Poe's motif of memory utilizes the ability of recollection to exist in a nebulous region that are and are not the subjects they represent. Memories are shadows of reality in that they both represent and transcend reality. Therefore, "Ligeia" is not a tale of resurrection, it is a tale of memory in which the narrator uses his will to manipulate his memories to impose his vision on reality. As McEntee states, "this tale has its origins in old memories that the narrator decides to resurrect" (75). The narrator's selective memory informs his descriptions of Ligeia, demonstrating his obsession with an idealized construct of her character. The perversity with which he clings to this memory of Ligeia belongs to the narrator's possession over the Glanvill epigraph. The narrator's memory filters the events in the narrative, demonstrating the narrator's possession over the lady Ligeia. The final moments of the tale depict the narrator's realization that memory has taken possession of the narrator's history. The narrator realizes that memory filters the events in the narrative, which would necessitate a depiction of Ligeia that lies beyond his memory. The narrator's possession over Ligeia's history becomes evident in the final moments of the tale, when he sacrifices his second marriage to Lady Rowena for his memory of Ligeia. The narrator's possession over Ligeia's history becomes evident in the final moments of the tale, when he sacrifices his second marriage to Lady Rowena for his memory of Ligeia.
“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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A Journal of Literary Criticism

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Editors’ Note

Criterion is a volunteer student journal for Brigham Young University’s English Department. The staff members are not compensated in any way, but their hard work and dedication are vital in keeping this journal alive. Staff members have spent countless hours selecting papers to feature in this edition. They then worked closely with authors in an effort to perfect the papers for printing. We are extremely grateful to these students for helping us to create a journal in which we all can take pride.

With this in mind, we are excited to present our Winter 2015 edition of Criterion. The papers we present are drawn from Brigham Young University and other universities across the world. The topics range from Jonathan Swift to Dostoevsky to Thoreau and present thoughtful literary analyses of works and trends across both English and world literature.

It is difficult to accurately thank everyone involved in the process of creating a student journal. An enormous thanks to Emron Esplin, our faculty advisor, for his hard work and valuable advice. Thank you, as well, to members of the library staff who have answered our questions and provided many invaluable resources. We would also like to thank the writers who took the time to submit such excellent papers. Finally, thank you to the Brigham Young University English Department for all of the support we have received in bringing this journal together. Now, please enjoy this issue of Criterion.

Kristen Soelberg and Jenna Peterson
Urbanized Prostitution in Swift’s “Beautiful Nymph”

Tyler Moore

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, London’s market sphere was radically altered. Lands which had been once owned by the Catholic Church were now sold to the private sector, and the founding of private venture companies such as the Royal Exchange and the East India Company, as well as London’s strategic location on the Thames and its access to the North Sea, brought London a flood of new commercial opportunities. Paired with the demise of the feudal system and the emergence of a middle class, this spike in commerce pulled immigrants to the city in droves. In only seventy-five years, the population of London quintupled, jumping from 50,000 in 1530, to almost 225,000 in 1605. London was urbanizing, changing into a city that would eventually become one of the most important commercial capitals in the world.

As commerce and population rose, so did the ancient, infamous industry of windmills and red lights: prostitution. Southwark flourished as London’s prostitution center, as its location near the Thames’s only bridge provided accessible
service to citizens, travelers, and sailors alike (Shugg 292). Drury Lane became one of London’s worst slums, decried by Richard Steele as “ladyships...over which matrons of known ability preside” (Steele). One newspaper writes that hundreds of persons kept “houses of ill-fame,” brothels specifically designed for the prostitution of twelve- and thirteen-year-old girls (Simpson 366).

It seems impossible (and unnecessary) to try to prove that this prostitution was caused by urbanization. Prostitution is called the world’s oldest profession, after all, simply because it always exists, and the writings of Chaucer and Shakespeare clearly indicate that prostitution existed in England at least since the fourteenth century. Moreover, there are almost no statistics from the time period that could show the increase in prostitution from feudalist London to urban London.

Instead, it is more plausible to integrate London’s prostitution with its urbanization, into a composite urbanized prostitution. Prostitution exists as long as money exists, and as urbanization increased commerce in the city, prostitution increased with it. Urbanization amplified traditional prostitution, infusing it with urbanized qualities: increased exposure to venereal disease, increased demand for prostitution, poor work and living conditions, overcrowding. All these things together create a kind of urbanization-commerce-capitalism-mercantilism-prostitution amalgam.

Jonathan Swift’s poem, “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,” depicts a woman, Corinna, who has been forced into urbanized prostitution. The poem describes, with painful detail, how Corinna returns home from work, removing her clothing, her false teeth and false hair, and finally her false body parts, all in preparation for bed. While much of Swift’s poetry is satirical, this tragically unfunny poem is crucially unique to Swift’s canon, for it reflects the convergence of three moments in history: urbanization, commercialism, and prostitution. The poem, for Swift, is a plea to society not to undo these moments, but to abate them, by ceasing to idolize money above beauty and humanistic power.

This topic and thesis fill a unique position in the available literature regarding Swift, “Beautiful Nymph,” prostitution, urbanization, and commerce. Plenty of scholars have written around the poem. Louis Landa offers an indispensable article about Swift’s economic theories, in which he argues that Swift’s Irish heritage caused his anti-capitalism (74). Brean Hammond discusses Corinna’s dream, and how in revealing it to the reader, Corinna loses all sense of privacy (99). Sheila Shaw writes a scintillating article about how Corinna becomes dismembered in the poem, revealing her incompleteness as a human (1).
plenty of other scholars have provided essential articles that have helped form a context into which this paper fits. However, while these articles tackle the contexts around the poem, economics, urbanization, and prostitution, not one of them addresses how these issues interact with each other. This paper is therefore unique in addressing that convergence.

The first line of the poem contrasts urbanized London with the pastoral, rustic England of the past. “Corinna, pride of Drury Lane,” Swift writes, “For whom no shepherd sighs in vain” (ln. 1–2.) Swift is referring to the Renaissance lyrics of poets like Marlowe and Campion, whose personae pined over their loves with syrupy language and exaggerated blazons. These lyrics often exalted idyllic natural settings, like Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” whose speaker invites his love to the rocks, to watch the shepherds and their flocks, and to see the waterfalls (ln. 5–8). That is a very different scene from the city streets and dark alleys Corinna would frequent. So in writing this first line, Swift reveals the gap between the past and the present: urbanized London cannot enjoy the benefits of nature as does rural England.

Carole Fabricant has argued that this change, to Swift, is a cause for lament, not satire. “[Pastoral] destruction will mean the demise of poetry,” she attests, and the land will be “ravaged by the acquisitive and avaricious spirit characteristic of the new economy” (Fabricant 230). Satire or not, Fabricant’s essay illustrates the conflation Swift employs of two extremely different ideas, natural destruction and poetic welfare. “Beautiful Nymph” has little to say about poetic welfare, but Fabricant’s essay shows Swift’s tendency to compare seemingly unlike ideas: the poem in particular associates natural destruction with moral and physical well-being.

So prostitution and urbanization in “Beautiful Nymph” are inextricably linked, forming the aforementioned composite of urbanized prostitution. The first line mentions that Corinna is the “pride of Drury Lane,” one of London’s most dilapidated slums at the time (ln.1). She has “no cellar where on tick to sup,” referring to a tavern, part of the commercial district where Corinna could purchase dinner instead of making it (ln. 6). And finally, arriving at her home, she must climb “four stories...to her bow’r” (ln. 8). “Bow’r” is a sarcastic description, for Corinna’s home is not the leafy, rustic hollow of Spenserian poetry, but a tenement, driven four stories upward by population crowding in the city, likely undersized and falling apart, more of a shelter than a home. So Corinna’s prostitution is as physically destitute as it is morally destitute. If Swift is criticizing prostitution, therefore, he must in part be criticizing urbanization.
In large part, this urbanized prostitution was caused by commercialism, a term which here serves to compositely reference several aforementioned political and economic changes: the fall of the feudal system and the rise of a middle class, mercantilism, capitalism, and London’s development as a major port. Serfs left manorial estates and made middle-class incomes as merchants, smiths, artisans, and entrepreneurs. Mercantilists persuaded the state to seek wealth through foreign trade. Through the exercise of private business—capitalism—merchants encouraged open buying, selling, and trading of their goods and services. The sea trade, in particular, brought London more market opportunities than ever before. Commercialism, in short, refers to all of this, the economic zeitgeist which simply made London an easy place to make money.

Swift himself was openly against this commercialism. “Power,” he writes, “which...used to follow Land, is now gone over to Money” (qtd. In Fabricant 228; emphases original). This is clear nostalgia for the feudal system, in which estates and land were the only money, or they were at least the only way to have money. Robert Irvine writes that Swift’s comment “[figures] the moral priority of land that Swift sees as being eroded by the money economy” (972). Much of Swift’s distaste for commercialism stems from the fact that it sapped power from the feudal estates and turned it over to the merchant class.

Thus Swift’s protest of commercialism and his protest of urbanization are essentially grounded in the same idea. Urbanization pays no attention to land, as cities build upward, and population crowding requires using as little land as possible. The richest billionaires in Manhattan, with their skyscraper penthouses, effectively live above the land, in a much smaller square footage than a feudal palace would have occupied. Commerce and urbanization together consign power to money, not to land.

This ties back to urbanized prostitution in that the increased value of money is what creates a market for prostitution. Prostitution, as noted earlier, only exists so long as money exists; unpaid sex is just sex. Persons who prostitute themselves—and the pimps who control them—are doing so for the cash; if they did not want the money, they would not charge a fee. So once a society develops money, and once that money has an incentive power, then prostitution emerges. In a feudalist society, where markets were small, where capitalism was impotent, and where money was worth less than lineage, prostitution must have been minimal at best, limited because there was no market where exchange could occur.
The irony that “Beautiful Nymph” and Swift’s economics together illustrate is that although money had increased in power, Corinna herself is completely powerless. The poem is rife with moments of her subjection: she has “no drunken Rake to pick her up,” meaning that she cannot even lure a witless playboy into helping her (ln. 5). Nor can she buy dinner on credit at a “Cellar where on Tick to sup,” as apparently the money she makes is only enough for her living quarters (ln 6). Corinna is powerless at the hands of vermin: cats, who pee on her plumpers, rats, who steal her plaster, pigeons who pick her issue-peas, and dogs who fill her tresses with fleas (ln 59–64). Worst, perhaps, Corinna dreams of bullies, cullies, watchmen, constables, and duns, correctional men, who represent the oppressive forces that dominate Corinna every day, and dictate Corinna’s every move. The johns choose what she does because they pay for it; the pimps choose what she does because she belongs to them. Their money, ultimately is the power; in following it, Corinna is simply a pawn in the commercial game, always desiring that power, but never quite possessing it.

There is another power which dominates Corinna’s life, and which has invaded her physical body: syphilis. Swift never explicitly mentions the disease, but Corinna’s false and failing body parts are evidence of its presence. Her hair and eyebrows have fallen out (ln 10, 13). One of her eyes, and most of her teeth, are gone, she wears a bolster for her hip, and her skin is overrun with shankers, issues, and running sores (ln 11, 20, 28–30). Swift writes, hauntingly: “The Nymph, though in this mangled Plight/Must every Morn her Limbs unite” (ln 65–66).

Corinna is not just surrounded by sludge—the animals and the smells and the makeup and the tenement—she herself has turned into it. She is literally decomposing, as her body—the thing which once gave her power—falls apart, like a robot smashed into parts. So money comes to symbolize not just power, but decay, as Corinna’s syphilis is directly caused by her pursuit of the market. Her disease obstructs her physical humanity, in destroying her body, and her spiritual humanity, in preventing her from living as a normal middle-class citizen would.

So Corinna’s urbanized prostitution, for Swift, is not simply a new entity to be reckoned with in the eighteenth century, but a metaphor for decay caused by commercialism. Just as prostitutes’ bodies are sold for money, so is urbanization driven by commerce, as people move to cities in the hopes that they can sell goods and services to a wider market. So the magnetism of the market runs two spheres to decay: the city, which in urbanizing becomes dirtier, more crowded,
less safe; and women, who in turning to prostitution abandon their humanity, and contract diseases which corrode their bodies.

Swift’s poem excels because it merges these forces together. Apart, both cities and prostitutes will decay on their own; pollution does not come from prostitutes, nor does syphilis come from high immigration. But, magnetized by the pull of commercialism, the forces do come together, as crowded cities and new money form an inevitable breeding ground for urbanized prostitution. “Beautiful Nymph” matters because it shows the gravity between these three forces, how urbanization and prostitution, fueled by commerce, are driven to ruin.

What change does “Beautiful Nymph” encourage? A return to pastoral feudalism, even if that is what Swift wanted, is impractical and unnecessary. Plenty of cities today—Barcelona, New York, even modern London—exist in much better conditions than those of Drury Lane. City ordinances can fight pollution and overcrowding; law enforcement can curb prostitution. And though Swift would never believe it, commerce, as Adam Smith argued, ultimately improves the quality of life for the common man, as riches once held by a feudalist few can now be exchanged freely throughout the working class. If Swift’s poem is a plea for reversal, then it effectively fails, as cities around the world have improved without having to resort to feudalistic overhauls.

More resonant, instead, is the poem’s humanistic cry, the charge to avoid the worship of money to which the city and Corinna fall prey. It is not that Corinna and London participate in commerce, but that they exalt it above all else which fuels money’s destructivity. London, in relinquishing its pastoral landscape, could still be a beautiful city with strong markets, but because it prizes money over beauty, it allows tenements and sludge and overcrowding to run rampant. And Corinna, who prizes money over her body, precludes any future she could have in the middle-class market by allowing syphilis to infect and destroy her. Thus “Beautiful Nymph” presents a kind of pragmatic morality, rather than dogmatic: commerce alone is fine, but worship of that commerce, to the exclusion of beauty and of humanistic potential, yields total annihilation.
I regret that I have had neither the space nor the time to examine how much of a choice Corinna had in prostituting herself. Swift’s poem is notably silent on Corinna’s history: why she becomes a prostitute, and whether or not she can get out of it. With regards to my thesis, however, these questions are ultimately irrelevant, for Corinna is neither the villain nor the victim here; she is simply an example that illustrates the convergence of economic forces, an example which Swift uses to attack what he really esteems the villain: commercialism.


Memory is the essential motif with which to analyze Edgar Allan Poe’s macabre tale “Ligeia.” However, the critical discussion of this motif fails to interpret the depth to which memory influences the narrative and the narrator. Grace McEntee recognizes the importance of memory in “Remembering Ligeia,” but she interprets the various instances of memory, or lack thereof, merely as the narrator trying to assert dominance over his artistic muse. In “Unburying the Wife: A Reflection on the Female Uncanny in Poe’s Ligeia,” Elisabete Lopes focuses on memory only so far as it is influenced by the “uncanny.” While both pieces acknowledge memory, they lack an emphasis on memory’s pervading influence and do not explain the narrator’s orchestration and distortion of memory in order to serve his selfish desires. Additionally, this scholarly discussion does not reconcile the role of memory as it relates to the enigmatic Glanvill epigraph, which frames the entire story around the concept of the power of “the will” (Poe 310).
Poe’s motif of memory utilizes the ability of recollection to exist in a nebulous region that both represents and transcends reality. Memories are shadows of reality in that they both are and are not the subjects they represent. Therefore, “Ligeia” is not a tale of resurrection, it is a tale of memory in which the resuscitated Ligeia does not exist outside of the narrator’s memory. The narrator uses his will to manipulate his memories to impose his vision on reality. As McEntee states, “this tale has its origins in old memories that the narrator decides to resurrect” (75). The narrator is in complete control as he immerses the reader in the realm of his memories while filtering the events of the story. The narrator’s selective memory informs his descriptions of Ligeia, demonstrating his obsession with an idealized construct of her character. The perversity with which he clings to this constructed memory poisons his second marriage to Lady Rowena and leads the narrator to sacrifice her as a vessel for his memory of Ligeia. The final moments of the tale depict the narrator’s desperate struggle to project his memory of Ligeia into reality. Therefore, the mysterious and pervading “will” that dominates the Glanvill epigraph belongs to the narrator and his memories.

Knowing that the narrator’s memory filters the events in the narrative, the lack of information regarding Ligeia’s past indicates the narrator’s possessive nature. The story opens with the narrator professing, “I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia” (310). Considering his devotion to Ligeia, this lapse in memory is certainly strategic, particularly when contrasted with the general acuity of his memory throughout the narrative. The narrator omits any information regarding Ligeia’s past, even their meeting, which would necessitate a depiction of a Ligeia that lies beyond his memory. Later, the narrator realizes that he has “never known the paternal name of [Ligeia]” effectively wiping away Ligeia’s history (311). This selective presentation of information displays a view where the narrator’s presence completely dictates Ligeia’s identity; in essence, she does not exist outside of the conceptions of the narrator. In Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction, Charles E. May is correct in his assertion that “Ligeia seems to have no source in the real world” (62), because the narrator obscures all of her real world attributes in order to take possession of her identity. The reason the narrator gives for never learning Ligeia’s surname reveals a fundamental facet of his character: “Was it rather a caprice of my own – a wildly romantic offering on the shrine of the most passionate devotion” (311); this shows the narrator’s recognition of his propensity to idolize Ligeia. Enforcing this further, the narrator refers to Ligeia as “my Ligeia” (311), denoting his conceptualization
of her while creating a distinction between reality and the creature of his possession. At this point, his lack of memory serves to dehumanize Ligeia and propagates the idea that the narrator is not concerned with the real Ligeia but more with the figure of Ligeia he has created in his memory. Therefore, this constructed version of Ligeia becomes the object of the narrator’s obsession and the subject of the final revivification.

The narrator’s ideal description of Ligeia supports her position as a construct of his deformed memories. He begins by stating, “There is one dear topic, on which my memory fails me not. It is the person of Ligeia” (311). Emphasis is put on her outward, material characteristics which he describes with idealistic fervor. The narrator describes a “faultless” and “divine” figure, with “the beauty of beings either above or apart from earth” (312–313). This depiction serves to deify Ligeia and accentuates the narrator’s preoccupation with the idol of Ligeia and not her humanity. The narrator also imbues Ligeia with an unrealistic aura, “In beauty of face,” he says, “no maiden ever equalled her. It was the radiance of an opium dream” (311). The narrator desires to separate Ligeia from a tangible comparison and once again connects Ligeia to a state beyond reality. Studies in Classic American Literature, D. H. Lawrence’s famous criticism on American literature, states that “love can be terribly obscene,” later describing “Ligeia” as “a tale of love pushed over a verge” (69). As the narrator’s love for Ligeia falls into this obscenity, he recollects her with such idealism that he effectively erases her true existence, thus perverting his love into idolatry. He then takes this idol and lets it fester in his mind to the point of obsession. In remembering Ligeia, the narrator fixates on the perfected figure he has formed for his own personal worship, instead of the complex, human Ligeia.

After her death, the narrator clings to this phantasmagoric vision of Ligeia, even creating the bridal chamber as a shrine to offer devotion to this idol. The narrator claims that he “could no longer endure the lonely desolation of [his] dwelling” (320). Yet, he moves to a decrepit abbey in the “wildest and least frequented portions of fair England” (320). This shows a perversity in the character of the narrator and suggests that he does not desire to move on from Ligeia’s death. The narrator is not restricted by means nor connections, yet he chooses to remain in solitude to indulge his grotesque fantasies. Dorothea E. Von Mücke supports this perverse reading of the narrator when she states in her book, The Seduction of the Occult and the Rise of the Fantastic Tale, that “the story commences with an elegiac tone, with the narrator’s narcissistic enjoyment of his lament” (181). He would rather remain in a state where he can
maintain his melancholic memories, in a type of masochistic show of devotion to his departed idol. The narrator chooses an isolated location to facilitate his lamentations and then he creates the bridal chamber as an altar for his Ligeia-dominated psyche.

In the narrator’s recollection of the bridal chamber, the feebleness of memory that characterized Ligeia’s description is conspicuously absent. The narrator even goes so far as to state: “There is no individual portion of the architecture and decoration of that bridal chamber which is not now visibly before me” (321). The narrator does not need to modify his memories of the chamber because it is already his own creation and serves as a construct of and vessel for the outpourings of his troubled mind. The narrator creates a pentagonal room filled with spirit bearing images, such as the sarcophagi and the “pall-like” canopy of the bed, the arabesque drapery then covers the entire bedchamber like a shroud (322). These vessel-like images betray the narrator’s desire to capture, contain, and resurrect his memories of Ligeia. In his analysis of the bridal chamber, D. H. Lawrence comments there is “never anything open and real” (74). The stylistic nature of the bridal chamber mirrors the narrator’s stylization of Ligeia’s character. The avoidance of “the real” in the bridal chamber also denotes the narrator’s desire to escape from reality into the world of his memories. Von Mücke further highlights the connection between the bridal chamber and the narrator’s psyche when she notes that “the narrator associates this interior space with an entire list of mental abnormalities: a childhood perversity, institutionalized madness, melancholia with a vague hope of overcoming the grief, and finally the dreams of an opium addict” (188). Instead of creating a healing space, the narrator produces an environment filled with his mental unrest. The narrator creates his own world in order to accommodate his constructed memories of Ligeia. Lady Rowena’s fate is to reside with the narrator in this vessel of psychic perversity.

