhaustible eternal life with God. In the story, the college boy, Asbury, moves from the booming New York City to his small hometown of Timberoo, which is surrounded by “black woods” (*The Complete Stories* 357). It is only after Asbury watches the urban train and “his last connection with a larger world . . . [vanish] forever” (358) that his true process of receiving God’s grace through the Holy Ghost can begin (382). Asbury’s deepest desire is to die and return to his atheist god, “Art” (373). Yet, when he moves to his home in the forest, his wishes are unfulfilled. He discovers that his sickness is not terminal, forcing him to live a “frail, racked, but enduring life” (382). In addition, he can no longer reject God because of the “enduring chill,” or the influence of the Holy Ghost that “descend[s]” upon him at the end of the story (382).

This setting of the woods as the scenery for divine grace is not unique to “The Enduring Chill.” This same religious imagery is found in “Parker’s Back.” Parker’s catalyst for change comes when he is in the fields and a tree
catches fire (O’Connor, *The Complete Stories* 520). He discovers the need for God in his life which drives him to literally impose God upon himself by tattooing a “stern Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes” on his back (522). The ending bestowal of grace and redemption comes as he is “leaning against [a] tree” (530). This parallels biblical stories wherein the need for divine salvation is also heavily based on the natural imagery of trees. The fall of Adam and Eve takes place in the “garden of Eden” (*King James Version, Genesis* 3.24), and forbidden fruit separates man from God. In the Bible, trees are not only associated with the fall of mankind, but also his redemption. At the end of Christ’s mortal ministry, he prays in a garden of olive trees and is thereafter nailed to a cross, often called “a tree” (Matthew 26–27). While O’Connor uses this symbol of the tree as a rhetorical device to reveal the fall and redemption of man, Jung would see this symbolism as a part of our collective unconscious, enabling us access to self-betterment.

In addition to the symbolic and unconscious symbolism of the forest, Jung also identifies stars as a symbol of psychological grace, or individuation. He wrote, “Astrology, like the collective unconscious with which psychology is concerned, consists of symbolic configurations: the “planets” are the gods, symbols of the powers of the unconscious” (*Letters* 175). This symbolism is matched in O’Connor’s “The Lame Shall Enter First” wherein a young boy, Norton, becomes obsessed with looking at stars through a telescope in order to glean divine inspiration and closeness to his deceased mother (*The Complete Stories* 479). He unfortunately never achieves this grace to which he aspires due to his tragic death, hanging himself from an attic beam in an attempt to reach the stars (482). Norton’s inability to understand the true mystery of godliness and reach his mother in a non-suicidal manner and his inability to become a fully mature, individuated adult could be attributed to his father’s neglect. Norton’s father, Sheppard allows his son to eat stale cake (446), focuses his attention primarily on Rufus, a boy from the streets, and discourages his son to believe in an afterlife (461). In fact, when Norton exclaims to his father that he has “found” his mother through the telescope, Sheppard responds, “You don’t see anything in the telescope but the star clusters,” denying the godliness of their symbolism (479). These combined factors stunt Norton’s proper understanding of grace and his process of individuation. Sheppard realizes all too late that his son hangs in a “jungle of shadows,” (a symbol that will be explored later in this paper), light-years away from
his intended “flight into space” and years away from his intended adult maturity (482). The stars, these beacons of divine light, connect both O’Connor and Jung in their interpretations of grace.

Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of O’Connor’s incorporation of Jungian psychology is not seen through archetypal symbols, but rather through the symbolic incorporation of Jung’s theory of “The Shadow.” Carl Jung’s theory fundamentally describes how every person possesses an unconscious collection of undesirable personality traits and behaviors. In his book *Psychology and Religion*, Jung writes, “everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is (93). In her own journal entries, O’Connor describes her fears and insecurities as a shadow that “obscure[s] the dreamy moonlit world of her faith” (Crank 126). In one opening prayer, she writes, “Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and my self is the earth’s shadow that keeps me from seeing the moon . . . what I am afraid of, dear God, is that my self shadow will grow so large that it blocks the whole moon” (qtd. in Crank 126). This quote shows the incorporation of the two previously mentioned Jungian theories: the divinity of astronomy, as she symbolizes God as the moon, and the realization of her inner “shadow” of unconscious undesirable traits—in this case her lack of divine adoration. For O’Connor, grace is the means by which she could expose and assimilate her own shadow.

This desire to expose the inner shadow is also reflected in the narratives of her short stories. Many of her characters, even the religious ones, are ignorant of their flaws. For example, Mrs. May in “Greenleaf” does not see the fault in her pride of socioeconomic standing, and Sheppard in “The Lame Shall Enter First” is so preoccupied with Johnson’s foot that he does not acknowledge his neglect of his own son. Jung would see these characters as not yet achieving individuation because they have not “recognized and dealt with [their] shadow” (Beaven 26). Therefore, some sort of confrontation or awakening must occur before the individual can progress.