The memory of Ligeia to which the narrator willfully clings negatively influences his marriage with Lady Rowena and ultimately leads to her death. The narrator first introduces Lady Rowena as “the successor of the unforgotten Ligeia” (321). “Unforgotten,” the memory of Ligeia rules over and dictates this second marriage. Being described as a “successor” deprives Lady Rowena of her own identity; she becomes a character whose sole purpose is to maintain the space left vacant by Ligeia. Instead of focusing on his current marriage, the narrator remains absorbed with the memory of Ligeia. Even when faced with the unhappiness in his second marriage, he retreats tenaciously into his memories
of Ligeia: “My memory flew back...to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed” (323). The narrator’s fixation consumes him and slowly begins to consume Lady Rowena. As D. H. Lawrence states, “the love which had been a wild craving for identification with Ligeia, a love inevitably deadly and consuming, now in the man has become definitely destructive, devouring, subtly murderous. He will slowly and subtly consume the life of the fated Rowena” (96–97). The memory of Ligeia destroys their relationship by limiting Lady Rowena and captivating the narrator in a fantasy that drives him to sacrifice Rowena in order to create a vessel for his memories of Ligeia. Jack L. Davis makes a similar argument in “The Ethereal Ligeia” and claims that the narrator’s delusions cause him to murder Rowena. She dies under the oppression of the illusory Ligeia, and it is the narrator’s projection of Ligeia that consumes her identity: “There can be no reasonable doubt that the narrator has killed his real wife under the mad delusion that he is thereby providing a body for the imaginary Ligeia to inhabit” (175). However, Rowena serves as more than a mere body, despite what Davis suggests. The narrator views her as a sacrifice to the idol of Ligeia, and her body is a template onto which he can project his memories of Ligeia. The narrator erases the real Ligeia in his pursuit of the ideal, and it is this exact ideal that motivates him to destroy Lady Rowena.

Even before Rowena’s death, however, the damaging effects of Ligeia’s memory manifest in the bridal chamber. The narrator describes an unseen presence that administers a mysterious red liquid to Lady Rowena. A clear correlation between this red liquid and the death of the Lady reveals itself when the narrator remarks, “Immediately subsequent to the fall of the ruby-drops, a rapid change for the worse took place in the disorder of my wife” (326). D. H. Lawrence argues, “It is Ligeia whose presence hangs destructive over [Rowena]; it is the ghostly Ligeia who pours poison into Rowena’s cup” (97). While Lawrence correctly recognizes the presence of Ligeia, he fails to credit the narrator’s involvement in this scene. Earlier in the story the narrator confesses, “I would call aloud upon her name... as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her” (323). The narrator effectively connects himself with the idea of restoration, and, since the narrator is the only one who sees the anomalies in the bridal chamber, his presence must be essential for their existence. The narrator then describes the shadow that poisons the Lady as “the shadow of a shade,” harkening back to an image of Ligeia who “came and departed as a shadow” (325, 311) and eliciting a sense of her presence. Yet, it is merely a shadow, a vacant
imitation of her form, representing her figure but failing to encompass the reality of her identity. In actuality, this shadow is the narrator’s first attempt to project his memory of Ligeia into reality. Like his memory, the projection is weak and lacks a vessel, and so it can only materialize as a shadow—an empty representation. The presence is still strong enough, however, to poison Lady Rowena and ultimately cause her death. The narrator recognizes the deficiency in the presence and therefore uses the shadow to prepare a vessel for his next attempt at projection.

The role of the projected memory in Rowena’s death culminates in the final scene of revivification. While the narrator gazes upon the corpse of Lady Rowena he recalls that, “Then rushed upon me a thousand memories of Ligeia” (326). The actions of the corpse disturb the narrator as he ensconces himself in his own memories. His “sense of duty” pulls him out of his reveries and causes him to attend to the Lady Rowena, but she immediately falls back into the throes of death, and the narrator reverts to “passionate waking visions of Ligeia” (327). After he relapses into his memories, a certain commotion makes him aware of the revival of the corpse, but as soon as he abandons his visions to attend to reality, the renewal immediately ceases. “And again [he] sunk into visions – and again … again there reached [his] ears a low sob from the region of the ebony bed” (328). The use of “again” creates parallelism that connects his visions with the body on the bed, and as McEntee cleverly points out, it is the remembering that helps the “re-membering” of the corpse before the narrator (80). This connection portrays the process of restoration as a depiction of the narrator’s attempt to project his memories of Ligeia into reality. When he remembers Ligeia, the creature stirs; when he focuses on Rowena, the body becomes rigid once again. Unlike the shadow it occupied before, the memory now has a body to flow into, and as such, when the narrator broods over Ligeia while staring at the body, the memories are able to amass and eventually materialize. As Roy P. Basler notes in his book *Sex, Symbolism and Psychology in Literature*, the corpse changes gradually after each cycle of revivification “until finally his obsessed brain and senses perceive their desire-wish accomplished” (155). It is the gradual nature of the change that reveals the intention of the narrator. The way the narrator meticulously pieces this Ligeia together mirrors the process the narrator took to selectively construct the Ligeia in his memories. He uses selective memory to create the idolized version of Ligeia in his mind, while he uses selective projection to create the idol of Ligeia out of Rowena’s corpse. When the creature presents itself “trottering, with feeble steps,” instead
of recoiling in fear, the narrator scrutinizes the individual features of the appari-
tion as if affirming his accomplishment (329). In the final lines, the narrator
shrieks in triumph as he surveys his masterpiece of constructed memory: “Can
I never be mistaken – these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes – of my
lost love... of the Lady Ligeia!” (330).

The narrator manipulates his memories in order to impose his ideals on
reality. In the hands of the narrator, memory becomes a powerful tool used
to recreate the world in his own image. David Shields, in his article entitled
“Memory,” highlights the basic creative powers of memory. To begin, Shields
brings up the fact that “in Greek mythology, Mnemosyne, the goddess of
memory, is also the mother of the nine muses” (32). This correlation between
memory and muse reveals how memory is the source from which all creativity
flows. In “Ligeia” the narrator uses memory not only to construct his idealized
vision of Ligeia, but the entire story as well. Throughout the narrative, the nar-
rator often comes into conflict with reality, but he manipulates his memories
to subject the world to his own perceptions. It is just as Shields states, “Human
memory, driven by emotional self-interest, goes to extraordinary lengths to
provide evidence to back up whatever understanding of the world we have our
hearts set on—however removed that may be from reality” (32). Despite the
demands of reality, the narrator powerfully uses his memories to assert his con-
trol over the narrative in an impressive display of his will.

The Glanvill epigraph that Poe specifically composed to precede “Ligeia”
revolves around the nature and the power of the will, asking, “Who knoweth
the mysteries of the will, with its vigor?” (310). Though many scholars attribute
this power to Ligeia, an examination of the narrator’s manipulations shows that
it is his will that drives the story. The beginning of the epigraph states, “And the
will therein lieth, which dieth not” and then ends with, “Man doth not yield
himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of
his feeble will” (310). This is the first clue that suggests that the epigraph does
not refer to Ligeia, but rather to the narrator. For Ligeia, despite the “intensity
of her wild desire for life,” still dies (317). Juxtaposing her death with the final
lines of the epigraph highlights her complete and utter failure; immediately
after the Glanvill quote, the text bluntly states, in two perfunctory words: “She
died” (320). The narrator, on the other hand, is the only character in the story
who does not yield himself to death. The epigraph equates the power of will to
the power of God: “For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of
its intentness” (310). The narrator, for all intents and purposes, is the God of
this story. Since he is relating the events from his memory, he is in complete control of the narrative. He then manipulates his memories to display his powers of creation. By constructing the idealized Ligeia and the horrifying bridal chamber, he displays his role as the creator of the universe of the story. The way he murders Rowena to revive Ligeia correlates to his God-complex and his desire to assert his powers over life and death. The story is the narrator's creation, and he depicts himself with Godly attributes that connect him to the God in the Glanvill epigraph. The narrator's will pervades the story as he uses his memories to create his idealized reality.

The narrator's memory of Ligeia supersedes her own existence. The narrator never presents the reader with the real Ligeia, but instead perpetuates his perfected vision of her through his recollections. The narrator employs his selective memory to possess an idealized version of Ligeia and cleaves to this idol figure to the point that he destroys his second wife, Lady Rowena. In his second wife's dissolution, the narrator finds a vessel into which he pours forth the longing of his soul, filling her corpse with the visions of his fantasy in his desperation to merge his memories with reality. This reading challenges the preconceived notions surrounding the role of memory in “Ligeia” by revealing how the narrator manipulates his memories to become the god of his own narrative. Therefore, memory becomes the catalyst, not just a symptom, of the story. The narrator’s memory filters everything and motivates all of the actions in the tale. Critics who downplay the motif of memory miss its pervasive influence on the characters, especially as it establishes the presence of the dark and oppressive will of the narrator. In the end, the reader is left with nothing, only a memory.
Works Cited


Can There Be an Ideal Coffehouse?

John Milton as Proponent and Critic of the Public Sphere

Hadley Griggs

It’s 1711 in a coffeehouse in London. Glasses are clinking, pages are rustling, and the burbling of conversation fills the building. People are holding up newspapers, discussing current events, and debating politics. Even more people are pouring in, paying a penny for their coffees, and joining the conversation. Joseph Addison, a writer of the era, explained his relationship with the coffeehouses in his publication, *The Spectator*: “I appear on Sunday nights at St. James’s Coffee House, and sometimes join the little Committee of Politicks in the Inner-Room, as one who comes there to hear and improve” (Addison). This may be the character of what Enlightenment scholars have come to call the “public sphere”: an unprecedented venue for the exchange of ideas that was born in the Enlightenment era. Jürgen Habermas is a leading voice on this phenomenon, and in his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he explains the public sphere as hitting its peak in “late-seventeenth-century Great Britain” (xvii) and defines it as “the sphere of private people come together as a public . . . to engage . . . in a debate over the general rules governing relations” (27). He also emphasizes the role of rationality, highlighting “people’s public use of their reason” (27). In short, the public sphere was an arena in which people could come and reason through debates.
It has claimed to be the rise of free public discourse. But this discourse didn’t last; scholars also agree that the public sphere fell shortly after its rise. Habermas explains in his book that “tendencies pointing to the collapse of the public sphere are unmistakable, for . . . its function has become progressively insignificant” (4). Alan Gross suggests a reason behind this shift into insignificance: “It [is] imperative . . . that [the public sphere’s] history emphasize its unfortunate turn away from rational debate” (142). Thus, as the public sphere transitioned into something governed not by rational debate but by irrationality, it became a petty and insignificant part of Enlightenment discourse.

But the discussion on free public discourse in the Enlightenment era cannot be complete without including the work of John Milton, particularly his 1644 tract to Parliament, entitled *Areopagitica*. In this pamphlet, Milton argues for “his country’s liberty . . . within the context of the public realm” (Kolbrener 58). He lauds the strength of free public discourse and damns restrictions on that discourse. In short, he “deals with the whole problem of . . . intellectual liberty” (Kendall 445). This pamphlet came at the exact time in history when the public sphere was just starting to stretch its wings in England, and scholars are adamant when they say that Milton was “highly conscious” of his historical moment when writing (Loewenstein 77). Thus, *Areopagitica* can be used as a snapshot of England’s public sphere, or at least the early opinions on the sphere. But *Areopagitica*, as an optimistic and idealistic view of the public sphere, paints only half of the picture—it accounts nothing for the sphere’s crumble.

So if the public sphere did indeed crumble, then *Areopagitica* is just one piece of the puzzle of Enlightenment views on the sphere. Thus, an inclusion of other works will yield even more fruitful historical criticism of the Enlightenment’s public sphere—namely, the inclusion of Milton’s great 1667 epic, *Paradise Lost*. If we view *Paradise Lost* as it often is viewed—a political allegory, representational of Milton’s early-Enlightenment moment—we can see a second iteration of Milton’s view of the public sphere, and this one not so optimistic. *Paradise Lost* paints a picture of a public sphere that is riddled with corruption and emotion; this is a far cry from the idealistic sphere of *Areopagitica* and shows a sphere that, far before the peak of Habermas’s “late-seventeenth-century Great Britain,” was already showing signs of failure. Thus, a pairing of the two works—*Areopagitica* and *Paradise Lost*—reveals a more accurate view of the Enlightenment’s public sphere: a view that begins in 1644 with *Areopagitica’s* ideal discourse model, and ends in 1667 with *Paradise Lost’s* book II debate in Pandemonium. By using these two Milton works as windows
into Enlightenment sentiments, readers can see the English public’s original optimism, and then its early disillusionment, with the public sphere—and therefore the nature of even the budding, early seventeenth-century public sphere as deeply flawed.

Areopagitica and the Public Sphere

In 1643, Parliament passed the Licensing Order of 1643, which instituted several pre-publication censorship regulations on England—namely licensing and registration—and provided for the lawful destruction of offensive books and imprisonment of offensive writers. Milton was outraged by this order, and in 1644, published his response to it, entitled Areopagitica; A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing, to the Parliament of England. On the surface, this tract is simply a staunchly anti-censorship piece. But if we read Areopagitica as a promotion of the newly forming public sphere, it becomes more than an anti-censorship rant; it paints a clear picture of an ideal space for discussion and participation—in other words, ideal free public discourse, or the ideal public sphere. If readers pay careful attention to both the context and content of Areopagitica, they can see Milton’s belief in the public sphere.

First, the context of this pamphlet’s inception and publication illustrates Milton’s ideal of public discourse. He even calls attention to this fact in the first paragraph of Areopagitica: “The very attempt of this address . . . and the thought of whom it hath recourse to, hath got the power within me to a passion.” (“Areopagitica”). The fact that he saw a problem, in this case, with a government-instituted restriction; the fact that he wrote something in protest of such a problem; and the fact that he believed that Parliament would view the protest with reason and make the change—all of these point to Milton’s belief in England’s public sphere. For that, Milton says, is the very reason he is writing: out of a belief that free public discourse would allow him to have an effect on his country: giving others “recourse.” Thus, even the existence of Areopagitica was a testament to the optimistic view of the public sphere’s freedom of discourse.

A second testament to discourse is in the content of the pamphlet, and it once again highlights his optimistic belief in the public sphere. In the epigraph, Milton quotes Euripides to lay out in simple terms the theme of his piece. In short, he praises the ability to “speak free” (“Areopagitica”). Then, Milton specifically outlines the ideal structure of the public sphere: “when complaints
are freely heard, deeply considered, and speedily reformed” (“Areopagitica; A Speech” 33), and it is within this ideal structure that he says England resides—no doubt because of the rise of the public sphere as a means of sharing, considering, and resolving complaints. Indeed, scholars recognize Milton’s zeal as faith in the Enlightenment ideals: “Milton realized, especially after his first, excited foray into pamphleteering, that the [Enlightenment] was a revolution of words. . . . Areopagitica, with its sense of the vitalistic power of texts, confirms and defends the power of words” (Loewenstein 82). Thus, we can see Milton’s belief in the Enlightenment’s “revolution”: that the public sphere had created an even footing through words, where a free exchange of ideas could take place and contribute to the betterment of society.

In the content of Areopagitica, Milton also highlights another key component to free discourse: that of reason. Later in his work, Milton explains the origin of man’s reason: “For those actions which enter into a man . . . God uses not to captivate under a perpetual childhood of prescription, but trusts him with the gift of reason to be his own chooser” (“Areopagitica”). Milton uses the word gift to stress the beneficial nature of reason, but he does more than that by associating the idea of reason with God himself. By saying that God “trusts [man] with . . . reason,” it is clear that Milton believes firmly that reason is of God, and therefore is key to a good life on earth; it is an important part in the process of “[man’s] actions.” Thus, Milton wants readers to understand the structure of decision-making: first comes reason, then comes action. And when we integrate this idea into Milton’s ideal structure of the public sphere (share, consider, resolve), we can see that reason would have an important role in every stage. People must use their reason when presenting their ideas, when listening to others’ ideas, and when implementing solutions. In this model, man must use his reason at each step to “be his own chooser.” This idea—that reason should inform all actions—became a fundamental component in the Enlightenment, and specifically in the public sphere; scholars consistently extol reason as the driving force behind the public sphere (Habermas 27; Gross 142). And clearly, for Milton, reason is an essential component—if not the essential component—in his ideal public sphere.

When we take a step back and look at this image as a whole, the painting of the public sphere that Milton paints in Areopagitica is optimistic and idealistic. This idealism shows that the public, or at least the educated thinkers like Milton, saw this sphere as a promising development—full of the potential to recognize faults in society and work to reach reasonable, informed consensuses.
He sees a sphere championed by free public discourse and reason. It is a public sphere in which he believes that one man’s well-reasoned pamphlet can make a significant change.

**Paradise Lost and the Public Sphere**

Milton publishes *Areopagitica*, and twenty-three years pass. He has time to watch the public sphere unfold, has time to watch the coffee shops fill up, and has time to write. Then, in 1667, he publishes arguably his greatest work, *Paradise Lost*—a twelve-book epic poem that has been praised by critics since its publication. Viewing this work through the filter of the public sphere adds a new layer to previous criticism and can shed a completely different light on the Enlightenment’s public sphere. The end of book I finds Satan raising a building, called Pandemonium, for a “great consult” (I.798). Milton describes the building as being “like a Temple,” with “pillars overlaid/With Golden Architrave,” and a “Roof [of] fretted Gold” (I.713–717). So lavish is Pandemonium that neither “Babylon / Nor great Alcairo” can rival its beauty. Once Pandemonium is finished, Satan summons all of his demons for a discussion of their plans. Then, “hundreds and . . . thousands” of demons pour into the building (I.761). Book II opens with all of the demons inside Pandemonium, preparing to participate in the “solemn council” by presenting their plans (I.755). Finally, Milton can really dive into his discussion of the public sphere.

This scene already creates an environment that is a far cry from the accessible, even humble, Enlightenment-era coffeehouses. Whereas in reality, coffeehouses were a single-penny investment, Milton paints Pandemonium as a palace of wealth. This stark contrast brings to light one of Milton’s great tools: inversion, or a reversal of the normal order. In the case of book II, this reversal is clear: what is about to transpire is a debate, but it is in hell. This setting is far from what readers would expect—in fact, they would expect free public discourse to be carried out in a place like heaven. Milton uses inversion as a powerful tool throughout the epic. But while readers can interpret this inversion to show the opposite of what is happening in their own world, scholars like Neil Graves ask us to look at it differently: “In his daring epic Milton . . . aligns paradoxically incongruous characters. The effect is so uncomfortable that most critics have ignored or dismissed the resulting implications . . . and have thereby failed to perceive Milton’s subtle criticism” (174). In short, Graves
is describing Milton’s ability to invert readers’ expectations and thereby show shocking parallels between the two things he is comparing. Thus, the effect of Milton’s “paradoxical” alignment in the epic is to highlight the striking similarities between two seemingly disparate ideas: for instance, the idea of what is happening in hell, and the idea of what is happening in reality. This inversion, then, can inform our reading of Paradise Lost’s debate scene and can allow us to view the epic not as a depiction of just what is happening in hell, but as a depiction of Milton’s opinions of the real public sphere, years after Areopagitica. Because before, in Areopagitica, Milton was trumpeting the cause of the exchange of ideas—in book II of Paradise Lost he is playing a different tune.

On the surface, it is easy to identify similarities between the debate scene in Paradise Lost and the debate structure Milton puts forth in Areopagitica. For instance, the idea of discourse is still present in the work. Satan opens the discussion with the command: “We now debate. Who can advise may speak” (II.42). What follows in book II is the account of this debate. Four demons offer solutions: Moloch demands war (II.51–105), Belial recommends inaction (II.119–225), Mammon asks for peace (II.229–283), and Beëlzebub suggests infiltrating Earth (II.310–378). It appears that discussion happens, that the demons weigh out each possibility, and that they decide on the best solution. Even the trappings of democracy are present in the scene: “With full assent / They vote” (II.388–89). With these superficial details, we could argue that Milton is still depicting an ideal public sphere, and that he believes that free open discourse is alive and well during his contemporary moment.

But as the demons press on in their speeches, it is very clear that book II’s public sphere discourse is flawed in two major ways. First, there’s the issue of reason and rationality, and we can see this issue with each demon that presents a plan. Satan is the first to speak; but before he begins, Milton describes his emotional state as thus:

Satan exalted sat, by merit raised
To that bad eminence; and from despair
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue
Vain War in Heav’n, and by success untaught
His proud imaginations thus displayed. (II.5–10)

In this excerpt, we see Satan relying on a wide array of passionate emotions: “despair,” being “beyond hope,” “insatiability,” having “proud imaginations”—all in four lines. Satan is allowing these emotions to cloud his reason, and thus
color his speech. Perhaps even more important is Milton’s use of the word *beyond*: Satan is “*beyond* hope” and “aspires / *Beyond* thus high.” The word *beyond* is a word of extremity, connoting the idea of pushing something further. In this language of extremity, where is the “gift of reason” that Milton talked about in *Areopagitica*? Satan’s speech isn’t borne of reasoned information and rationality—it springs out of his “despair” and shows him losing his grip on that rationality.

This lack of reason can be seen in several other demons as well: especially Moloc and Belial. When Moloc speaks “for open War” (II.51), Milton says, “His look denounced / Desperate revenge” (II.106–107). Rather than describing Moloc as wanting simply to act, Milton uses the word *revenge*—a passionate word. And he pairs with that passion a word of impulse: *desperate*. Desperation does not produce rationality; it is, by nature, an emotion of rashness and extremity. Therefore, Moloc, too, is allowing his rage to overtake his reason. And alongside Moloc comes Belial. Milton again indicates a lack of reason when he describes Belial’s speech as “words clothed in reason’s garb” (II.226). This line is perhaps the clearest critique Milton gives of the debate—that while those speaking have every semblance of reason about them, it is nothing but a façade. Thus, when applied to the public sphere, we see Milton’s view, and it is not an optimistic one: that participators in the public sphere’s discussions are not relying on “public use of their reason,” as Habermas put it. They instead are relying on a public use of their *passion*. When passion, not reason, is behind every argument, public discourse becomes less of a venue for discussion and more of an arena for shouting. Therefore, this lack of reason is disrupting the very core of the public sphere’s free public discourse.

But as the scene stretches on, Milton brings up more issues with the public sphere than simply its reliance on passion, rather than reason; his second critique has to do with the very foundations of free speech. It starts when Beëlzebub rises to present his plan to the awaiting audience—because unbeknownst to the listeners, Beëlzebub’s plan was actually prepared by Satan: “Thus Beëlzebub / Pleased his devilish Counsel, first devised / By Satan” (II.378–380). Beëlzebub speaks about traveling to the Earth and tempting man, all under the guise of presenting this plan as his own invention, while Satan looks innocently on—appearing not as a tyrannical leader, but as a democratic guide. Finally, when the plan is delivered, Satan leads another show of democracy: “With full assent / They vote” (II.388–89). And, of course, the demons vote in favor of Satan’s plan, presented from Beëlzebub’s lips. Satan then begins to speak, praising the
demons for their great implementation of reasonable democracy: “Well have ye judged,” he says, “well ended long debate” (II.390). But there was no debate; Satan had engineered the meeting to seem democratic, but he knew the outcome all along. He knew his plan was going to be the choice. Everything was completely predetermined. And this bleak lack of democracy brings the question: how, in this public sphere, can Areopagitica’s free speech even exist? When the ideal public sphere is based on “when complaints are freely heard, deeply considered, and speedily reformed,” how can this perversion of that structure even be called free public discourse? The fact is this: it is not true public discourse. The picture that Milton paints in Paradise Lost is a harsh commentary on the nature of free speech in the public sphere: the sphere is dominated by one central figure that claims to be using the free public discourse model, but is truly just a tyrant. And perhaps the most crushing aspect of the model in Paradise Lost is the fact that the audience has no idea; the demons believe they are involved in the decision-making process of their world, when really their discussion was just wasted breath. Whether Milton intends Satan to represent Parliament (who, after Areopagitica was published, rejected Milton’s plea to repeal the Licensing Order of 1643), a despotic ruler, or a controlling dogma, this final piece shows Milton’s cynicism: that free speech, in his Enlightenment-era moment, is an illusion.

Looking at the public sphere now through the lens of Paradise Lost, we can see the whole picture. What started out as hopeful idealism in Areopagitica turned into disillusionment in Paradise Lost. Whereas before, we could only see the “intellectual liberty” (Kendall 445) of the public sphere, now we see “the unfortunate turn” (Gross 142) into irrationality and futility. Thus, Milton’s critique shows a public sphere marred by passionate zealousness and predestination; Paradise Lost is evidence that the writers and philosophers, in just twenty-odd years of the early Enlightenment, were not as impressed with the function of the public sphere as they had been in the beginning. It had already begun to show its flaws, even before its peak.

Conclusion: John Milton and a Glimmer of Hope

The pairing of Areopagitica and Paradise Lost gives readers a more accurate window into the Enlightenment, and by using these, we can chronicle
something of the rise and early fall of the public sphere. *Paradise Lost* leaves a cynical view of public discourse because while critics like Habermas argue that the public sphere hit its peak in the eighteenth century, Milton’s picture depicts a failure in as early as 1667. And what’s more, we are even left with a bleak outlook on free speech in general. We see a world in which people may *think* they are voicing their opinions to an eager audience, when in fact the entire conversation is rigged.

But is there a glimmer of hope? I argue that there is. Because while Milton’s *Paradise Lost* depicts a public sphere in complete disarray, there is one thing that may hint that Milton had not given up: the fact that he wrote the epic poem in the first place. If he still saw value in presenting a critique of his historical moment, perhaps that shows he still thought that the exchange of ideas had value. Perhaps, instead of a complete failure, Milton thought that there was still a chance that the world could be changed. So while coupling the works may provide the most accurate representation of the Enlightenment’s historical moment, perhaps the coffeehouses were not as hopeless as *Paradise Lost* makes them out to be. It could still be that sitting in a coffeehouse in London—with its clinking glasses, rustling pages, and burbling conversation—yielded some fruitful interaction after all.


Famously known for returning ethics to the field of theory, Emmanuel Levinas often looks to great works of literature to illustrate his philosophies. One text Levinas uses consistently is Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, as Levinas quotes it directly in *Ethics and Infinity* (98). The relationship between Dostoevsky and Levinas has been written about for years, and many scholars have expanded on this connection between Levinas’s theories and *The Brothers Karamazov*, particularly in regard to Levinas’s theory of the “face.” However, few articles have been written about Levinas’s “face” in *The Idiot*. This is surprising as Val Vinokurov argues, “almost every one of his [Dostoevsky’s] novels is really a series of face-to-face encounters” (23). If we accept Vinokurov’s claim of the “series of face-to-face encounters,” then *The Idiot* should display Levinas’s principles as well. In fact, of Dostoevsky’s works, *The Idiot* may be the best representative of Levinas’s theory of the “face.” By reading *The Idiot* through Levinas’s theory of the “face” and the responsibility it entails, we see that not only does Prince Myshkin perfectly embody the
execution of Levinas’s theory, but the continued violation of this theory drives the plot of the novel. As a result of this continued violation, Myshkin becomes a victim of others violating the “face,” as he is placed in a position in which, no matter what he does, he violates the “face,” becoming a perpetrator himself.

In order to understand how Myshkin fulfills Levinas’s theory of the “face,” we must first understand the theory. Levinas describes the function of the “face” as, “it requires me. The face looks at me, calls out to me. It claims me. What does it ask for? . . . responsibility for the other” (Alterity and Transcendence 163). The “other” is “the right of the other man. A right with respect to which I am never released! Hence infinite responsibility for the other” (127). Furthermore, “The first word of the face is the ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me. However, at the same time, the face of the Other is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all . . . I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call” (Ethics and Infinity 89). In its simplest terms, the “face” of another person, of an “other,” requires complete accountability, care, and concern for it. The “face” shows that we have an ethical responsibility for “others,” hence the “Thou shalt not kill.” The “face” is also a vehicle for vulnerability, in its “destitut[ion].” It is an undeniable responsibility for “others” and a requirement of morality; it is the epitome of putting “others’” needs above your own. In the “face” we see the basic humanity of people and their fundamental rights as humans.

In an 1896 letter to his friend Maikov, Dostoevsky describes an idea he has for an upcoming novel, which would become The Idiot; “This idea is—to portray a wholly beautiful individual” (Mochulsky 344). If we extend this idea of applying Levinas’s theory to Dostoevsky’s novel, this would mean Myshkin is the perfect embodiment or fulfillment of honoring Levinas’s “face.” Vinokurov argues that Myshkin’s “relationship to the face has more to do with emotion” (24) than anything else, and as we move through The Idiot, we will see that Myshkin is always obligated to the “other,” and it drives and controls his every action.

Dostoevsky immediately establishes Myshkin’s fascination and obligation to “faces” in Myshkin’s first encounter with the Epanchin women. In her article, “The Face of the Other in Idiot,” Leslie A. Johnson observes that Adelaida immediately senses within Myshkin an ability to “see” and that Myshkin can teach her to “see,” too (869). The direct line reads, “I don’t know how to look . . . The prince did learn to look abroad” (Dostoevsky 58). Mrs. Epanchin immediately bristles, wondering what Adelaida means by being unable to look, “What
do you mean, you don’t know how to look? You have eyes, so look” (58). Mrs. Epanchin misses the intuition Adelaida feels in Myshkin and his ability to look beyond the physical and see within an individual—to be called by and obligated to someone’s “face.” Johnson claims, “what the prince has come to teach is a way of seeing the human face” (869). His purpose in the novel is to exemplify what honoring someone’s “otherness” is—what the true honoring of the “face” is. Furthermore, Adelaida is surprised when Myshkin suggests she paint a physical face, as “Had the prince suggested a landscape, a still life, even a portrait, then Adelaida, that artistic daughter of good family and amiable disposition, would have known how to see it. The genre would have specified the tropes by which she could thematize and appropriate her subject” (869). Myshkin, by delving deeper into a physical face and its meaning, rather than just staying surface level, brings an entirely new perspective to the Epanchins, one utterly different from what they are used to.

However, as Adelaida cannot approach painting in the new manner Myshkin suggests, she asks several questions, “How should the face be portrayed? As just a face? What sort of face?” (Dostoevsky 63). Surprisingly, rather than describing the physical features of the face he proposes, Myshkin describes the emotions and thoughts of a man before his execution, quite different from what Adelaida was expecting (64–66). Myshkin's description shows that, once again, he sees beyond the physical into the humanity of a person. Myshkin does not describe a detached, merely physical representation of a person, but rather the emotional, humane state of a person. Vinokurov supports this idea in his article “The End of Consciousness and the Ends of Consciousness: A Reading of Dostoevsky's The Idiot and Demons After Levinas” by saying, “Myshkin is someone who only truly loves persons as manifestations of an iconic meta-face and not as concrete and individual faces” (25). Vinokurov reemphasizes what we already know from Levinas, that Myshkin sees beyond a person’s physical face to the humanity that requires infinite respect and obligation from other humans. Myshkin does not focus on the physical but on the “meta,” what cannot be seen and what is beyond the physical face. Myshkin always sees and feels obligation toward Levinas’s “other,” and “holds himself responsible before it” (Johnson 869). At one point, Myshkin states he knows the Epanchin girls’ faces, refusing to expound when asked for details, so we do not know if he refers to the physical or metaphysical face (Dostoevsky 66). However, from his insights with Adelaida and our knowledge of Levinas, we can determine that Myshkin has
already seen into the humanity and hearts of the Epanchins, seeing their “faces” and feeling obligated and called by all of them to put their needs above his own.

An ideal example of Myshkin’s devotion to the “face” and the “other” is his story with Marie. While no explicit references to the “face” appear in this section of the novel, Myshkin’s actions align with his later treatment of Nastasya Filippovna and fulfilling the role of honoring Levinas’s “face” and “other.” Myshkin begins his love of Marie with a kiss, telling her “that I had kissed her not because I was in love with her but because I felt very sorry for her, and that from the very start I had never regarded her as guilty but only as unfortunate” (70). Myshkin’s actions stem from his moral obligation and pity to the “other” he sees in Marie. This total obligation and answer to a call from Marie’s “face” cause Myshkin to speak with the children and change their attitude toward her. The children no longer tease and abuse Marie, instead they visit her while she is sick “to embrace and kiss her” (71). Myshkin’s love and obligation to Marie, although it stems from pity, inspires the children, and because of their kindness, Marie “died almost happy . . . [even though] till the very end she considered herself a great criminal” (73). Myshkin sees Marie’s true “face,” and with the help of the children, fulfills the obligation her “otherness” deserves. In addition, after this story, Myshkin reveals that because of his experience with Marie and the children he is “very attentive to faces now” and proceeds to describe each of the Epanchin daughters’ personalities through their physical faces, further demonstrating his perceptiveness of the “other” through the objective face (75).

However, the most significant and influential “face” relation in *The Idiot* is between Nastasya Filippovna and Myshkin’s strong reaction to her portrait. Of her portrait, Myshkin says, “An astonishing face!” ‘And I’m convinced that her fate is no ordinary one. It’s a gay face, but she has suffered terribly, eh? It speaks in her eyes, those two little bones, the two points under her eyes where the cheeks begin” (36). Myshkin’s assessment of Nastasya’s physical face is unique because he discerns her character and her life through it, unlike any of the other characters in the novel. Adelaida sees the power of Nastasya’s beauty while Totsky, General Epanchin, Rogozhin, and Ganya all see opportunity in Nastasya’s physical face, but Myshkin is the only one who sees who she is through her objective face, seeing her “face” (80). Later at a party that evening, Myshkin says to Nastasya, “I saw your portrait today, and it was as if I recognized a familiar face. It seemed to me at once as if you had already called me” (168). Again, we see the return to Levinas in Myshkin’s words and in his actions.
Later in the novel, Myshkin again recounts his initial encounter with Nastasya’s portrait, “I was looking at her face! That morning, in her portrait, I already couldn’t bear it” (582). At the end of their conversation, Evgeny Pavlovich wonders, “what was the meaning of this face that he [Myshkin] was afraid of and that he loved so much” (583–4). In Nastasya Filippovna, Myshkin sees the violation of the “face” she has endured by the men in her life, and he feels the pull and obligation of Levinas’s theory to help her. Myshkin sees beyond the physical attributes of Nastasya to her right as a human for proper treatment. In Levinas’s terms, Nastasya’s “face” calls Myshkin to his responsibility, and he responds by offering her a way out of depravity through marriage, even when he does not know her besides her portrait. Myshkin stays true to that promise to Nastasya, even as he acknowledges that he does not love her but only pities her (168; 589).

The final event of the novel that shows how Myshkin embodies Levinas’s theory of the “face” is Myshkin’s reaction to Nastasya’s murder by Rogozhin. Levinas says, “The first word of the face is the ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me” (Ethics and Infinity 89). The first function of the “face” is to call us to humanity, to resist the taking of life. When this fundamental principle of the “face” is violated, Myshkin’s health relapses (613). In fact, immediately upon seeing Nastasya’s dead body, Myshkin begins “trembling” and Rogozhin asks if he is likely to have a “fit” associated with his “disorder” (607). Being so closely associated with murder, with such a violent violation of the “face,” Myshkin cannot recover. Even while he is with Rogozhin, Myshkin’s legs cease to function “from fear,” he says (608). The violation of the “face” literally makes Myshkin physically and mentally unwell.

Unfortunately, because Myshkin’s character is the attempt “to portray a wholly beautiful individual” and the embodiment of Levinas’s theory of the “face,” it means that every other character in the novel is not in this “wholly beautiful” state. Characters’ constant violation of “faces” and “otherness” drives the plot of The Idiot, eventually placing Myshkin in a situation where he becomes a violator of the “face” himself. The first instance of this occurs with Totsky’s violation of Nastasya’s Filippovna’s “face” in her youth. Nastasya’s forced position as Totsky’s mistress sets up the plot for Totsky and General Epanchin wanting Ganya to marry Nastasya so Totsky can marry Alexandra. Nastasya is only seen as a problem to be solved, instead of an “other” that demands infinite responsibility and respect. Not only is Nastasya’s “otherness” violated by Totsky, it is
additionally violated by General Epanchin, Ganya, and Rogozhin through their endless deal-making and auctioning of her, as in the party scene at Nastasya’s (41; 49; 160–161). None of these men actually want Nastasya for who she truly is but for what they can gain from her. Rogozhin claims to love her, but it is really only dangerous passion, as Myshkin comments, “He’d marry her, and a week later he might well put a knife in her” (37). Nastasya is merely a bargaining commodity for them and a means to get what they want.

This shuffling of people in and out of marriage proposals creates a breeding ground for the violation of the “face,” as few of these people actually want to be married to their chosen partners. For example, Ganya entangles Myshkin in his desired relationship with Aglaya. As Aglaya observes to Myshkin, “he knows and yet hesitates; he knows and still asks for a guarantee. He’s unable to make a decision on faith . . . he wants me to give him hope in me” (84). Rather than wanting to be with Aglaya because he loves her, Ganya simply wants a way out of his engagement to Nastaya Filioppovna because he has come to despise Nastasya. By disrespecting his responsibility to Aglaya’s “otherness,” Ganya creates an environment in which Myshkin and Aglaya become friends, allowing Myshkin and Aglaya to form the bond that sets Myshkin up to fail in upholding his perfect “otherness” to all. If Myshkin had not come to know and love Aglaya, he would not have to choose between Aglaya and Nastasya.

Furthermore, although Nastasya “did not consider herself guilty of anything,” the impact of Totsky violating her “face” when she was younger shows itself in her inability to follow through with Myshkin’s offer of marriage (49). Despite her assertions of innocence, Nastasya leaves Myshkin twice, once minutes before their wedding, and with Rogozhin multiple times. Rogozhin tells Myshkin, “she thinks it’s impossible for her to marry you, because she’d supposedly disgrace you and ruin your whole life. ‘I’m you-know-what,’ she says. To this day she maintains it herself.” Rogozhin goes on to say, “She ran away from you then, because she suddenly realized how much she loves you. It was beyond her to be with you . . . So she wants to marry me out of spite” (215–216). Nastasya herself states, “I’m not worthy of him [Myshkin]” in her conflict with Aglaya (570). Despite her attempts to distance herself from her past, Nastasya cannot allow herself happiness with Myshkin because she does not believe herself worthy enough to be with him, despite the fact that she is the victim of her “otherness” being violated. She is sincerely convinced of her unworthiness of Myshkin and cannot imagine someone honoring her personhood and humanity because all she has experienced is violation from the men in her life, as demonstrated
by the party scene earlier in the novel, where the men basically auction her off. Nastasya’s inability to commit to Myshkin drives the plot because it dictates where Myshkin goes (he follows her all over Russia) and influences with whom he interacts, as seen with Nastasya’s correspondence with Aglaya.

Nastasya actively tries to destroy any possibility of her “face” receiving its proper respect by writing to Aglaya, urging Aglaya to marry Myshkin as an attempt to remove Nastasya’s opportunity for happiness (568). Nastasya’s inability to accept Myshkin because of Totsky violating her “face” as a young woman causes Nastasya to push Aglaya and Myshkin’s relationship, hoping that once Myshkin is married Nastasya can be free of the possibility of her own happiness. However, Myshkin’s obligation to Nastasya while being pushed toward Aglaya places Myshkin in a position where he must violate a “face”—either Nastasya or Aglaya’s.

The crucial moment comes when Aglaya, determined to assert herself in the situation, visits Nastasya Filippovna’s home. At the end of their confrontation, both women look to Myshkin, expecting him to make his choice between the two. Myshkin, however, does not see a choice between two women who love him, but the never-ending call of one “face” in particular.

But he may not have understood all the force of this challenge, even certainly did not, one may say. He only saw before him the desperate, insane face, because of which, as he had once let slip to Aglaya, ‘his heart was forever pierced.’ He could no longer bear it and with an entreaty and reproach turned to Aglaya, pointing to Nastasya Filippovna: “It’s not possible! She’s . . . so unhappy!” (571)

Seeing his betrayal in choosing Nastasya’s “face” over Aglaya’s in Aglaya’s reaction as she “covered her face with her hands,” Myshkin immediately tries to comfort Aglaya, but he is stopped by Nastasya clutching him from behind (572). Nastasya then occupies all his attention in her hysterics, “stroking her dear head and face with both hands, like a little child” (572).

However, Myshkin cannot endure his having to choose one “face” over another, and we see his turmoil in his conversation with Evgeny Pavlovich. In his conversation with Evgeny, we see, “The prince is simply profligate toward the face, and thus unable to live with the politics, the agony and violence of choosing between faces” (Vinokurov 28). Myshkin cannot live with his having to make a choice between two “faces”—his inability to honor both Nastasya and Aglaya at the same time. Myshkin consistently insists that Aglaya will “understand . . .
She’ll understand that it’s all not that, but something completely, completely different!” (582). Myshkin again references his marrying Nastasya Filippovna because “she wants it” and how he “couldn’t bear Nastasya Filippovna’s face” when the two women demanded he choose between them (582). Furthermore, Myshkin claims he wants to love both of them, again insisting that Aglaya will “understand.” Asking, “Can she really still have the same face as when she ran out?” (583). Here we see Myshkin’s vain belief that other people respond to the “face” as he does, and Evgeny censures him by saying, “Aglaya Ivanovna loved as a woman, as a human being, not as . . . an abstract spirit” (583). Myshkin cannot understand Aglaya’s love because he does not love selfishly. He only loves in obligation and responsibility to the “face” and “other,” whereas those around him continually violate the “face” he honors consistently.

Myshkin also sees his betrayal in Nastasya’s “face” as he continues to meet, in an attempt to repair the damage after choosing Nastasya, with the Epanchins. “He noticed, however, that Nastasya Filippovna knew and understood only too well what Aglaya meant to him. She did not say anything, but he saw her ‘face’ at those times when she occasionally caught him, in the beginning, on the point of going to the Epanchins”” (590). This section is particularly significant because Dostoevsky places quotations around “face,” indicating its significance. Myshkin is not just seeing Nastasya’s physical face here, but her deep unhappiness that he cannot fully honor her “face” while trying to honor Aglaya’s, as well. By trying to be fully responsible and honorable to both “faces,” Myshkin ends up unfulfilling both.

The last and ultimate violation of the “face,” as discussed earlier, is Rogozhin’s murder of Nastasya Filippovna. Referring to the Hans Holbein painting discussed in the novel, “The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb,” Johnson claims this painting “prompts us to ponder not only the meaning of the mortal body, but the meaning of a violated face as well” (868). While Nastasya’s body does not physically resemble Christ in the brutality of the wounds, her “face” and “otherness” have been just as cruelly abused. This abuse drives the plot of the novel as Nastasya becomes the figure around whom all the characters’ lives center. Without the violation of her “face” by Totsky at the beginning of her life, much of the novel would never have happened.

Myshkin’s failure to save Nastasya may cause some readers to question whether Myshkin even embodies the honoring of the “face” through Levinas’s terms, or if Dostoevsky succeeds in “portray[ing] a wholly beautiful individual” (Mochulsky 344). However, what Dostoevsky shows us through Nastasya’s death
is that Myshkin is attentive to the needs of the “face” to the very end. Myshkin stays with Rogozhin, now a murderer, in order to keep Rogozhin calm throughout the night, “caressing and soothing” his physical face until they are discovered (Dostoevsky 611). Even after the tragedy of Nastasya’s death, Myshkin still answers the call of the “face” and the “other” before him, Rogozhin. Rather than leaving Rogozhin and reporting him to the police, Myshkin stays with him all night to “quietly touch his head, his hair, stroke it and stroke his cheeks” (611). Myshkin even loves the murderer’s “face.”