For O’Connor, this individuation occurs as her protagonists, even the presumably righteous ones, encounter some sort of suffering. In order to receive grace or individuation, her characters pass through “physical, psychic, and spiritual pain from a variety of sources—disabilities, displacement, discrimination, disorientation, disease, death” which all can cause undesirable “shadows” at an unconscious level (Leigh 365). O’Connor
describes this human condition of suffering as “a shared experience of Christ” (*Habit of Being* 527). Here we see how just as O’Connor’s view of suffering reconciles Christ and man, Jung’s individuation is a representation of how the self and the shadow assimilate. In addition to human suffering, O’Connor’s assimilation with the internal shadow often comes through a confrontation with another character in the story, namely a devil-like figure.

The devil-like character in O’Connor’s stories serves as the vehicle by which grace can penetrate the hearts of the characters. A prime example of the shadow figure in O’Connor’s work can be found in the short story “Revelation.” Herein, Mrs. Turpin’s ignorance to her vanity drives her to put herself above Christ, “sometimes occupying herself at night naming the classes of people” (O’Connor, *The Complete Stories* 491). Her false understanding of deity “keep[s] her from acknowledging her shadow . . . the first step of a painful process of individuation which can lead to the realization of God and of the self in God” (Beaven 26). The means by which Mrs. Turpin faces unconscious is through the shadow character and devil figure, Mary Grace.

As Rebecca Rowley argues in “Individuation and Individual Experience: A Jungian Approach to O’Connor’s ’Revelation,’” the young “fat girl,” Mary Grace, is a reflection of Turpin’s ugly, unconscious (97). Although they differ in age and appearance, Mary Grace and Mrs. Turpin seem to share a deep psychological or spiritual connection, as evidenced by Mary Grace’s all-knowing glare. They are perfect strangers, yet Mrs. Turpin is convinced that “the girl [knows] her in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition” (O’Connor, *The Complete Stories* 500). In line with Jungian psychology, it is only through a confrontation with Mary Grace that Mrs. Turpin is exposed to her pride and “fallen nature”; Mary Grace calls her “an old wart hog” from “hell” (500).

However, Mrs. Turpin’s desire to rise out of her fallen state does not come immediately. When Mary Grace throws her human development textbook (499), this foreshadows Turpin’s future process of individuation, a further “development” into a self-actualized being. After her encounter in the doctor’s office, she spends several more hours thinking about Mary Grace’s words while eating dinner, lying down, talking to the hired help, and washing off the hogs. The image of “a razor-blacked hog . . . snort[s] into her head” and taunts her previously held social beliefs (502). This process of accepting grace, that concludes in her final vision of the procession of souls into heaven, mimics two aspects Jungian individuation: that individuation can often take
time and present itself through dreams. Her moment of revelation can be considered a spiritual awakening, but also a deeper understanding of her repressed desires and pride through facing the shadow of her unconscious.

Unlike “Revelation,” many of O’Connor’s stories feature a more sudden bestowal of grace. Jung’s theory of the shadow also accounts for why O’Connor’s initiation of the divine intervention, or start of the process of individuation, often comes in violent situations. According to Jung, “The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves” (*The Collected Works* 71). Thus, in order to achieve individuation, a person must face his inner shadow and assimilate it into the consciousness of his psyche, but if this process does not occur naturally, “the world” forces the act upon the man. This theory seems familiar to any reader startled by the religious violence in O’Connor’s stories. These encounters are unlikely, yet to O’Connor, they are situations of “realism” (*Mystery and Manners* 179). Realistically, her short stories do not depict the situations of daily living. The chances of a lost bull stabbing a farm woman (“Greenleaf”), or a tractor spontaneously catching a tree on fire (“Parker’s Back”), or an escaped convict murdering a stranded family (“A Good Man is Hard to Find”) are all quite small. However, these are the unique circumstances, necessitated either by “the world” or divine intervention that allow the characters to either receive grace or individuation.

The connection between Jung’s theory of the unconscious and O’Connor’s concept of grace can be summed up and illustrated through Plato’s myth of the Man in the Cave. The setting of the cave, which could be a symbolic form of natural imagery, provides the ideal setting for the individuals inside to learn about themselves. According to Simon Beaven’s interpretation, the characters in the cave cast dark shadows on the walls, a reflection of their grotesque inner selves. It is only by recognizing that these shadows come from themselves that the characters “turn around to discover the source of the light that casts the shadows” (Beaven 19). This would help them understand the larger reality in order to gain exaltation, or achieve individuation.

Ultimately, this seems to be the goal of both religion and psychology: to understand reality at large through a study of the smaller, interworking mysteries of the soul, which manifest themselves in both symbols and shadows.
A didactic argument as to whether psychology or religion provides a more correct interpretation of the universe is not as helpful as acknowledging the intimate connection between the two. By recognizing these similarities in O’Connor’s work, there comes a roundness of interpretation, because texts, just as humans, are rarely one-dimensional. To understand the psychology woven into Flannery O’Connor’s works is to have a deeper insight into the refining concept of grace that blankets the morals of her stories.


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