Through Myshkin and his acts in *The Idiot*, we see the fulfillment of Levinas’s theory of the “face,” as it calls Myshkin to his supreme responsibility to humanity. Although Dostoevsky wrote *The Idiot* before Levinas’s theory, they both seem to be asking similar questions about humanity and our obligation to each other. Through his character of Myshkin, Dostoevsky encourages us to look continually outward and answer to the humanity of the people surrounding us, seeing them as they truly are and the level of respect they deserve. By applying Dostoevsky’s and Levinas’s principles, we have the potential to become perfectly whole and beautiful, just like Myshkin.
Works Cited


During the Romantic period in England, manners meant more than just please and thank you; in the modern sense of the word, they referred to one’s manner rather than politeness, relating to how people conducted themselves, their character, air, and sincerity of address. In the late Romantic period, this notion of character and self-presentation was at the heart of social interactions and was key to issues of rank and breeding. Toward the end of the period, the concepts of good breeding and gentility were broadening to include those born to lower social strata, and gentility was no longer synonymous with gentleman. Jane Austen engages with these changes and the importance of manners, and collectively, “[her] novels are a fascinating repository of the manners of ‘polite’ society” (Byrne 299). In Austen’s time, manners were increasingly a set of attributes that could be learned—and were learned—by
lower classes, creating tension with the upper classes who saw this learning of manners as pretentious and wished to maintain class distinctions. However, because manners could be learned, they could also be lacked. In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, Austen explores how the lack of manners, or the possession of false manners (lacking sincerity and putting manners on for show) in the place of true, good breeding and gentility could cost upper class people the full deference due their position. Rank and class were still the most important criteria for demanding respectful treatment, and regardless of their level of sincerity or kindness, upper class people were still seen as the leaders of society. But Austen also shows how possessing sincere manners could distinguish such societal leaders and earn them more than grudging civility. This sincerity was key to the manners of both the lower classes and the upper since sincere manners were something that could be learned by upper class people or by lower class people hoping to move up in the social ranks. However, good manners still had a particular relationship with the upper classes because good manners were both an expectation and a quality that increased their social position. In *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen shows the increasing class tensions of the time by demonstrating how anyone can learn or lack manners, and she explores the idea that sincerity is the key to true manners, which was a quality of particular importance for the upper classes in maintaining their social distinction.

Though social hierarchy was still upheld, the boundaries between classes began to blur in Austen's time, causing both the concern of the upper classes and an increase in the importance of manners as a means for maintaining the social order. Hitherto, the social and financial situation to which a person was born determined their prospects for life. Keymer explains, “Rank placed primary emphasis on lineage, implying that social status was more or less inalienably conferred by birth and descent” (387). However, this idea was beginning to change in Austen’s time. The Romantic period was a time of revolutions and nationalism and the challenging of social, religious, and political orders, and the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth was a time of increasing social mobility. There were still strongly demarcated classes, however, and this social mobility only increased the snobbishness of the middle and upper classes and the outcry against lower-class people coming into money and having the audacity to move upward (White 58). Margetson writes that the “leading aristocratic families . . . were born to rule and lead” (10), while the lower classes were born to follow, and the upper and middle classes struggled to maintain this hierarchy. Manners suddenly became more important in relation
to this hierarchy: they both maintained and thwarted class structures. Manners maintained class distinctions through “downward condescension” (Keymer 394), or the refusal of the upper classes to mix with the lower class, but they also thwarted the hierarchy because of lower class people with “upward ambition” (Keymer 394) who learned manners to achieve higher social status. This “upward ambition” can be seen with the changing concept of gentleman: the classic “country gentleman” of the late Romantic Period was defined in part by his manners and good breeding (White 51). This was a change from earlier times when birth and class were the only factors for defining a gentleman. This shift was the beginning of a fundamental change that only passed fully in the Victorian period—the notion that a man of any birth could make himself, be educated, learn manners, and achieve the title of gentleman, as Charles Dickens illustrates in Great Expectations (Umunc 13). In Austen’s works, the stigma toward such men with “upward ambition,” who made their fortunes through trade or business without owning land, was still very much present in the upper and middle classes, but it would decrease over the coming decades (Umunc 12; White 54). With these changes in social mobility and the potential to move upwards, manners became increasingly important to the upper classes as a way of maintaining their distinction. Margetson describes how “gentlemen aspired to an ideal type of manhood—serious, conscientious and morally impeccable . . . it was necessary to . . . uphold the honour of a gentleman . . . [for] only thus could the ruling aristocracy survive the rising tide of democracy,” despite how “these virtues [were] so rigorously imitated by the middle classes” (90). With the title of gentleman and the adjective genteel beginning to be used more loosely, and with the manners and virtues of the upper class being imitated by the lower ones, it was crucial for an upper class person to maintain class distinctions through morality, sentiment, and manners, or else have their position threatened by the rising tide of the lower classes trying to imitate them.

With so much imitation by the lower stratum and an increasing importance put on maintaining classes, an increasing distinction was drawn between real and fake manners, and the very definition of manners began to change. In the late 1700s, manners could refer to “character of mind and general way of life; morals; habits to ceremonious behaviour; [or] studied civility” (Byrne 297). Increasingly, manners referred to quality of character and address rather than adherence to formalities, and good breeding and manners were nearly synonymous terms. Moore muses that manners were “characteristic of good breeding,
a very necessary knowledge,” because “one of inferior parts, with the behaviour of a gentleman, [was] frequently better received than a man of sense, with the address and manners of a clown” (18). Writing in the late 1700s, Moore shows that in Austen’s time, (a) manners and superiority by rank did not necessarily go together, (b) manners were required to be received with the respect due an upper class person, and (c) manners were a sign of good breeding and of being educated properly. Austen’s portrayal of Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, an arrogant and wealthy man with connections to the aristocracy, illustrates these ideas well. Because he is rude, Mr. Darcy loses the respect he otherwise would be granted because of his high social status; his poor manners undermine his social status because good manners are required for him to fully come into that status. Through Mr. Bingley, Mr. Darcy’s less wealthy but friendlier companion, Austen shows how someone with lower birth could be treated with more respect because of a difference in manners. Mr. Darcy’s character alone also demonstrates this because he changes his manners, which shows that manners could be learned, resulting in increased respect from Elizabeth and the Gardener.

Reflecting the changing times, Mr. Darcy’s transition from ill mannered to well mannered demonstrates how manners were learnable. Byrne argues that, though politeness was a part of “a code of behaviour definitive of gentility, [it was] a code that could be learned . . . It was not predetermined by one’s status at birth” (303). Darcy’s status at birth, his looks, and his wealth are enough to grant him the initial respect of the people at the ball where he is first introduced. Initially, he “drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features . . . and the report . . . of his having ten thousand a year . . . and he was looked at with great admiration . . . till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity” (Austen, *Pride* 7). After this turn in popularity, it is to Mr. Bingley that people turn with admiration, despite his inferior fortune. After Elizabeth forms a strong negative opinion of Mr. Darcy at the ball, and after she calls him out on his lack of gentlemanly manners when he proposes to her and complains of the “inferiority of her connections” (Austen, *Pride* 165), Elizabeth is amazed when Mr. Darcy does learn good manners. Unaware of the personal struggle Mr. Darcy went through following her reprimands and the shame he experienced when she pointed out his lack of manners, she thinks, “his behaviour, so strikingly altered,—what could it mean? . . . Never in her life had she seen his manners so little dignified, never had he spoken with such gentleness” (Austen, *Pride* 214). Elizabeth sees clear changes in him, a new humility
in the place of pride, gentleness in the place of rudeness. Though she does not understand the reason behind the change, it is evident to the reader that Mr. Darcy has changed for her, thus demonstrating that learning manners is possible, even by someone as ill mannered as Mr. Darcy.

Since manners could be learned, it followed that even a lower class person could also learn to be genteel, but Austen illustrates how the upper classes were reluctant to acknowledge this truth and the increasing social mobility through the character of Robert Martin in Emma. Mr. Knightley, Emma's friend and a well-respected gentleman in the neighbourhood, sees Robert Martin as possessing “manners [with] sense, sincerity, and good-humour,” and a mind with some “true gentility” (Austen, Emma 41), despite Robert Martin being only a yeoman farmer. Emma, the spoiled and headstrong though well-meaning heroine, rejects this view of Robert Martin, seeing in him only the coarseness and vulgarity she expects to see in a farmer. She tells Harriet, “I did not expect much; but I had no idea that he could be so very clownish, so totally without air. I had imagined him, I confess, a degree or two nearer gentility” (Austen, Emma 19). Emma is deliberately harsh because she envisions Harriet as a nobleman’s daughter and wants her to marry into that rank, but she reveals a conflict of mind in her speech. She says she did not expect much, and she did not—without giving him a chance she had labelled Robert Martin as beneath both her own and Harriet’s notice. But in saying she had hoped to find him closer to gentility, Emma suggests that even she acknowledges gentility as something that can be neared, if not obtained, by a farmer. She suggests that a person like Robert Martin can achieve a state of not seeming clownish and exhibit a certain air and degree of manner. Though she acknowledges that someone of a lower class could approach gentility, she does not allow herself to see any of the gentility that Mr. Knightley observes in Robert Martin because of Martin’s rank. With this downward condescension, Emma upholds a system of social immobility and reflects the same fear of the rising lower class that English gentry felt in Austen’s time. In contrast to Mr. Knightley, who over the course of the novel is cast as a picture of the ideal gentleman and an expert in manners, Emma is reluctant to acknowledge virtue in the lower class, making an exception only for her pet Harriet. Keymer explains that Emma “has no time for Knightley’s unsettling idea” (393) that Robert Martin might possess gentility because she does not want to face the unpleasant truth that the gap between herself and those below her is shrinking.
With this unsettling new ability of the lower classes to reach a state near gentility, the difference between true and false manners became more important in the late Romantic period. Formality and real manners, and good breeding and true good breeding, are set apart by sincerity. Austen shows this through characters who conceal cold or ambitious hearts with seemingly good manners and through upper class characters who lack good manners, despite their official good breeding.

Mr. Elton from Emma is a clear demonstration of how manners can be put on for show and be completely lacking in sincerity. Like Mr. Wickham in Pride and Prejudice, whose “manners recommended him to everybody” (Austen, Pride 71) but who then nearly leads the Bennets and the Darcys into disgrace, Mr. Elton also faces a loss in regard when his seemingly good manners are revealed to be superficial. At the ball at the Crown, Mrs. Weston asks him, “‘Do you not dance, Mr. Elton?’ to which his prompt reply was, ‘Most readily, Mrs. Weston, if you will dance with me’” (Austen, Emma 213). It is thus a shock to everyone when in response to Mrs. Weston suggesting Harriet as his dance partner he replies hypocritically, “Miss Smith!–oh! . . . You are extremely obliging . . . but my dancing days are over” (Austen, Emma 213). His feigned surprise and his refusal to dance with Harriet is an extreme insult to her, with no better motivation than pride and spite. Mr. Elton was willing to dance with Mrs. Weston, his social superior, but not someone below his status, and especially not Harriet. His manners are merely a tool he uses to gain social status, to consort with higher-class individuals, and (in the case of Emma) to court them.

In the reverse situation, Lady Catherine, Mr. Darcy, and Miss Bingley are all portrayed as lacking manners despite their high social position. Miss Bingley, the haughty sister of Mr. Bingley who pursues Mr. Darcy, is repeatedly rude to Elizabeth and insults her openly to Darcy. When she meets Elizabeth again at Pemberley, she and Mrs. Hurst acknowledge her “only by a curtsey” (Austen, Pride 227). Austen provides an important character foil from Miss Bingley when she describes how the awkward pause that follows this introduction was “broken by Mrs. Annesley, a genteel, agreeable-looking woman, whose [endeavor] to introduce some kind of discourse proved her to be more truly well-bred than either of the others” (Austen, Pride 227). Mrs. Annesley’s friendliness and genteel manner are described as reflecting a better breeding than Miss Bingley or Mrs. Hurst, despite that the simple description of “genteel” suggests that she was not in fact a noblewoman herself, but only possessing the manners of one. Truly well-bred suggests that the other two were only officially better
bred—born to a better class with better education. In contrast to the noble-women, Mrs. Annesley’s expression of welcome is a sign of true good breeding. Her sincere welcome demonstrates that she cares that a visitor be properly included into a company, and her concern over the awkward pause demonstrates compassion.

Like Miss Bingley, Lady Catherine is often impertinent despite her title and education; in contrast to her nephew Darcy who is reprimanded by Elizabeth, her poor manners go entirely unchecked. When Lady Catherine announces loudly to Darcy that she had repeatedly told Elizabeth that she should practice on her piano-forte in the servants’ room, “Mr. Darcy looked a little ashamed of his aunt’s ill-breeding and made no answer” (Austen, *Pride* 149). Because they belong to the same family, and because manners are a reflection of status and are thus tied to family, Mr. Darcy is embarrassed because of his aunt in the same way that Lydia’s transgressions of behaviour affect the Bennets’ very “importance [and] respectability in the world” (Austen, *Pride* 198). That the same embarrassment can be felt by Elizabeth and Darcy because of their family members, and that someone as insignificant as Mrs. Annesley can be better bred than Miss Bingley, shows that “true good breeding comes not from birth, station or social nuance, but from the heart” (Byrne 304). Austen expresses this idea in her novels, and characters who act from the heart like Mr. Bingley and Mr. Martin are rewarded with good fortune in the end.

Though someone of a lower class could be more truly well-bred than someone of a higher class, upper-class characters like Lady Catherine that are still respected despite their rudeness demonstrate how rank and birth were still primarily important for garnering respect. The transition and flexibility of the definition of gentleman was still underway for Austen, and both manners and rank were required to truly be a gentleman or gentlewoman. In Highbury, Emma feels that the Coles, who “were a very good sort of people . . . [and] were very respectable in their way” (Austen, *Emma* 134), were nonetheless displaying arrogance by not inviting Emma’s family to their party since the Woodhouses were of a superior rank. Despite their manners and growing wealth, the Coles are only respectable in their own way, and are not of the superior families in the neighbourhood. They are still subject to the whims and the social rules laid down by the families with older lineages, older money, and more land. So while manners can elevate the Coles to be near the superior families, and while Robert Martin can be seen as respectable despite his status and Mrs. Annesley as better bred than her higher born companions, manners still had a unique
significance to those of the upper classes of society, despite the blurring boundaries of the time.

In these novels, Austen portrays manners as both a responsibility of the gentry and as something that is necessary for the upper class to fully realize the positions they were born to. When Emma makes fun of Miss Bates at Box Hill, Mr. Knightley reprimands her severely and impresses on her the importance of being kind to the less fortunate. He speaks of it as a responsibility of hers as a leading social figure. Mr. Knightley explains,

were she your equal—but, Emma . . . she is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to . . . Her situation should secure your compassion . . . to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her . . . and before others, many of whom . . . would be entirely guided by your treatment of her. (Austen, *Emma* 246)

Emma is privileged by wealth and family name, and therefore she is one of the leading social figures in Highbury. Mr. Knightley tells her that with this superiority comes a responsibility toward those less fortunate. He reprimands Emma just as harshly as Elizabeth reprimands Mr. Darcy, but he presents Emma's poor manners as a responsibility and is hard on her for her lack of compassion. It is because Miss Bates is not Emma's equal that Mr. Knightley sees the insult as so cruel: Miss Bates has lost what she once had and already must suffer. In a way, pity is a luxury of the fortunate, and here, it is Emma's responsibility to have pity because she is a leading social figure and because her actions guide how the others act. Instead, Emma acts in pride and thoughtlessness: her security in her own position causes her to dismiss the hardship of Miss Bates. Mr. Knightley tries to make Emma feel with the sincerity and compassion that are required for true good breeding.

As Lady Catherine and the Coles demonstrate, socio-economic status was the most important factor for social status, and thus it was not necessary for an upper class person like Emma to ever check her rudeness because she would be deferred to anyway. However, to be genuinely respected and to fully realize their high status, sincere manners were necessary for the upper classes. Though Emma was publicly rude to Miss Bates, it is only the similarly ranked Mr. Knightley who is able to criticize her and explain to her the importance of good manners because the others must defer to her as a superior personage regardless of her actions. The importance of sincere manners in the realization of social status is demonstrated through the commonly disliked Mrs. Elton.
Despite Mrs. Elton's wealth, she is not well received in Highbury because of her impertinence and informality with the respected families. Emma describes her indignantly as “a little upstart, vulgar being” (Austen, Emma 181): vulgar for her lack of manners that deny her the full realization of a position she might have held in that society. In contrast, Emma’s friend Mr. Weston is seen as respectable, despite the fact that, like Mrs. Elton’s, his family was a newly wealthy one and could easily have been seen as belonging to those with pretentious “upward ambition.” Mr. Weston’s sincerity and his “warm heart and sweet temper” (Austen, Emma 8) allow him to realize the position that Mrs. Elton is unable to achieve. Moore writes that “a certain dignity of manners is absolutely necessary, to make even the most valuable character either respected or respectable in the world” (149). Without those manners, though someone like Mrs. Elton might be respected by those below her because of her money, there is little genuine feeling behind the acknowledgement.

A similar scenario plays out at the ball where Mr. Darcy is first introduced. Before his bad manners are revealed, Mr. Darcy is treated with more admiration than Mr. Bingley, showing that Mr. Darcy had the potential for higher respect by the people at the dance and that it was his rudeness and pride that stopped him from fulfilling that potential. When Mr. Darcy later proposes to Elizabeth, again lacking manners while doing so, she tells him that his mode of address did not inspire her refusal, it only “spared [her] the concern which [she] might have felt in refusing [him], had [he] behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner” (Austen, Pride 165). Mr. Darcy’s lack of gentlemanlike manners, though he is a gentleman in the economic sense, causes a lack of concern in Elizabeth; it is an exchange of a lack of compassion for a lack of compassion. In the reverse circumstance, after Darcy’s manners improve and he then meets the Gardiners, his sincerity of manner inspires genuine respect in them rather than mere deference. Mr. Gardiner exclaims that Darcy’s manner and way of treating them “was more than civil” (Austen, Pride 219), surpassing mere politeness. Mr. Darcy never needed to learn better manners, but Mr. Knightley would have told him that he had a responsibility to learn them. Margetson writes that “The English upper classes . . . had a strong sense of duty towards those less fortunate than themselves, and it was this that enabled them to survive and prosper and to earn the respect of the common people” (10). This duty, this responsibility, was both reciprocal and kind: kind to those less fortunate, and reciprocal because, by taking the time to be well-mannered, the upper classes received the sincerity
that they gave and earned the true respect of the commoners, solidifying their positions as societal leaders.

Through *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen paints a portrait of the manners and class concerns of the late Romantic period, but she uses the qualities of compassion and sincerity to do so. It is the possession or lack of sincerity that accompanies displays of courtesy that either brings Austen's characters together or tears them apart. In these works, Darcy’s improvement shows the affection that can be inspired by good manners, including Elizabeth’s own, and that manners could be taught and learned; Robert Martin shows that even a farmer can become respectable through genuine courtesy, and anyone can rise nearer to gentility through their manners; Emma’s tale demonstrates the responsibility that comes with being socially superior and the option to take part in the unspoken deal of sincerity for sincerity. Manners could make those of the lower classes respectable and allow them to mingle with those above them at a time of blurring social boundaries, but for the upper classes manners held a greater ethical weight: they were markers of gentility of mind and compassion toward the less fortunate and were something that the lower classes could recognize, appreciate, and follow. A lack of sincere manners is what divided characters like Elizabeth and Darcy initially and is what caused Mrs. Elton to be seen as an upstart while Mr. Weston was welcomed. It is the presence of true good will beneath spoken words that led to the social recommendation of well-loved characters like Mr. Bingley, Mr. Knightley, and later, Mr. Darcy. Though she wrote in a time when wealth and lineage were still very important, Austen’s works demonstrate a lesson that is yet being learned today: that integrity of character, virtue of mind, openness of heart, and sincerity in everyday courtesies are what bridge distances between people and create an equality of spirit.


In “A New Reading of Capital,” Fredric Jameson maintains that “Utopia . . . is the radical disturbance in our sense of history and the disruption whereby we approach a thought of the radical or absolute break with our own present and our own system” (13). Utopian thinking, that is, though it may be bound up inexorably with failure, with impossibility, acts as a “radical disturbance” in our reified, our governed and limited, method of thinking about what is and what must eventually come about. According to Jameson, then, it is not necessary that such images of utopia be in any way certain or inevitable, but rather that these images allow the individual, if only for a moment, to “approach” the “thought of the radical or absolute break with” his or her “own present” and its “own system”; utopian thinking provides the individual with a space, no matter how fitfully rendered, outside of the total system, outside of the prescribed manner of thinking about, of experiencing, and of interacting with the world. In allowing the individual to imagine such a “radical break” with the present socio-economic “system” and all of its values, utopian thinking not only posits a space which could exist outside of inequality, alienation, and scarcity; it also, by representing that which is absent from the present and its system, provides the individual with the ability to critique a present which has become reified,
which has become ostensibly natural, inevitable, and thus immutable. For as Ernst Bloch reminds, “the essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present” (12), a critique of what is, which functions by imagining what could be and what ought to be.

Because of its continued presence in high school and college classrooms, Henry David Thoreau’s Walden remains one of the most engaging and relevant representations of the construction of such a utopia and of the method of utopian thinking more broadly. For Thoreau’s time at Walden Pond, with its ostensible disconnection from industrial society and its political, social, ethical, and epistemological values, with its attempted spatial rejection of the various forms of oppression and alienation inherent in such a mode of production, awarded him the ability to think of a “radical break with” his “own present,” one of increasing industrialization and the advent of capitalist modernity, and, to borrow from Heidegger, this society’s dominant mode of “revealing,” of experiencing, observing, understanding, and interacting with the natural and social world. Most certainly, such a moment apart, no matter how fitful, awarded to Thoreau the ability to better explore his own social system, the mode of capitalist production in which he found himself, and its ideological values. In Walden, Thoreau writes a new and qualitatively better outside, while still situated within the determination of the inside; he presents a radically new way—without the proliferation of alienated labor and human and natural exploitation—of living within and thinking about the world itself.

In order to fully understand the utopian impulse at work in Walden, however, and in order to apply such a method of thinking to our own late capitalist period, Thoreau’s text must be understood as both a product of and a response to the early stages of the emergence and ascendancy of capitalist modernity, of industrialization and all of its corresponding values and modes of social intercourse. As Marx maintains in The German Ideology, the replacement of one mode of production with another always results in a corresponding shift in social, political, ethical, and even epistemological values and practices. That is, with this productive shift, this moment of revolution, “in place of an earlier form of intercourse, which has become a fetter, a new one is put, corresponding to the more developed productive forces and, hence, to the advanced mode of the self-activity of individuals” (87). With the advent of modern technology, then, and with the profound shift in the mode of production itself, an entirely new form of “intercourse,” whether social or ethical, political or poetic, was established in Thoreau’s lifetime. Most certainly, according to Heidegger, the
emergence of modern technological processes, of industrialization—of the railroad, for Thoreau—ushered in with it an entirely new mode of “revealing,” of observing, experiencing, and interacting not only with the natural world but also with society itself.

As Heidegger maintains in “The Question Concerning Technology,” “Technology is” what may be thought of as “a way of revealing” (103). Technology, that is, as Heidegger so conceives of it, reveals the world itself, including its inhabitants and resources, to the individual in a particular manner; it alters his or her way of experiencing and observing that by which he or she remains surrounded. This epoch of modern technology, of the increasing permeation of industrialization into the productive process and into social life more generally, reveals the world in a certain manner; it carries with it prescribed ways of experiencing, observing, and interacting with nature. According to Heidegger, the form of “revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such” (104). Modern technological processes, then, grounded of course in industrial capitalism and its various superstructural expressions, prescribe to the individual a way of looking at the natural and social world as a mere means to an end, as a thing to be “challenged” and harnessed, to be mastered. It must be remembered that Thoreau himself is responding directly to the prescribed mode of “revealing,” of social and economic “intercourse,” put forward by such an epoch. What marks Thoreau’s thought in Walden as utopian, then, is his desire to break radically from such a mode of “revealing,” from such a systemically prescribed and reinforced way of experiencing the world and, more importantly, its inhabitants within this dynamic stage of capitalist development. For through such a mode of “revealing,” Heidegger maintains, even human beings come to be seen as instruments, as mere things which must be mastered and manipulated.

Such a method of “revealing,” of course, may most obviously be observed in Marx’s theorization of alienated labor in his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844; here, Marx, writing in much the same world-historical moment as Thoreau, maintains that, under capitalism, men and women come to be seen and treated as mere instruments within the process of production. According to Marx, “labor,” for this worker-commodity, remains “external to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his [or her] essential being; . . . in his [or her] work, therefore,” the laborer “does not affirm . . . but denies” him or herself. Thus, the worker, revealed as a mere instrument by first stage capitalist
industrialization, remains not “content but unhappy.” For in this productive process, the individual “does not develop freely his [or her] physical or mental energy but mortifies [the] body and ruins [the] mind” (74).

Most certainly, Thoreau’s retreat to Walden Pond represents a “radical break” with the modern “mode of revealing” and with the alienation and exploitation which it prescribes and by which it functions. In Walden, Thoreau imagines a moment in which individuals will be able to break from the modern mode of “revealing,” and—instead of selling themselves to the alienating occupations which sustain industrial capitalism—in which individuals will be awarded the opportunity to “develop freely” their “physical” and “mental energy.” Thus, by creating for himself a space away from industrialization and the alienated labor which it produces and by which it is continually produced, Thoreau becomes able to critique a system, a determining capitalist totality, of which he remains a part. In addition, he becomes, even in the fragile and ultimately failed state of apartness awarded to him by Walden Pond, able to imagine an outside to the inside; he becomes able to visualize and concretize a “radical or absolute break with” his “own present,” and thus to imagine a disalienated and dereified world to come. For the “millions,” Thoreau explains, “are awake enough for physical labor, but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life.” According to Thoreau, “To be awake is to be alive,” and yet he has “never yet met a man who was quite awake” (2001). Thoreau’s excursion to Walden Pond, then, and the utopian ruminations which come from it, directly negates the alienation, the “mode of revealing,” of thinking about others and about nature as mere instruments, inherent in the industrial capitalist mode of production.

For Thoreau, it is the societal system itself—that is, the anti-Walden, the inside as opposed to some sort of radically disconnected and negative outside—which keeps men and women from being properly “awake,” from “effective intellectual exertion,” from a “poetic or divine life.” Certainly, such an assertion and accusation of “never” being “quite awake” could be merely ascribed to the individual, to the realm of uninhibited individual choice, but Thoreau situates his criticisms within modernity itself, within the newly developed industrial capitalist system and its mode of “revealing,” of structuring, determining, and thus limiting thought and activity. Such a response to this “mode of revealing,” of course, with its alienated labor, with its almost absolute reification of the human and the natural, may most clearly be observed in Thoreau’s discussion of the railroad and the alienation into which it forces individuals. “We,” Thoreau
explains in an oft-quoted passage, “do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us.” According to Thoreau, “those sleepers . . . that underlie the railroad” are human individuals themselves: “Each one is a man, an Irish-man, or a Yankee man. The rails are laid on them, and they are covered with sand, and the cars run smoothly over them. They are sound sleepers, I assure you” (2002). The train, the archetypical symbol of early modernity, of early capitalist mechanization and industrialization, Thoreau argues, carries men and women with speed; however, such constructions are themselves predicated upon the mastery of men, the alienation of human labor. The railroad, and industrial capitalism itself, in its ever-increasing demand for more and more labor, claims the abilities of individuals, keeping them from “effective intellectual exertion,” from the “poetic or divine life.” For “if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail,” Thoreau continues, “others have the misfortune to be ridden upon,” to be exploited and alienated, to be removed from humanity and reason, from poetry and divinity, from thought itself, in order to maintain the current system of speed, of rapid extrinsic “improvement” (2003).

“As for work,” Thoreau maintains, “we haven’t any of any consequence” (2003). The industrial capitalist “mode of revealing,” that is, which is imputed to and imposed upon human individuals, results fundamentally in a disregard for actual thought, for intellectuality and ethico-philosophical exploration. According to Thoreau, speaking from his societally disconnected space at Walden Pond, the “work” which the system itself requires for its continued functioning forces individuals to become alienated, to disconnect themselves from their own humanity and their own reason. Modernity itself, from which Thoreau remains disconnected for a moment, requires such sacrifices in its continued functioning; it depends upon a “mode of revealing” in which all existing entities, be they nature or human beings, are reified and ordered, are reduced to mere instruments.

In such a mode of production, thought, the free development of the individual mind, aside from its instrumental application within the system itself, becomes something which is greatly devalued. Because of the demand of industrialized capitalism, the individual is no longer expected to devote his or her time to self-improvement, to moral and intellectual exploration, to the “poetic” and “divine” life; all of these concerns have themselves been devalued by the industrial moment and the “mode of revealing,” of “intercourse,” which it prescribes in order to sustain itself. Though the industrial outside demands the labor of individuals, and though it creates a spectacle of development, of
dynamic growth and prosperity, “with all its so called internal improvements,” according to Thoreau, it produces improvements which, in fact, remain only “external and superficial” (2002). These improvements, Thoreau maintains, may advance the image of improvement, of “internal” development, but they remain extrinsic to the individual; they do not “develop freely his [or her] physical or mental energy but,” with the alienation and unhappiness which they produce and require, merely mortify and ruin the human mind and body.

Thoreau’s retreat to Walden Pond, however, speaks to the creation of a utopia in which human energy exists not as some mere instrument, allocated to produce only “external and superficial” improvements, but rather in which human energy is allowed, once again, to produce “internal” improvement, to “develop freely” the human mind and body, to be utilized not in the creation of machines but rather in the creation of the “poetic” and “divine.” *Walden*, then, outlines an entirely new space, a utopian space, in which the “mode of revealing” imposed upon individuals by an increasingly industrial form of capitalism is transgressed: a space in which the human energy expended in the creation of “external and superficial” development becomes immediately personal, qualitative, and thus disalienated. For at Walden Pond, Thoreau’s own utopia, untouched as it appears to be by the mode of production and its determining structure, human energy is not harnessed and exploited in the development of the extrinsic, but rather is used in the further development of the intrinsic, of the “greatest gains and values” which exist, in the capitalist mode of production, as those which are “farthest from being appreciated” (2010).

As Louis Althusser reminds in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in the system of capitalism, the “ultimate condition of production is . . . the reproduction of the conditions of production” (1483); the underlying “structure” of capitalism, that is, remains predicated upon “a process of perpetual breakdown: so we have here a machine which . . . must, to remain in existence, constantly repair itself by enlarging itself and its field of control” (Jameson, “A New Reading” 6). Such a continuing process, of course, depends directly upon the exploitation of the energy, the labor, of human beings. At Walden Pond, however, detached as it appears to be from the structure of an early industrial capitalism and thus from the “reproduction of the conditions of production,” Thoreau locates a space in which he is not forced to employ his energy in the maintenance and enlargement of the industrial capitalist structure, of the railroad and the telegraph machine; rather, Thoreau’s labor at Walden Pond remains under his own control, free from the determining instance of the
structure which forces the individual to alienate him or herself from his or her labor. Thus, at Walden Pond, Thoreau locates a space in which he becomes able to utilize his own energies not to further industrial development, but rather to “affirm” himself and his own desires.

“I went to the woods,” Thoreau explains, “because I wished to live deliberately” (2001). That is, instead of being forced to employ his faculties in the service of another, in the service of the “superficial” developments of industrialization, Thoreau locates at Walden Pond a utopian space in which he may “live deliberately,” in which he is awarded the ability to allocate his own energy and labor according to his own desires and needs. Rather than merely working for the industrial mode of “revealing,” rather than merely reproducing the conditions of the capitalist mode of production, then, Thoreau maintains that, at Walden Pond, the individual becomes able to grow into “a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within” him or herself, “opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought” (2026).

Though his implicit valorization of Columbus must be ignored, Thoreau maintains that in the utopian space, in the space disconnected from the modern mode of “revealing,” from the alienating socio-economic “intercourse” imposed by an increasingly industrial form of capitalism, the individual is not bound by the wage: the individual is not forced to sell his or her labor to the capitalist system, and thus to alienate him or herself from this labor and its products. Instead, a space like the one about which Thoreau writes at Walden Pond awards to the individual the opportunity to invest his or her labor within the discovery and the betterment of him or herself, to neither mortify the body nor ruin the mind, but rather to “develop freely his [or her] physical or mental energy.” For, Thoreau explains, all individuals “are sculptors and painters”; however, “our material,” ought not to be that which is imposed upon us by industrial capitalism and its mode of “revealing,” but rather “our own flesh and blood and bones” (2013), our own selves.

According to Thoreau, individuals must not allow their energy to be harnessed in the service of the “reproduction” of some exploitative socio-economic system and its dehumanizing “mode of revealing.” For in a utopia like Walden, labor exists not as that which belongs to and is used in the service of another; instead, labor is intrinsic. In Thoreau’s rendering of utopia, then, labor is rescued from alienation: it is awarded, once again, to the human being and is allowed to be “deliberately” invested within “divine” and “poetic” development, by this individual. Life, in Thoreau’s image of utopia, is not determined by
the industrial process; it is neither driven by the expansion of the railroad nor the further proliferation of the telegraph, but rather it is lived “deliberately.” In a utopia such as Walden, it is the individual, and not the mode of production and its forms of “intercourse,” who decides how he or she is to spend his or her life. “If the bell rings,” Thoreau wonders, “why should we run?” (2005). For Walden itself occupies a space seemingly without the bounds of capitalist determination, and Thoreau renders it as such. Thus, the living of life in Walden, in this space typifying a “radical or absolute break with” the “system” of industrial capitalism, is not determined by the productive process: it does not respond to the “bell” that “rings,” but rather to the deliberate decisions made by the individual. Here, labor is no longer alienated. It is no longer driven by, and exercised in order to sustain, the ringing “bell,” the demands of the industrial capitalist mode of production. Instead, labor, here, belongs to the individual.

In Walden, Thoreau develops a space in which labor is no longer alienated, in which individuals, rather than having their actions determined by larger and exploitative structural totality, by the ringing of the “bell,” work and “live deliberately.” Rather than being determined by the “reproduction” and the enlargement of the current system, by what Marcuse terms the “reality principle” (141)—by the dominant mode of “revealing” inherent in industrial capitalism, which seems to have become the only reality possible—labor in Thoreau’s utopian space appears as that which belongs to and is determined by the individual and the fulfillment of his or her wants and needs, by the free development of his or her “physical” and “mental energy.” Thus, in this space, human energy is once again liberated and becomes that which may be used in the pursuance of the development of the “poetic” and “divine,” of “effective intellectual exertion.”

Most certainly, then, in Walden, Thoreau presents to his reader a utopian space in which labor, in which human energy, belongs to and is determined by neither the economic system nor its form of “intercourse,” but rather by the individual him or herself. In this imagined space, then, even if physically impossible, Thoreau becomes able not only to critique the profoundly exploitative mode of “revealing,” of socio-economic “intercourse,” imposed upon the individual living within the industrial capitalist mode of production, but also to imagine a new “present,” a new mode of life itself, in which labor is not alienated from the individual, is not determined by the capitalist system and its continual need for its “reproduction,” but remains a part of him or her. The utopian space about which Thoreau writes in Walden, then, allows not only for the criticism of that which exists, but also the imagining of a radically different mode
of life which ought to exist instead. For as Adorno reminds in “Something’s Missing,” his dialogue with Bloch, utopias like Thoreau’s act not only as “determined negation[s] of that which merely is”; they also, always, “point at the same time to what should be” (12).

However, Thoreau’s *Walden* is not only a response to the alienation of labor inherent in the industrial capitalist mode of production. For Marx himself further defines the epoch in which Thoreau’s text is situated as a moment in which “[n]ature” itself “becomes . . . simply an object for mankind, purely a matter of utility.” In this moment, Marx continues, the “natural world itself ceases to be recognized as a power in its own right.” Rather than being observed as itself a living entity, then, nature becomes, in Thoreau’s epoch, that which is merely to be challenged and harnessed by the human individual. Even “the theoretical knowledge of the natural world’s ‘independent laws,’ Marx explains, ‘appears,’ in this moment, ‘only as a stratagem designed to subdue it to human requirements, whether as the object of consumption or as the means of production’” (*Grundrisse* 94). Therefore, it must be noted that Thoreau’s experiences on Walden Pond not only negate the alienated and inconsequential labor which the emerging mode of industrial capitalist production requires, but also that they respond directly to this historical moment in which nature itself becomes merely something to be subdued, a reified object to be placed in the service of the socio-economic system itself.

*Walden*, therefore, not only establishes a utopian space in which alienated labor may be critiqued and abolished, but also a space in which the industrial capitalist “intercourse” concerning nature—which Heidegger characterizes as a form of “challenging,” as a way of seeing and experiencing the natural world, despite its living dynamism, as a mere object which must be mastered and ripped apart—may be undermined. “The earth,” Thoreau argues, “is not a mere fragment of dead history . . . to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly”; for Thoreau, thinking outside of the reification of nature inherent in industrial capitalism, nature is not some object to be trampled and pulled from at will. Rather, nature itself, he continues, is “living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit—not a fossil of earth, but a living earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic” (2019). For Thoreau, nature itself remains not a thing to be harnessed and mastered, not a mere resource to be subdued, but the master of all life, the beneficent host from which all parasites, human and animal, feed. Thoreau, then, dereifies nature itself, exposing it not as something which is waiting to
be harnessed or challenged, but rather as the dynamic and lively master in its own right.

In his textual rendering of utopia, Thoreau, countering the mode of “revealing” put forth by the increasingly industrialized mode of capitalist production in which he finds himself, theorizes the creation of a new relationship between the individual and the natural world. Describing his dwelling, Thoreau explains that, while living on Walden Pond, removed, even if only slightly, from industrial capitalism and its values, he “was not so much within doors as behind a door.” Here, Thoreau situates himself not over, but within the dynamic natural world; he is not its master but an observer living both with and within nature, “suddenly neighbor to the birds; not by having imprisoned one, but having caged [himself] near them” (1998). In this utopian space, in this concretization of the “radical . . . break with” the “present” and its socio-economic “system,” it is no longer necessary for the individual to stand above the natural world, acting as its master. Rather than merely reflecting or even negating the manner in which nature is revealed by industrial capitalism, Thoreau posits an entirely new space, a radically different mode of life, in which the human individual does not attempt to enslave the natural world, but rather to make his or her home within nature’s dynamism, within its beauty, without having to either alter or subdue its functioning.

The tranquility and apartness of Walden Pond, rather obviously, awards to Thoreau a moment of clarity, a moment in which alternatives may be considered, in which an outside may be constructed, and thus in which the criticism of what exists may be reasserted. As has been suggested, Thoreau’s Walden functions fundamentally as a utopian text, as a textual rendering of a space which remains both geographically apart and radically different from the industrialized mode of production which actually colors Thoreau’s historical moment. Thus, Thoreau’s textual, and somewhat fictional, representation of his time at Walden Pond must be characterized not only as a separation, but also as a reconstruction of an entirely new, yet seemingly impossible, space untouched by the exploitative structure of industrial capitalism and its mode of “revealing.” Thoreau’s Walden illustrates and concretizes the possibility of a “radical or absolute break” with what exists, and also the ability to imagine the habitation of a radically different, a freer and more deliberate, space in which the individual is not mindlessly forced hither and thither by the ringing “bell” of industrial capitalism. Thoreau’s time at Walden Pond, then, represents a utopian refusal to accept what exists and—while still situated within an increasingly persuasive
social, political, and economic totality—a similarly utopian desire to imagine a different mode of life

Thus, despite the obvious historical apartness of Thoreau’s text, *Walden* presents to the twenty-first century reader—occupying a seemingly perpetual “present” of exploitation, of alienation, and of environmental degradation—the power which utopian thinking, which the imagining of an idealized apart or post-present, lends to critique and to socio-economic and political resistance. For according to Jameson, the postmodern individual remains shackled by the seemingly immutable and inevitable character of the late capitalist mode of production; the mode of production appears not to be that which may be transgressed or destroyed but rather a “perpetual present” (*Postmodernism* 169). In this postmodern moment, all forms of resistance have been “somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it” (48).

Twenty-first century late capitalism, then, presents to the individual that it remains the only possible reality. In a moment in which difference and radical otherness, of the construction of a different system, have been rejected altogether, in a moment which may be characterized by the profound “waning or disappearance of otherness,” Thoreau’s utopian thinking reasserts itself mightily, signaling not the acceptance of what is, but rather the imagining of what ought to exist (Jameson, “A New Reading” 12).

In this period of late capitalism, the whole of existence, of thought and life, becomes subsumed by the primacy of what exists empirically, of what Marcuse has termed the “reality principle.” According to Marcuse, all thought in this moment “is channeled into the domain of the reality principle and brought into line with its requirements” (141). Here, thought which transgresses the bounds of “reality,” of the “perpetual present” which exits, is labelled impossible. In late capitalism, Adorno explains, “the capability to imagine the totality as something that could” and ought “to be completely different” has become a seeming impossibility. Rather, “people” appear to be merely “sworn to the world as it is and” to “have” a “blocked consciousness vis-à-vis possibility” (4).

By rereading Thoreau’s rejection of the “reality principle,” of a seemingly natural and inevitable societal structure, in the twenty-first century, however, the possibility for imagining an entirely new present, an entirely new mode of life, is reinvigorated. In *Walden*, Thoreau rejects the alienated labor and the mastery of nature which, in the era of late capitalism, have reasserted themselves as life’s natural and inevitable components. Thoreau’s concerns with the
alienation of labor and with environmental degradation have certainly been forced to their respective crises in the late capitalist moment, and they remain relevant concerns for all contemporary readers. Certainly, this seems to suggest a direct affinity between these two supposedly different historical epochs, the industrial and the postmodern. However, Terry Eagleton reminds that such a sense of historical sameness, such a direct comparison, as capitalism has persisted, remains warranted:

The final limit on capitalism . . . is capital itself, the constant reproduction of which is a frontier beyond which it cannot stray. There is thus something curiously static and repetitive about this most dynamic of all historical regimes. The fact that its underlying logic remains pretty constant is one reason why the Marxist critique of it remains largely valid. Only if the system were genuinely able to break beyond its own bounds, inaugurating something unimaginably new, would this cease to be the case. But capitalism is incapable of inventing a future which does not ritually reproduce its present. (10)

Walden, though, reasserts an imaginable and incredibly concrete break with such modes of domination and exploitation, with such a system, thus reintroducing to the modern reader the possibility of amending, of critiquing, and of overcoming the “present” and its “reality.” For the reader living beneath the determining structure of late capitalism, Thoreau’s text allows for “the return of the repressed image of liberation” to consciousness (Marcuse 145).

Marcuse, writing in Eros and Civilization, identifies such utopian thinking itself as the “refusal to accept as final the limitations imposed upon freedom and happiness by the reality principle,” as the “refusal to forget,” even in the ultimately determining realm of what is, “what can be” (149). Thoreau’s trip to Walden Pond, by removing him as far as possible from the socio-economic totality and its life-governing principles, enables him to refuse “to accept” what is, to refuse to acquiesce to the demands of society, and also, in the very same moment, to imagine “what can be.” In his excursion, Thoreau becomes able to reassert his ability to think and thus his ability to criticize the oppressive and alienating mode of production about him. Walden, then, holds what are assumed to be the very bounds of “reality,” of possibility, to the light of criticism; it reveals the supposedly natural and inevitable constraints of life to be those which must and are able to be resisted and overcome. In the “perpetual present” of late capitalism, within the ostensibly inescapable “reality” of what is, a reading of Thoreau’s Walden reasserts the possibility of imagining an entirely
new and different mode of life—free from alienation, exploitation, and human and environmental degradation—toward which all must strive.

In addition, Thoreau’s rendering of utopia not only as some sort of future of difference but as a geographic space lends itself perfectly to the postmodern mode of cognition: a mode in which “our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages are . . . dominated,” first and foremost, “by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism” (Jameson, Postmodernism 16). For, according to Bloch, though “Thomas Moore designated utopia as a place, an island in the distant South Seas,” this “designation underwent changes later so that it left space and entered time.” “Indeed,” Bloch continues, “the utopians, especially those in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, transposed the wishland more into the future” than into any geographic space. Thoreau’s Walden, of course, attempts just the opposite; for therein, he posits not necessarily a time of utopia, but rather a space, a geographical location, which breaks from the supposedly natural and inexorable system of industrial capitalism (3). “Where I lived,” Thoreau explains, “was as far off as many a region viewed nightly by astronomers.” Rather than directly occupying some sort of temporal future, Thoreau’s utopian image of “what can be” asserts itself in a specific geographical and spatial location; he describes his time at Walden Pond not as a when but rather as a “where,” as a concrete space “far from the noise and disturbance” (2000). In the era of late capitalism, then, in which spacial cognition has come to replace temporal cognition, Thoreau’s concrete and geographical rendering of utopia, of “what can be,” appears more relevant than ever, and thus a reading of Walden allows for the reassertion of the concept of a utopian space, of the creation, even in the “perpetual present” of late capitalism, of a utopian “where” as opposed to a utopian when.

“Only that day dawns,” Thoreau explains, “to which we are awake” (2034). For in order to bring about “what can be” as opposed to the “perpetual present” of what is, the individual must become awakened to his or her ability to transgress the “reality principle,” the mode of “revealing” and “intercourse,” presented as natural and inevitable, which the capitalist mode of production, whether industrial or multination, imposes. By positing a utopian space which may function without the bounds of capitalist determination, without the bounds of alienated labor and natural exploitation, Thoreau’s Walden awards to the modern reader the ability to imagine a “radical or absolute break with” the “present” and its determining “system.” For herein, Thoreau posits a utopian enclave, an ideal world, in which labor is not alienated from but determined by the individual,
in which human energy is not expended in the industrial capitalist mode of “revealing,” but rather utilized in the free development of the individual. In the era of late capitalism, in which the “present” and its “system” has become so reified, so apparently inescapable, Thoreau’s *Walden* reasserts the individual’s ability “to pass judgment on the abstract quality of life in the present and to keep alive the idea of a concrete future” (Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 416).

Most certainly, Thoreau’s own present, like our own, must have appeared to him as something ostensibly inescapable; yet, in *Walden*, he creates a space which enables him to “see how the . . . world around him,” the capitalist mode of production, “is . . . not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and the state of society” (Marx, *German Ideology* 62). In his constructed space, largely textual, of ecological utopianism, Thoreau becomes able to critique his own present and to imagine some sort of “radical or absolute break” with it; here, he is able to reaffirm not the space which actually exists but rather the space which ought to exist and can be brought about. Such an affirmation of “what can be,” as opposed to the image of existence which is asserted and maintained by the “reality principle,” remains integral in the project of overcoming our own “perpetual present” of late capitalism, with its apparent inevitability.

In positing a utopian space, a space of radical difference, of radical freedom, Thoreau’s *Walden* speaks directly to the individual living within the era of late capitalism, always reaffirming the fact that, even in the seemingly “perpetual present,” radically different spaces and societies must be imagined and pursued. As Thoreau explains, “Only that day dawns to which we are awake,” and thus “what can be” may only be brought about by reawaking the utopian ability to imagine a new and radically different life, to imagine a “radical or absolute” break with a seemingly “perpetual present.” In this ability to imagine difference, to imagine a better future or a better space, hope itself remains concentrated.


Joyce Carol Oates’s novel You Must Remember This explores how American culture socializes men and boys into violence and vividly portrays the disastrous results both for society at large and for the individual men and boys who are pressured into violence.

Much progress has been made in combating the limiting influence of gender roles. Only a few decades ago, it would have been unthinkable for women to be airline pilots, CEOs of Fortune 500 corporations, or major contenders for the U.S. Presidency. Today, men can be stay-at-home fathers, and women can be the breadwinners. Some gender stereotypes however, are surprisingly resilient, and one of the most notable of these is the expectation that men should act violently. Indeed, our society still feels that a willingness to engage in violence is one of the defining features of manhood. The noted sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that despite its benefits for men, male privilege is also a “trap [that] has its negative side in the permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances” (50). It might be objected that this predicament is simply an outmoded remnant of patriarchal culture, and that men should simply ignore it. Yet any man who fails to meet this deeply-rooted expectation will face
serious consequences; it is likely that he will be ridiculed as a “wimp,” “sissy,” or “mama’s boy.”

The ideal of manhood in our culture includes: Fearlessness, supreme self-confidence, and invincibility. Germaine Greer observes that the romantic hero of the typical paperback romance novel is, “never nervous or uncertain or humble” (178). In contrast, any real-life man will inevitably find himself in many situations in which he has every cause for fear, indecision, and a crushing sense of inferiority. Men are human, after all, fallible in body and mind, susceptible to weaknesses, both of strength and of courage. No matter the extent of his physical or mental toughness, any man will eventually meet his match, if only as a result of that greatest vanquisher of all, age.

The result is a discrepancy that men experience between what they really are and what society expects them to be. In physical combat, the penalty for failure is particularly high: losing can result in severe injury or death. Men are more often victims of physical assault than women are, and assault against men is often viewed by perpetrators, authorities, and sometimes even the victims themselves, as simply an inevitable part of men’s place in society. Criminologists Kathy Hobdell and Elizabeth A. Stanko note, “the police sometimes assume that many assaults involving men are just ‘fair fights’ gone awry.” In their study of male victims’ responses to assault, Hobdell and Stanko observe that men “who were most severely affected all expressed strong notions about how men needed ‘to fend for themselves.’ Thus these men had difficulty sharing their emotional reactions to being victimized, and reconciling their intense feelings of vulnerability.” Hobdell and Stanko quote one male victim of violence: “Men are still measured by how tough they are, when you’re young, you’re tough, that’s how you get respected. We all suffer from that.” In a physical confrontation, even the victor may emerge scarred or mortally wounded. Moreover, in any context other than an officially sanctioned combat sport, winning itself can be a liability, for the victor is likely to find himself imprisoned for assault or depending on the outcome, murder. Thus, a man frequently finds himself in a dilemma. Refusing to fight means humiliation, yet triumph itself can lead to the ruination of his life.

Few writers have delved more deeply into the cultural and psychological issues of contemporary American society than Joyce Carol Oates. During a career that has spanned some of the most portentous decades in American history, she has produced a vast body of fiction that encompasses nearly every vortex of social upheaval, from racism to sexism to war protests to political
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corruption. Gabrielle Antonello posits, “Although Oates often focuses on individuals or individual families, her characters are emblematic of American culture and values, and the conflicts that arise because of them” (4). Greg Johnson observes that “all [Oates’s] characters, regardless of background, suffer intensely the conflicts and contradictions at the heart of our culture—a suffering Oates conveys with both scrupulous accuracy and great compassion” (Understanding Joyce Carol Oates 8). Though Oates’s subject matter often addresses the most intimate details of (often highly dysfunctional) family life in the United States, her real interest always clearly lies in exploring the submerged complexities of the American psyche.

Most critical attention to Oates’s treatment of gender issues has focused on her female characters and how the social construction of reality limits their opportunities for growth and happiness. The majority of critical discussions of her use of violence have focused on her female characters as victims of male violence. For instance, Johnson emphasizes women’s oppression and its societal source in Oates’s fiction. He asserts that, in their conflicts with male characters, Oates’s female characters “usually find themselves on the losing side because of their culturally enforced passive roles. . . . Male aggression and violence, whether through actual rape, psychological trauma, or institutional domination, lie at the heart of all these women’s torn and conflicted lives” (Joyce Carol Oates 42). Marilyn C. Wesley argues that Oates “mounts a feminist challenge to the status quo which produces both patriarchy and its [female] victims” (253). J. Samuel Kirubahar posits that Oates’s fiction “participates in feminist discourse by attempting to assess how women are made and unmade by male definitions of womanhood” (110). One critic, Ellen G. Friedman, does discuss male characters, but she focuses on fathers and patriarchy, emphasizing Oates’s male characters’ role as beneficiaries, rather than as victims, of social pressures. She opines that “in the plot lines of Oates’s fiction . . . fathers may begin as mythological large presences unlike other characters, but they end up reduced and quite ordinary. . . . The effect . . . registers on the remaining family members, whose agency increases with [the fathers’] lost power” (482). It should be noted that those remaining family members in Friedman’s examples all are female.

Though critical attention to Oates’s female characters and the difficulties they undergo has been essential in developing our understanding of the role of gender in her work, the paucity of attention to male characters in her oeuvre is regrettable. One should not be left with the impression that Oates ignores the plight of men and the social pressures they also experience. On the contrary,
she has a special skill for conveying the dilemmas that men face in a patriarchal, violent society, and she devotes much attention in her novels to the consequences for men, who fail to match society’s expectations that they be violent and aggressive. She also presents moving portraits of those men who embrace the violence that society expects of them, invariably with disastrous results not only for others but also for the men themselves.

One of the best examples of a work in which Oates explores the consequences of America’s obsession with violence is You Must Remember This (1987), a novel set in the 1950s in the fictional upstate New York city of Port Oriskany. Many of the characters have been physically and emotionally scarred by the violence of World War II and the Korean War; the nuclear threat posed by the Cold War looms over every thread in the narrative. Violence at a more personal level also permeates the book, and violence defines masculinity for the male characters as they find themselves expected to fulfill a masculine ideal impossible to achieve. Though the novel takes place in a time far removed from our own, it comments on many of the predicaments that men still face today.

Felix Stevick: Disillusionment with Violence

One of the main characters in the novel is Felix Stevick, a former professional pugilist turned real-estate developer with ties to organized crime; he epitomizes the man who embraces violence as a means to prove his manliness both to others and to himself. Felix’s father is a well-to-do businessman who invests in boxing promotion. When Felix is a boy, his father often takes him to watch exhibition matches at the local gym. The young Felix idolizes the fighters and begins to see boxing as the ultimate expression of male achievement, as well as the only true expression of male emotional bonding. Bourdieu observes that “manliness must be validated by other men, in its reality as actual or potential violence, and certified by recognition of membership of the group of ‘real men’” (52). In one fight that Felix witnesses, a local amateur faces the world middleweight champion. Unsurprisingly, the latter easily wins, but at the conclusion of the match, “the world champion was hugging the young man he’d so badly beaten as if they were brothers” (Oates 153). For the young Felix, boxing provides the sense of love, belonging, and acceptance he craves. He takes boxing lessons and finds fulfillment in every aspect of fighting, even in the risk of physical harm, for “in the ring, elevated above the crowd of ordinary men,
even injury was meaningful.” Felix believes that defeat itself is far preferable to staying out of the ring: “If he wasn’t to be . . . the world champion, he’d be the young man who dared climb into the ring with [him] for three amazing rounds, locally famous for the rest of his life for a single lucky left hook that caught the champion on the jaw and set him back on his heels.” Felix fully internalizes the concept of manliness as defined by violence, measuring “all men, all male behavior, against that world [of boxing]—which was a twin or mirror of the ‘real’ world and far more significant” (155).

Felix enjoys remarkable success in his boxing career, winning twenty-nine bouts, twenty-five of them by knockout. Finally, however, he too experiences the inevitability of failure when he faces Gino Corvino, a brawler with far more physical strength and stamina than Felix. For all Felix’s skill and dexterity, he finds himself unable to compete with this boxer. Felix learns what every man must accept: No matter how tough one is, there is always someone tougher. As Corvino knocks Felix unconscious, Felix sees “[his death] and tastes it.” His doctors tell him he is “lucky he didn’t lose [his] right eye” (Oates 157). For the rest of his life, Felix considers a resultant scar on his eyebrow “the mark of his humiliation” (373).

This brush with death so traumatizes Felix that he quits boxing, though he remains in the scene as a trainer and promoter. He recognizes, however, that his friends think less of him because of his decision to leave the ring. His boyhood friend and fellow boxing promoter, Vince Matiuzzio, blithely downplays the significance of Felix’s maiming and near death, insisting that, in a rematch with Corvino, Felix would “have had Corvino down cold” (Oates 236). Felix is constantly frustrated by his inability to express his feelings about his failed fighting career to his friends, for to admit the fear and inadequacy he had felt is sure to be taken as a sign of weakness. Not only does he find it difficult to talk about his experiences, he discovers that others are often reluctant to listen.

In a moment of uncharacteristic candor, Felix confesses his innumerable weaknesses to his young boxing protégé Jo-Jo Pearl at a dinner party, telling Jo-Jo how nervous and frightened he had been before his fights, to the point that he had difficulty sleeping and eating, even losing “weight he couldn’t afford to lose.” One would expect Jo-Jo to empathize with Felix, appreciating the emotional connection that Felix is trying to forge with him through this display of self-deprecating frankness. At the least, one would expect Jo-Jo to value the truths Felix is seeking to impart to him about their sport. Instead, Jo-Jo is uncomfortable that a man he so admires would admit to such vulnerability, and
he wonders if Felix is “maybe a little drunk? — Saying things the other men might overhear” (Oates 226). Of course, as Bourdieu reminds us, the esteem of other men is crucial to maintaining one’s identity as a “real man.” For his part, Jo-Jo cultivates the air of steely bravado that American society demands of men; he assures Felix, “I’m one of those guys . . . that could almost fall asleep in the dressing room . . . Or drink a bottle of beer and then go out and fight” (227). Jo-Jo’s glib machismo is doubly ironic—and tragic—in light of his subsequent death as a result of injuries sustained in a match against an aging journeyman boxer whom both Felix and Vince assumed he would beat easily.

Jo-Jo’s repudiation of Felix’s attempted emotional openness is particularly devastating to Felix’s self-esteem because as a young man he had himself measured all male behavior against boxing. Felix experiences a dilemma that many men have faced through the ages; he can either remain in the world of violence and risk death or debilitating injury, or he can leave and suffer the stigma of cowardice. Unable to connect with others, even with his family members, Felix becomes emotionally isolated. His half-brother Lyle attributes Felix’s habitual mistrust of everyone to his training as a boxer, epitomized by the exhortation that the referee gives the fighters before each match: “[K]eep your guard up, protect yourself at all times” (Oates 263). Yet Felix’s reticence is understandable given the belittlement he experiences; the admonishment to “keep your guard up at all times” could apply to all men in American society, even those who never set foot in a boxing ring.

Robbie, the Bus Driver, and the Pimp: Violence and the Inevitability of Failure

Felix’s disillusionment with violence is a gradual process that ebbs and flows throughout the novel; for much of the narrative, he is still very much attracted to fighting. In particular, during moments of stress or depression, he often turns to violence as a means of managing his emotions. He knows violence will invigorate him and make him feel alive, and sometimes he is willing to risk injury or imprisonment simply to improve his emotional state. Even as a child, he had “thrived on opposition, resistance . . . [T]he sudden assertion of another’s will in relationship to his own excited Felix to combat: within seconds he was flooded with emotion and purpose” (154). It might be tempting to see Felix’s obsession with competition, particularly violent competition, as
mere personal idiosyncrasy. Many men, however, feel the pressure to gain status by asserting themselves against other men. The sociologist Victor J. Seidler observes “often as men we can only feel good about ourselves at the expense of others, for we are tied into competitive relations” (23). All too often, this competitiveness manifests itself violently. Time and again, Felix seeks to prove his manliness by demonstrating that he can defeat other men in a fight.

Obviously, this behavior is problematic for many men Felix encounters in daily life; any man, outside his circle of friends and business associates, is a potential target for Felix’s violence. To mitigate the physical dangers, Felix usually engages in street fights or bar brawls in which he knows that, as a former professional pugilist, he will be guaranteed almost certain victory. One incident in particular demonstrates the vulnerability every man faces when confronted with a situation in which he feels he must defend his honor and manhood. Felix has been having an affair with his fifteen-year-old niece Enid, who attempts suicide and is hospitalized. Overcome by a range of emotions, including guilt, anger, and fear that she will expose him to prosecution, Felix drives out into the countryside and stops at a bar. He attempts to flirt with a woman whose boyfriend, Robbie, is a large, muscular man with a Navy tattoo. Despite Robbie’s formidable appearance, Felix exults in his own superiority as he envisions the ensuing fisticuffs. He imagines toying with Robbie, “try[ing] for the classic solar plexus punch you never get a chance to throw in the ring, just under the heart and your opponent drops as if dead.” Felix also considers inflicting more serious damage, similar to what Corvino has done to him, perhaps displacing his desired vengeance: “[M]aybe he’d chop up Robbie’s face” (Oates 168).

Robbie is the sort of man most people would find physically intimidating, but for all his height, strength, bulk, military training, and (likely) combat experience, he is utterly helpless in this situation. If he backs down from the fight, everyone in the bar, including his girlfriend, will despise him as a coward, but if he fights Felix, he is doomed to almost certain failure. Whichever option he chooses, he faces humiliation, either of cowardice or of defeat. Even the best-case scenario for Robbie is not particularly appealing; Felix knows that “if Robbie got lucky and landed a few good shots, if Robbie had ever boxed in the navy . . . he’d kill Felix” (Oates 168). Indeed, we might justifiably wonder whether Felix is self-soothing or attempting suicide. In that case, Robbie would be able to congratulate himself on his victory as he sits in a prison cell for decades, perhaps for the rest of his life.
In an ironic reversal of the “damsel-in-distress” scenario, it is Robbie's girlfriend who rescues him. Observing Felix's fixation on her, she urges Robbie out of the bar; as they leave, she refuses “even [to] glance back over her shoulder at Felix in a flirty reproachful farewell,” because “he'd scared her—something tight, mean, vicious in his face” (168). Whether she is primarily concerned for Robbie's safety or for her own is unclear; it is possible that Felix's demeanor so terrifies her that she simply wants to escape him. Nevertheless, there can be no question that if she had wanted Robbie to fight Felix, he would have. If she were flattered by Felix’s attention, and even more flattered at the prospect of two men fighting over her—if she felt that getting into a physical confrontation is part of a man's “job”—there would have been a fight. That the instigation of a confrontation is avoided is simply a matter of good luck for Robbie. As is true for any man, his essential defenseless against the prospect of a more skilled fighter challenging and “besting” him as a man remains unchanged.

Later, we encounter another incident that demonstrates the helplessness of a man who is called upon to exert his manliness physically. Felix and Enid are involved in yet another lovers’ spat. As they drive through a residential suburb of Port Oriskany, Enid bolts from Felix's car at a stoplight, and he chases her and seizes her on the sidewalk. A city bus happens to pull into a stop nearby, and the driver and all the passengers observe Enid struggling to pry herself from Felix's grasp. The bus driver calls out, “What’s going on there? What’s happening?” Felix replies, “Mind your own business!” The driver is a perfect example of a man caught in the predicament of needing to look fearless, confident, and strong, when he possesses none of these qualities. Leaning from the bus door, the driver attempts “to look courageous,” despite his “fat gut inside the uniform, beefy jowls, frightened eyes.” He is an out-of-shape, middle-aged man, and “Felix could kill him, and they both [know] it.” Nevertheless, the driver asks Enid, “Miss? Do you need help?” (300). He feels the need to project a façade of puissance and self-assurance, though he is in fact powerless to protect Enid from Felix. If Felix, maddened by rage, were to assault the driver, a single punch would likely prove fatal, before any of the passengers would have time to intervene.

Of course, anyone, male or female, of any age or physical condition, would want to assist a young woman in evident danger, but many aspects of the driver’s dilemma arise from his position as a man in American society. For instance, it would be acceptable for a woman in a similar situation to run to a nearby house and call the police, but for a man, that would likely be interpreted as cowardice.
Most of the passengers doubtless expect a man to interpose directly on Enid’s behalf, and, having grown up in a society that expects men to act violently, the driver clearly expects it, consciously or unconsciously, of himself. Also, though Felix is hardly a paragon of gentlemanly behavior, he is less inclined to assault a woman than a man; other than once slapping Enid, he reserves his considerable propensity for violence to men. He might simply ignore a woman who challenged him as the driver does, but he would likely feel the need to respond violently against a man. Yet again, it is the woman in the situation who averts the confrontation. Enid tells the driver that she is all right and allows Felix to lead her back to his car. This outcome merely underscores the driver’s essential helplessness, however; if Felix had wanted to beat him to death, there would be nothing the driver could do to stop him, and, as a man, the idea of simply fleeing would be too humiliating to be countenanced.

Intriguingly, in the only episode in which Felix actually assaults a man outside the ring, the victim makes no effort to defend himself. Perhaps even more than the first two, this incident illustrates the utter hopelessness of a man’s defending himself against a highly skilled opponent. Felix is distraught over the break-up of his relationship with Enid and over Jo-Jo’s death. When a prostitute approaches Felix on a lonely street late one winter night, he capitalizes on the opportunity to vent his frustration by “giv[ing] [her pimp] the beating he deserved.” Felix justifies his actions to himself by appealing to a primitive notion of chivalry; he reviles the pimp for “[p]utting a girl out on the street to make a buck for him.” Yet he also takes evident masculine pleasure in “besting” another man, especially in front of a woman. The pimp is the antithesis of everything American society expects of a man: He begs “Felix not to hurt him, to let him go. He hadn’t any strength in his legs he was so terrified, didn’t even try to block Felix’s blows, just whimpered and begged,” while “shielding his face like a woman” (376). As a man in our violence-oriented society, the disgrace the pimp suffers is complete; Felix emasculates him as fully as conceivably possible, short of actual castration. The pimp endures both the physical pain and the humiliation that had threatened Robbie and the bus driver. Yet what options does the pimp have? Felix has defeated the vast majority of the professional boxers whom he faced in the ring, most of them by knockout. What chance does an ordinary man have against him? Resisting Felix’s assault might only enrage him all the more. The pimp’s plight underscores the vulnerability all men face; Felix humiliates the pimp just as Corvino has humiliated Felix. Undoubtedly,
someone else will humiliate Corvino. Whenever violence is involved, after all, someone must lose.

Warren Stevick: The Consequences of Rejecting Violence

While Felix embraces violence, and other male characters cope (or fail to cope) with the expectation of violence as best they can, Felix’s nephew, Warren Stevick, rejects violence altogether. Warren serves as a foil to Felix; while Felix is aggressive both physically and in his business dealings, Warren eschews violence and the self-aggrandizing impulse that guide Felix’s life. Though the two men are closely related, live in the same city, and are both war veterans, their personalities and life goals could hardly be more different. Warren’s selfless devotion to the peace movement stands in stark contrast to Felix’s self-centeredness and obsession with personal glory and gain. Notably, of all the male characters in the book, Warren attains the highest level of contentment. Yet his rejection of violence and his devotion to pacifism create their own unique problems.

Unlike Felix, Warren spends his childhood in a lower-class neighborhood in inner city Port Oriskany. In Warren’s milieu, and even in his family, violence is expected of boys; they are conditioned to be willing to witness and to perform it. For instance, when Warren’s father wants to take Warren and his sisters to see one of Felix’s local bouts, Warren’s mother’s objection falls along predictable gender lines: “[S]he didn’t want her daughters exposed to violence,” though she can accept Warren going (Oates 23–24). Violence and maleness go hand in hand, even in the mind of Warren’s relatively peace-loving mother.

Though Warren is large and physically strong, he refuses to join the local East Clinton Street gang, so he cannot depend on other boys for camaraderie, or for protection. Warren must witness numerous acts of perverse cruelty in this turbulent environment. In one incident, a group of boys catch a mourning dove, douse it with gasoline, and immolate it. Warren buries the dead bird, but he does so alone; even his sister Enid, who had also witnessed the atrocity, neglects to accompany Warren during his grim task and thus fails to offer him emotional support. In his day-to-day life with other children, Warren, a rare compassionate person among bullies and thugs, faces the expectation that boys
should act brutally, and his refusal to participate leaves him socially isolated and emotionally alone.

Like Felix, Warren recognizes at an early age that violence and male emotional bonding are inextricably linked in American society. In an incident similar to Felix’s boyhood epiphany, the nine-year-old Warren watches a friendly sparring match between Felix and another fighter at the local gymnasium. When the two boxers embrace at the end, Warren realizes, “there would be no context in his [own] life in which he might embrace another man. To do that you would have to hurt him first” (142). The young Warren’s rejection of violence foreshadows the difficulties he will face as an adult in a society in which violence defines masculinity.

At eighteen, Warren is drafted into the Army and sent to Korea, where he is critically injured in combat. During his near-death experience, he receives a revelation for his purpose in life, to work to end war. After a lengthy and grueling convalescence, Warren enrolls in law school and joins the fledgling peace movement. The peace movement is extremely unpopular during the mid-1950s. At protests, passersby constantly insult Warren, but he refrains from responding in kind, choosing instead to preserve a demeanor of imperturbable calm. A man in our society is expected to react angrily, even violently, to insults, and Warren struggles to conceptualize himself as someone who is unbothered by such taunts: “[O]nly upon occasion was his pride—his manly vanity, it might be called—injured: but that was nothing” (277). Warren’s insistence that his “manly vanity” is “nothing” forms his primary conflict for much of the novel.

One of Warren’s first disappointments occurs when he volunteers for Adlai Stevenson’s 1952 presidential campaign. Warren supports Stevenson in large part because he takes a more dovish stance on nuclear armament than his opponent Dwight Eisenhower does. At the height of the “Red Scare,” the American electorate is attracted to a militaristic posture, and Eisenhower’s supporters “accuse Stevenson of being ‘soft’ on communism” (Oates 105). Stevenson loses the election in a landslide, and Warren watches in despair as Stevenson gives his televised concession speech. Significantly, Oates’s narrator couches Stevenson’s electoral defeat in terms of violence and physical suffering: Stevenson appears “gracious in defeat, good-humored it might almost have seemed, for he knew well how America adores a winner and despises a loser, how closely America scrutinizes its losers to gauge the depths of their injury and humiliation: Is the wound mortal? Yes, but does it hurt?” (108). The American public’s morbid obsession with the spectacle of a defeated political
candidate’s emotional pain mirrors the crowd’s lurid fascination with boxers’ physical pain in the ring. It should also be noted that it is Stevenson’s position on violence (nuclear armament) that marks him as a “loser.” Violence on a mass scale looms large behind the election, and the consensus of the American electorate is closer to the young Felix’s vision than it is to Warren’s: A “loser” is someone who refrains from fighting, far worse than someone who fights and loses. Warren and Stevenson, then, are “losers” in the sense in which that word is often used in the popular vernacular as a pejorative to demean someone who is deemed a failure in life. In the eyes of many Americans, Stevenson represents a “loser” mentality, a way of looking at the world that is incompatible with masculine ideals of aggression and violence. It is worth noting that the term loser is nearly exclusively applied to men.

More problems arising from Warren’s rejection of “manly vanity” are illustrated when he begins an unlikely love affair with Miriam Brancher, a pulchritudinous artist’s model who is constantly attracting attention from other men. Warren’s introverted nature, his speech impediment, and the physical scars resulting from his war injury make him self-conscious and awkward around women. He recognizes that under ordinary circumstances, he would be unable to attract Miriam. She becomes deeply attached to him, however, when he talks her down from the roof of their apartment complex, where she had climbed during a drunken, possibly suicidal episode in the wake of a breakup with one of her boyfriends.

In the first weeks of their courtship, Warren tries to interest Miriam in the peace movement. At first, she finds pacifism too extreme; she tells him, “You’ve got to be crazy taking [nuclear disarmament] seriously for more than five minutes. . . . Letting whatever happens happen without defending yourself” (Oates 288). Eventually, however, Warren succeeds in persuading her to join him and other activists at one of the protests. Miriam is unable to adopt Warren’s equanimity when facing hecklers; indeed, her response is more akin to that of a testosterone-fueled man: She is “the angriest of the protesters, incapable of not responding when provoked, shouting back curses.” Warren attempts to calm her by downplaying the importance of individual pride. Though Miriam initially resists Warren’s view, she finally agrees and vows to “try to be wiser” (313). Most people would likely think of pride in one’s individual accomplishments as more appealing in a romantic partner than the humility and self-negation that Warren espouses, so his ability to engage Miriam with his ideas as her lover is remarkable, especially given the number of other men who are pursuing her.
Readers have good cause, however, to wonder if Miriam’s attraction to Warren’s ideology is mere passing fancy. For instance, during their final conversation, which takes place after they had attended a speech given by a world-renowned peace activist, Warren sees Miriam looking pensive, and he offers her comfort: “Miriam, don’t be so sad. It isn’t too late [for nuclear disarmament]—it can’t be.” She responds, “Warren, what?—sorry, I didn’t hear” (Oates 317). One of the reasons that she does eventually leave him may be that he has failed to fulfill her (and society’s) expectations of him as a man. Perhaps Miriam feels that a willingness to fight to protect one’s honor and the honor of one’s girlfriend is part of a man’s job. After all, the hecklers’ jeers are directed at Miriam as well as at Warren and the other protesters. She might think more highly of him if he were willing to punch the hecklers, rather than treating them respectfully.

Though Miriam’s exact reason for leaving Warren is unclear, Warren himself at least partly blames his lack of aggressiveness. He ruminates on how he has always been “The shy boy. Big, but shy. A pushover” (Oates 317). These personality traits place Warren at an obvious disadvantage in a society that demands aggression from men. It is reasonable, then, for Warren to wonder if his lack of aggression has played at least some role in Miriam’s desertion of him. By rejecting violence altogether, Warren attempts to transcend the types of problems that Felix and many of the other male characters face, but he also ends up paying his own price.

**Conclusion**

Many people contend that men only benefit and never suffer as a result of patriarchy. A large component of this belief arises from the assumption that the socialization of boys and men into aggression gives them an advantage over girls and women. While there are, of course, certain benefits to aggression, these are often far outweighed by the disadvantages. The pressure to be violent can result in injury, imprisonment, the ruination of one’s life, and even death—not to mention the psychological strain of maintaining a demeanor of supreme self-confidence in all circumstances.

A project that demonstrates how men’s psychology is shaped by the social construction of masculinity is a natural extension of feminist ideas and the feminist critical method. The social philosopher David Benatar observes, “[E]nding discrimination against one sex is inseparable from ending
discrimination against the other sex,” because “the same sets of stereotypes underlie both kinds of discrimination” (198). A critical method that examines the role of the social construction of gender in literary works, while accepting that male as well as female characters can be victims of damaging and constricting gender stereotypes would be a welcome addition to the study of gender issues in literature. Without question, a better appreciation of how cultural pressures socialize boys and men into violence and an understanding of how these pressures can be reduced would benefit everyone.


Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is rife with creation; even in sections such as Satan’s fall to hell or Adam and Eve’s fall from grace, mentions of God’s creation are easily found. According to Kent Lehnhof, “Scholars have long recognized that the process of creation is crucial to Milton’s poetry” (15). Such an assertion is not difficult to make, given that so much of Milton’s most famous poem is spent discussing or referring to the creation process. The seventh book is almost entirely composed of a variation on the Genesis account, with odes to light and lengthy passages on fish. Perhaps even more interesting are Satan’s, Adam’s, and Eve’s speeches on creation. These speeches and other mentions of God’s creative power lead scholars such as W. B. C. Watkins to claim that creation is “the substance and the structure of [Milton’s] epic” (qtd. in Lehnhof 15), and C. Gilliland to acknowledge that creation is one of “many devices in the poem that convey to the reader the necessity of acknowledging man’s subordination to God” (42). These scholars largely concentrate on the “Human-Divine relationship” (Coffin 2) or Milton’s method of asserting that “creation constitutes the very essence of deity” (Lehnhof 15). While this is an interesting and integral part of creation’s power in the poem, focusing
primarily on the way in which creation defines the creator obscures a thorough examination of the way in which creation shapes the created. It is evident in the epic that the way in which Satan, Adam, and Eve perceive creation affects not only their relationship with their maker, but also their identity and interpersonal relationships, ultimately influencing their choices and eternal roles.

It is the assertion of *Paradise Lost* that all creations owe their creator an unending debt of gratitude. From Milton’s God we learn that He wishes from his creations “true allegiance, constant faith or love” (Milton *Lost* 363). Satan understands this and, though unwilling to give it, admits that such love and gratitude is “the easiest recompense . . . how due” (387). In *Paradise Regained*, Christ agrees, saying “since his word all things produced . . . Then glory and benediction, that is thanks, / The slightest, easiest, readiest recompense / From them who could return him nothing else” is indeed required (667). As God the Father, Jesus the Son, and Satan the deceiver all agree that gratitude is a warranted payment and God’s desire, the obligation of creations to offer thanks to their maker is a consistent theme and even an eternal law in Milton’s poetry. *Paradise Lost* operates on “the idea that every creature is indebted to its author for bestowing upon it the gift of life or being” (Lehnhof 16). Morally and naturally, all beings within *Paradise Lost* are obligated to acknowledge the Lord’s creation and, in doing so, to offer obedience and gratitude as recompense.

Whether or not and to what degree characters choose to follow this eternal mandate shapes their identity and interpersonal relations. Identity will simply be discussed as the way in which characters views themselves; the analysis of interpersonal relationships is slightly more complex, as it requires two points of view. For example, Eve’s view of her creation affects the way that she interacts with those around her. Simultaneously, those who interact with Eve are affected by their perception of her creation. These two facets of interpersonal relationships relate to and influence each other, just as identity and interpersonal relationships overlap and constantly alter each other. As numerous psychological studies have argued, “one’s definition of self might be influenced by interpersonal relationships” (Sluss & Ashforth 1). The ways in which the characters of *Paradise Lost* view themselves are manifest in their interactions with others, and the ways in which others interact with them impact the ways in which they view themselves. Partially because of this overlap, both identity and interpersonal relationships directly relate to a character’s understanding of creation and, thus, that character’s relationship to God.
Throughout the poem, Satan’s defining characteristic—willful and proud independence—is manifested in his refusal to acknowledge God as Creator. This refusal shapes both his identity and his eternal role. Satan becomes the devil through his argument that God is not creator. As he attempts to seduce the hosts of heaven to rebel against God, the angel Abdiel rebukes Satan for this betrayal, asking what greater knowledge he has than “him . . . who made / Thee what thou art, and formed the pow’rs of Heav’n” (Lost 442). Abdiel’s argument is that Satan is inherently less worthy of leadership than those God chooses and is ungrateful in seeking it because in doing so he violates the laws of his creator. In Milton’s universe, Abdiel’s assertion that Satan was created by God “is sufficient to establish the Father’s pre-eminence” (Lehnhof 23). In response, Satan orates,

. . . Strange point and new!
Doctrine which we would know whence learnt: who saw
When this creation was? Remember’st thou
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
We know no time when we were not as now;
Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised
By our own quick’ning power (Lost 443).

Satan’s independence does not allow him to admit his debt to God, that debt which is so obvious to Abdiel and to Milton. Rather, Satan insists that because angels do not remember their creation they are “self-begot, self-raised” (443). This absurd logic flows against the explicit claim of the poem that the Lord is creator and that his creations owe him gratitude. Satan’s rebellion, the center of his identity, is fully yoked to the claim of self-creation—rebellion without a denial of creation is inconceivable, and a denial of creation without rebellion is unthinkable. In fact, it is “after hearing Satan’s blasphemous declaration of being ‘self-begot, self-raised’ (V, 860), [that Abdiel] foretells the irrevocable doom of Satan and his cohorts” (Tung 601). From that point forward, Satan is necessarily damned, because he will not serve under God nor acknowledge the Lord’s hand in his being.

In order to retain an identity of independence after the fall, Satan continues to deny his creation by God and claims that power as his own. As Charles Coffin explains, “No creature in Milton’s world has [self-sufficiency], although Satan strives with Faustian vigor to get the illusion of it” (Coffin 14). This “Faustian vigor” is evident in one of his most famous lines in the poem. Cast out of heaven, Satan relates to Beelzebub that “The mind is its own place, and in
criterion

itself / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n. / What matter where, if I
still be the same . . . ?” (Lost 303). Satan’s concept of creation both necessitates
and is necessitated by an inflated sense of self. He not only claims the power of
original self-creation, but seems intent on believing in ongoing self-creation, a
creation so powerful that it reshapes the world around him. Satan sets himself
up to be a god, one who creates himself and, in the process, the world around
him. If, as Lehnhof explains, Milton’s “God is god by virtue of his singular role
in the Genesis of the universe,” then Satan’s attempt to claim the creation not
only of himself but of his surrounding is a literal attempt at deification of self
and a rebellion against God (16).

Ironically, within the logic of the poem, there is nothing that Satan could
have done to distance himself from godly power more than denying God’s hand
in his creation. Milton believed that “the Father is not only he by whom, but
also he from whom, in whom, through whom, and on account of whom all
things are” (Milton Doctrine 1199). This concept is ex Deo creation, “the idea
that God created the world from Himself rather than from ‘nothing’ or from
some eternal coexistent matter” (Adamson 756). Within this concept of cre-
ation, “everything is to some degree a part of the Father” and thus “everything
is to some degree divine” (Lehnhof 15). By acknowledging authentic creation,
Satan could draw closer to God, not only in terms of his relationship to him,
but also because he would be embracing the parts of himself that were most
Godlike. It is both ironic and interesting, then, that by asserting that he is not
made by God (in an attempt to reign like God) Satan neglects and refuses the
divinity in himself.

Satan’s concept of self-creation is also evident in his interpersonal relation-
ships, especially those with Adam and Eve and the hosts of heaven. Clearly, his
relationship with the host of heaven (both those who follow him and those
who wage war against him) is based on his claim that they owe nothing to the
Father. A study of creation also sheds light on Satan’s desire to plague Adam
and Eve. Since God is god because of his creative power, and since he shares
his divinity with his creations, then Satan’s plan (articulated by Beelzebub) to
“waste [God’s] whole creation, or possess / All as our own . . . [or] seduce them
to our party, that their God / May . . . with repenting hand / Abolish his own
works” is not just a matter of revenge (Lost 334–335). Rather, it is an attempt to
minimize the divinity of God by debasing his creations. Thus Satan frames his
interactions with Adam and Eve by his obsession with creation; his desire to
bring about The Fall is directly related to his understanding of creative power and what it means to be divine.

And yet Satan’s perception of creation—his driving motivation—is not stable; he is consistently faced with evidence that conflicts with his version of creation, and yet he continues to choose rebellion. At times, even he cannot deny the overpowering truth of the Lord’s power. These moments of self-doubt consistently occur when he is confronted by one of God’s new creations, new evidence of the Lord’s divinity. Upon first seeing Eden and the sun, “conscience wakes despair that slumbered” (385), and Satan admits that God “deserved no such return / From me, whom he created . . . What could be less than to afford him praise, / The easiest recompense” (386). This echo of the Son’s assertion in *Paradise Regained* creates a moment of deep identity crisis for Satan—his concept of himself begins to unravel as the belief that he is self-made is challenged. This moment of “quasi-penitence reveal[s] the way in which his adversarial stance is sustained by this claim to self-creation” (Lehnhof). Rather than claiming that he is self-made and that in his self-making he can define the world around him, Satan admits “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (*Lost* 387). Satan sees his own weakness in God’s creations. And yet, though such moments of self-reflection and near repentance occur several times in the poem, each time he reverts back to ideas of self-making and thus to a person who is reconciled to God, and who continually torments those around him. Still, Satan’s occasional wandering into a correct understanding of creation emphasizes one of Milton’s primary themes—liberty. Satan is not trapped in one way of thinking and thus one way of being. Rather, he is free to choose and to choose repeatedly how to view creation and, consequentially, is free to choose his identity, eternal role, and relationship with others.

In many ways, Adam is the antithesis of Satan as he naturally and gladly extends the worship that God requires; in doing so, he defines himself and his role in the narrative. There are two accounts of Adam’s creation in *Paradise Lost*—Raphael’s telling and Adam’s. In Raphael’s version, God made “a creature who [would] . . . Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence / Magnanimous to correspond with Heav’n, / But grateful to acknowledge whence his good” (*Lost* 492). Here, once again, the poem asserts that creations are meant—even made—to pay homage to their maker, and that Adam has a responsibility in terms of worship. Unlike Satan, however, Adam does so willingly, as is demonstrated in his account of his creation. Raphael’s
account lays out Adam’s responsibilities; Adam’s account shows him fulfilling them as part of his identity.

Adam’s telling of his creation demonstrates that he instinctively acknowledges his maker, fulfilling his obligation towards God. This instinctual obedience affects his actions, relationships, and identity. Almost immediately upon waking to find himself made, Adam wonders, “how came I thus, how here? / Not of myself; by some great Maker then, / In goodness and in power pre-eminent” (505). Many critics note that this excerpt indicates a natural inclination and intuition to worship God. This is a moment of self-reflexivity, as Adam demonstrates “the Self’s complex awareness that being implies the Other than itself as a condition of existence and that its complete identity somehow requires at least the acknowledgement of the fact” (Coffin 7). Adam’s entrance into the world is marked by an immediate wish to acknowledge God and thus become more whole. His “first action is to raise his eyes to Heaven . . . How came he there? Clearly not by his own means . . . He must, therefore, be the product of some great Maker, preeminent in goodness and power. How may he know this creator so that he can adore him?” (Bowers 266). Adam fulfills his responsibility naturally and without any inclination to do otherwise. In doing so, he establishes his identity and his relationship with his creator as an obedient follower of God. So great is his devotion that when Raphael warns against disobedience, Adam does not understand the concept. He says, “What meant that caution joined, ‘If ye be found / Obedient’? Can we want obedience then / To him, or possibly his love desert / Who formed us from the dust . . .?” (Lost 433). Adam cannot fathom disobeying his maker, because his concept of creation defines their relationship.

Unlike Satan, Adam sees his lack of memory before creation as a sign that he must have been created, rather than a sign that he created himself. In the context of Milton’s concept of creation ex Deo, Adam’s logical leap indicates a far greater understanding of the world around him than Satan’s does. Not only is Adam’s assumption correct where Satan’s is not, Adam’s assumption also leads to a more complete and holy sense of self. Satan feels that admitting his relationship to God would make him somehow less, while Adam feels intuitively that in order to be whole and have a “complete identity” he must acknowledge and thank his creator (Coffin 7). In giving thanks, Adam draws closer to divinity, both by strengthening his relationship with God and by acknowledging the associated divinity in himself as a creation of God.
Adam's identity is thus stamped by his understanding of both the creation of the world and the creation of himself. He tells Eve, “best are all things as the will / Of God ordained them, his creating hand / Nothing imperfect or deficient left / Of all he created, much less man” (Lost 527). Adam acknowledges not only that the things around him are of God, but also that his own worth stems from the fact that he was created by God. He, God's crowning creation, is without defect. Adam cannot be “imperfect” or “deficient” because of the divine hand that formed him.

In yet another definitive difference between the devil and the first man, Adam understands that God created the world, and that it remains under the Lord’s power, which understanding further shapes his identity and narrative role. Adam’s first questions “aim to define the structures of authority that shape his world,” demonstrating from the beginning that he recognizes that the world around him exists outside of him and is not subject to his creation (Lehnhof 21). Adam addresses the sun and enquires “Thou sun . . . Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?” (Lost 505). Adam speaks with humility to the sun as a fellow creation. This is notable because of Satan’s speech to the sun, in which he says “to thee I call / But with no friendly voice, and add thy name / O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams” (386). While Adam models humility and seeks to know from whence he came, Satan models hatred for the Lord’s creations, as they are evidence of his own debt. Satan cannot abide the sign of his enemy’s power, nor the beauty that he has deprived himself of; Adam accepts his place in the world with gratitude. He does not seek to remake the world in his image but rather to understand it as it was created.

Adam’s understanding of creation also permeates his relationship with Eve. Throughout the poem, Adam instructs Eve on their maker’s ways, at one pointing inviting her to bed, pointing out that “God hath set / Labor and rest, as day and night to men / Successive” (403). Adam’s knowledge of creation gives him a measure of authority, shaping his understanding of himself and his relationship with Eve. We see, too, that he values her partially because he recognizes her as God’s creation. Adam calls Eve “fairest of creation, last and best / of all God’s works” (543) and frequently references her with titles such as “Daughter of God and man” (526). Adam’s great love for Eve, then, at least partially stems from recognizing that she is one of God’s creations, and his authority over her stems partially from a greater understanding of that creation.

It becomes clear how much Adam’s understanding of creation shapes his concept of himself and his relationships only after The Fall. Like Satan, Adam’s
perception of creation is in flux, and it changes after he has sinned. After The Fall, Adam’s relationship with God is drastically changed. On the cusp of the promised punishment, Adam complains, “Did I request thee, Maker from my clay / to mold me man, did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me, or here place / In this delicious garden?” (574). This is a sharp turnaround from the grateful inclination to worship that woke him from his first sleep. The obedience he once found so easy has changed as well, and he now describes the terms of his obedience as “terms too hard, by which I was to hold / The good I sought not” (574). The version of creation that Adam promotes after The Fall represents a separation between Adam’s will and the Lord’s and a diminishing of the gratitude that once came to him so naturally.

Adam’s ingratitude is a dismissal of his own worth as well. Whereas he was once in no way “imperfect or deficient” but “best . . . as God ordained him,” Adam now seems to feel his own imperfections strongly (527). Though he complains bitterly at first about the unjustness of God, he eventually acknowledges the fairness of the Lord’s punishments and says, “That dust I am, and shall to dust return: O welcome hour whenever!” (575). Adam’s new vision of creation—as an act of God without his will, which brings misery—makes him view himself as less than dust, and a vessel not worthy of the life that fills it. Because of defying God’s creative process, first by disobeying God and second by refusing to feel gratitude, Adam no longer feels worthy of the divine gift of life. Indeed, he seems to feel it more as an unwelcome burden.

However, while Adam’s understanding of creation shifts drastically and negatively after he partakes of the fruit, there remains an important distinction between him and Satan: Adam misinterprets and is ungrateful for God’s creation, but he never denies it. Adam never claims to be self-made, or capable of creating the world around him. This, according to Lehnhof, is a vital distinction: “the difference between redemption and damnation, the distance between Satan’s perpetual imprisonment and Adam’s eventual exultation, is in many ways reducible to the beliefs each espouses concerning God’s role in creation” (39). While Satan was forever damned because he denied creation entirely and thus refused to acknowledge God’s sovereignty, Adam’s shift in perception still allows him room to return. Adam has not denied the reality of creation. He is still capable of feeling gratitude for it and the opportunities it gives him to be exalted. This is yet another significant way that Adam’s understanding of creation contributes to his overall identity—not only who he is in the poem, but who he is capable of being after its end.
Perhaps less obviously, but even more completely, Eve’s creation defines her in her own eyes and in the eyes of others. Unlike Satan and Adam, Eve’s creation is somewhat mediated by the presence of a third party—her husband. Adam is not just Eve’s spouse but also “her formal and material cause. She is his idea, and he supplies the rib” (Coffin 14). Unsurprisingly, this connection to Adam and mediated connection to God becomes a vital part of her identity.

Unlike Adam, who intuitively acknowledges another outside of himself and addresses God’s creations immediately (Lost 505), Eve’s origin story is much more focused on herself. Upon waking from creation Eve “with unexperienced thought” saw her reflection, recognizing it only as “a shape within the wat’ry gleam,” noticing it with “sympathy,” “love,” and “vain desire” (399). It is perhaps unsurprising that Eve, more removed from her divine creator than Adam, does not immediately seek her Lord out. As Coffin notes, Eve “feels no such large connection with the creatures of the world or with ‘some great Maker’” (15). Indeed, she has to be led away from her reflection and towards Adam in “whose image [she] is” by a voice (Lost 399). It is significant that Eve is described as being in Adam’s image, because it again defines her as partially his creation. Only a few pages earlier, Milton introduces the couple as splendorous, “for in their looks divine / The image of their glorious Maker shone” (394), and yet we learn that the reflection of God’s image in Eve is passed down through Adam, whose image she is also in. It is clear in her creation story that Eve’s image, as well as her connection to God, is experienced second-hand.

If it is not completely evident in Eve’s introduction that her mediated creation has affected her relationship with God, it becomes so as the poem progresses. Eve recognizes a greater divinity in Adam, who she admits to originally thinking was “less fair, / Less winning soft” than her “own reflection” (399), but from whom she learns “How beauty is excelled by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair” (400). In recognizing herself as a creation of Adam, she recognizes that he is closer to divinity than she is. When Adam tells Eve that it is time to go to bed, she responds, “Unargued I obey; so God ordains, God is thy Law, thou mine” (404). Eve’s identity, then, very much operates around the concept of subjugation to Adam, the only intelligent being she is in direct contact with.

Eve’s view of her own creation also affects the way in which she interacts with those around her. While Adam interacts with deity and the otherwise divine with some frequency, Eve is often one step removed. Adam is greeted by God after his creation while Eve is met with “a voice” and Adam (399). When
Raphael visits and converses with Adam, Eve is directly addressed in only four lines, and she does not directly participate, except in providing food (429). In fact, she is noted as being “retir’d” and eventually she wanders off to tend her garden, knowing that Adam would tell her of their conversation later and “Her Husband the Relater she preferr’d / Before the Angel” (498). Eve not only is not involved in the semi-divine council, she does not particularly wish to be, marking both identity and interpersonal relations. This pattern repeats itself throughout the poem. Near the end of the epic, Gabriel comes to prophesy to Adam concerning the rest of the world and the affects of The Fall. Unlike Adam, Eve has little direct contact with Gabriel but tells Adam “whither wet’st, I know; For God is in sleep, and dreams advise” (628). It is not that Eve does not interact with the divine, but only that her interactions are often mediated, much like her creation.

Like Adam's, Eve's concept of creation and relationship with God shift after her sin. Eve's change in creational thinking is directly related to her interaction with Satan, who recognizes “that Eve obeys the Father out of respect for his authority as her author” and as such “impugns the Father's role as creator. . .” (Lehnof 37). Satan questions Godhood by questioning him as creator, saying “God therefore, cannot hurt ye, and be just; / Not just, not God” (Lost 537). Eve, in turn, comes to believe the serpent and changes her concept of creation to match his. It is clear that Satan's arguments of self-making have an effect on Eve because, as they speak, she changes “the way in which she refers to God. Throughout the epic Eve has customarily called the Father 'Creator' or 'Maker.' As the Temptation proceeds, however, she foregoes that form of nominalization.” Instead, Eve's understanding of her relationship with deity has clearly changed when she calls “God as 'Our great Forbidder' . . .” (Lehnhof 38). Eve's change in her creational thinking enables her to disobey her creator, for, while understanding him as her beloved maker, she could not go against his will.

Eve's misunderstanding of creation continues after she partakes of the fruit, affecting her relationships and concept of self. She seems to recognize The Fall as a new creation and therefore seeks a new creator—Eve's first action after eating of the fruit is to worship the tree. She prays, “henceforth my early care, / Not without song, each morning, and due praise / Shall tend thee” (Lost 540). This morning devotion used to be paid to the Father, but Eve recognizes the tree as the creator of her new self. This problematic concept of creation continues as Eve considers not sharing her newfound knowledge with Adam and contemplates using it to “rend [her] more equal, and perhaps, / A thing
not undesirable, sometime, / Superior” (541). This is an inversion of the power structure the poem has previously employed and goes against its implicit argument that “every creature is indebted to its author” (Lehnhof 16). Eve no longer recognizes her creators, God and Adam, as beings to whom she owes gratitude, and consequently, her relationships with them and her concept of herself changes.

However, like Adam, Eve’s shifting perception of The Fall is not permanent. Rather, Eve quickly realizes her error and pleads for mercy from her two creators—God and Adam. Eve goes first to Adam and admits her fault saying, “both have sinned, but thou / Against God only, I against God and thee” (Lost 579). Eve has regained her understanding of creation, and rather than worshipping the tree and desiring to be superior to Adam, she recognizes her sin against her creators. It is Eve who proposes the idea of “importun[ing] Heaven” for mercy, and it is through this speech that Adam is once again reminded of the truth of creation. Their joint admission of guilt allows them to reconcile and, eventually, allows for the reconciliation of man and woman to God, as their prayer of repentance operates as a renewed recognition of creation. Eve retains her identity as a dutiful creation of the Father and her peaceful relationship with Adam by returning to a correct understanding of creation.

Many of the major characters of the poem, Satan, Adam, and Eve, are twice-shaped by creation, first in the creative act itself, and second in their perception of it and the way in which that affects their identity and interpersonal relationships. For these characters, the way in which characters view creation is a decision, because the truth of God’s creations is unquestionable in Milton’s writing. In his Christian Doctrine, Milton argues that “It is indisputable that all things which exist in the world, created in perfection of beauty and order for some definitive purpose . . . provide proof that a supreme creative being existed before the world” (1145). When faced with an unquestionable truth, his characters must accept or deny, rejoice or mourn. Since it is “indisputable” that God created the world, to deny it, or to not offer the gratitude that is the creator’s due is the first choice. From this decision stems all others, and from it springs an identity and relationships. Milton’s God is insistent that he built humanity “just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to Fall” (Milton Lost 363). It becomes evident throughout the poem that God’s creations’ choice to stand or to fall depends largely on how they see the world and who they attribute it to.


De-suturing Milton’s Eden
Navigating from an Althusserian Bipartite System to a Badiouian Set in *Paradise Lost*

*Brittany Strobelt*

Though Satan certainly catalyzes the Fall in *Paradise Lost*, his deception does not appear to be the *only* factor leading to original sin. Based on several passages within *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve already engage in a process of learning even before they taste of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil; such knowledge includes a moral education, even though the only moral command Adam and Eve actually receive from God is not to eat of the forbidden fruit. According to Eric Dunnum, we can and should connect Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Louis Althusser’s ideas of the Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus. By doing so, we come closer to answering the question of why Adam and Eve should be educated on morality. But Dunnum’s Althusserian explanation still remains inadequate. Thus, I hope to shift his explication so as to better suit Milton’s complex interpretation of Adam and Eve’s time spent in the Garden of Eden leading up to the Fall, and I will do so by applying Alain Badiou’s ideas on set theory in order to expand Dunnum’s analysis. Ultimately, I aim to radically expand readers’ conceptions of Milton’s Eden by suggesting potentialities—concerning sin and alternative falls—within Eden.
In terms of who and/or what leads up to original sin, Satan aims and even claims to be the sole impetus of the Fall, and yet simply blaming Satan for the Fall understates Adam and Eve’s joint complicity. In fact, as portrayed in Milton’s version of the Fall, Satan probably only shortened the span of time spent in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, for Adam and Eve, even while still in the Garden of Eden, begin to progress—or, perhaps, even digress. For instance, though supposedly created perfectly, Eve appears to be naturally inclined toward sin. She recalls that soon after her creation, upon seeing her reflection glimmering in a stream, she immediately began to “[pine] with vain desire” after herself and would still be doing so if she had not been warned of her folly and led to Adam by an invisible voice (Milton 4.465–478). This longing after her personal reflection undeniably reflects a still immortal “perfect” being’s imperfect natural tendency toward sin—a seemingly blatant paradox. As mentioned in the footnotes of The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton, Eve’s pining not only echoes Narcissus’s longing after his own image, but also echoes Satan’s pining, as in lines 511 and 848 of Book 4, where he pines after what he has recently lost. Thus, Eve’s first action in Eden already lowers her to a level at which she can be compared to the devil. But then again, even the devil was created perfectly, and he still fell. However, this comparison signifies that alongside an increasing self-awareness, an internal sense of pride is also brewing within Eve. And this manifests itself even before Satan enters the Garden. In addition, if readers missed this slightly subtle connection to Satan through the particular word choice of “pining,” they would find it much harder to ignore the connotation of “warned” when Eve recalls the invisible voice (Milton 4.467). Through this warning, Milton alerts readers that Eve is already in the process of making a mistake, which is one that Christians could easily identify as idolatry—self-idolatry, specifically. As such, Eve appears to be in the process of breaking the very first commandment, “thou shalt not have any other gods before me” (King James Bible, Exodus 20:3). Even though Eve has not been given this commandment explicitly, one would still think idolatry should be considered a sin, especially in the perfect paradise that is Eden. Does God just let this little mistake slip because Eve is just newly created? This allowance of something so close to sin appears to violate God’s strict adherence to justice. Hence, this calls into question the conditions determining banishment from the Garden of Eden in Milton’s epic.

Though Dunnum’s article “The Bipartite System of Laws in ‘Paradise Lost’” does not necessarily clarify all of the questions raised by such actions and
their allowance in Eden, it certainly does at least brings readers closer to solu-
tions. Throughout his article, Dunnum emphasizes the two Althusserian sys-
tems within *Paradise Lost*: the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological
State Apparatus. Briefly summarizing such apparatuses, the Repressive State
Apparatus equals the external system, such as the two commandments God
gives Adam immediately after the creation, whereas the Ideological State
Apparatus is an internal system by which “the Father’s control over his subjects
goes further and deeper” as He “exerts power through an ideology of obedi-
ce” (Dunnum 152). In fact, Dunnum asserts “that this ideology of obedience
is always already internalized in the subjects through laws that are worked in
the fabric of creation and implanted as ‘gifts’ to human beings by the Father”:
namely, “freedom and reason” (152). For instance, Dunnum mentions Adam’s
“argument” with God about his (Adam’s) need for a female companion after
his creation as the embodiment of these “gifts” of freedom and reason. Milton
does not purvey Adam’s ability to reason (to connect the animals’ needs for a
companion as a symbol of his need for one) and his freedom to disagree with
God and freely speak his opinions in a negative light. In fact, God is actually
pleased with Adam’s aptitude. This example of freedom indeed adheres to
what Dunnum explicates as Milton’s definition of freedom because, according
to Milton, freedom does not necessarily equate to a state without any fetters
or restraints but rather signifies a state of using one’s freedom to make choices
that mesh with both God’s Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State
Apparatus. In this way, Adam uses both his reason and freedom to adhere to
God’s bipartite system. However, by universally applying such Althusserian
interpretations to *Paradise Lost*, can we reconcile Eve’s pining with vain desire
after her own reflection?

Unfortunately, Eve’s development of ego does not align with God’s will,
and the warning which leads her to Adam indicates that. Of course, Eve *does*
instantly choose to follow the voice of warning, but she indicates that her natu-
ral instinct to stare pining after herself would not have been overcome other-
wise. If this brief development of pride indicates only the beginnings of sin,
how long would Eve have had to pine after her reflection for it to turn into sin?
Since Milton has provided no way of ever truly determining an exact answer to
such a complex question, we are left to only wonder and surmise possibilities.
However, Eve’s brief encounter with pride after her creation does still hint at a
much larger question: might this brush with sin only be the beginning of Adam
and Eve’s moral digression within the Garden of Eden, which culminates in
the Fall? In other words, might there have been a fall within the Fall? And if so, how can we reconcile this with Dunnum’s Althusserian model of God’s laws for \textit{Paradise Lost}?

Indeed, when we view Adam and Eve in Milton’s \textit{Paradise Lost} as two innocent and inherently righteous beings who, beguiled by the devil, partake in original sin, then yes, Dunnum’s account of the external Repressive State Apparatus and internal Ideological State Apparatus suitably describe God’s rule over the original father and mother of mankind. And yet, as mentioned, if Eve had been left to her vain desires, her brush with sin would almost certainly have turned to outright sin, at least by Christian standards. If Eve were not interrupted and had sinned, would she have gone unpunished? Even the mere existence of such a possibility must certainly trespass against and undermine God’s Ideological State Apparatus. This incongruency suggests a hole either within Dunnum’s theory or within Milton’s \textit{Paradise Lost}—either Dunnum’s theory is too limited or Milton’s depiction of Eden perhaps allows for a little too much freedom. So which is it?

In order to even begin an attempt to unravel such mysteries, readers should consult yet another philosopher: Alain Badiou. His \textit{Manifesto for Philosophy} ushers in postmodern philosophy by countering the modern philosophical notion that philosophy is dead. While contradicting such notions, Badiou argues that “philosophy is possible today”; moreover, “this possibility does not take the form of a final stage” (32). And so, in order to revive the perennial nature of philosophy and disprove Jean-Francois Lyotard’s assertion that “philosophy as architecture is ruined” (Badiou 28), Badiou promotes a mathematically structured philosophy based on set theory. This new Badiouian, mathematical structure actually provides more flexibility than before imagined for philosophy. And surprisingly, it also provides more flexibility for \textit{Paradise Lost}.

But just what is mathematical set theory? First and foremost, a set is a designated collection of distinct objects (numbers, in mathematics). In relation to \textit{Paradise Lost}, the fundamental set is Eden, which, though comprised of a conglomeration of objects, still is seen as a complete object in itself. And so set theory describes collections—collections that in themselves can represent a complete whole (another object). In \textit{Lectures in Logic and Set Theory}, instead of giving readers a purely ontological definition of sets while describing axiomatic set theory, George Tourlakis likens sets to “collections” (99) but then informs readers that “from the mathematical point of view we are content to have tools (axioms and rules of logic) that tell us how sets \textit{behave} rather
One fundamental behavior is that sets are comprised of urelements, which are atomic or non-divisible. These urelements can exist separately or can be grouped together to build actual sets. In *Paradise Lost*, some of these urelements might be freedom and agency—two core principles that render the Fall’s possibility. Furthermore, set theory also contains an axiom that claims we can continually build sets upon existing sets, which is why we can build the set of Eden upon the set of a bipartite system. However, set theory begins to become more complicated when we reach axioms like the axiom of pairing, which says that for sets A and B, there exists a set C, of which A and B are both elements.

Conversely, we can break down existing sets to create smaller subsets, as long as the sets are not atomic. In this manner, Tourlakis expounds upon set theory, ending in the axiom that states that even infinite sets—or rather inductive sets (originally atomic level sets that perpetually fit into larger sets)—exist, too.

So how does set theory save the allegedly dying field of philosophy? Set theory provides a structure—sets—that, through multiplicity, create a flexible whole. Because, as Badiou claims, philosophers have continually “sutured” or fettered philosophy to other conditions (namely to “the matheme, the poem, political invention and love”), this flexibility is absolutely vital to philosophy’s existence. Thus, Badiou asserts that “if philosophy is threatened by suspension, [...] it is because it is captive of a network of sutures to its conditions [...] which forbade it from configuring their general compossibility.” In other words, philosophy’s sutures restrict its growth and perpetuation, rendering inductive sets a highly unlikely possibility. However, set theory suggests that these philosophical constructions are only parts of the whole—are only urelements of a larger set. In fact, according to Badiou’s concept of philosophical set theory, though we may not have realized it before because of suturing, these sets might actually be inductive sets—sets that unceasingly fit into larger sets. As such, philosophers can unceasingly reimagine the set that is “philosophy.” Actually, Badiou would probably object to any such definitive attempt since defining the set of philosophy implies it is a closed set, rendering even a general compossibility of philosophy impossible; hence, focusing on behavior is ideal. However, instead of recognizing immutable urelements of a philosophic set and labeling them as mutually exclusive with other possibilities, Badiou claims future compossibility. In other words, though philosophy may seem to be made up of certain components now, depending on the circumstances, it might soon be comprised of radically different urelements or even of other sets. As such,
although Badiou’s argument focuses upon philosophy, his work simultaneously and indirectly encourages his readers to consider expanding and reordering sets in order to reimagine the preconceived world.

Returning to *Paradise Lost* and Dunnum’s Althusserian evaluation of Milton’s Eden, I propose something similar to Badiou; utilizing set theory, we must also consider expanding and reordering sets in order to reimagine Milton’s Eden. Currently, based on Dunnum’s theory of God’s Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus, Milton’s Eden is sutured to political invention, particularly an Althusserian bipartite law system, which certainly enlightens the state of rules, laws, and commandments within Eden, but also simultaneously forms a dead end when exploring Milton’s Eden. According to the workings of the Ideological State Apparatus, Adam and Eve should both be inherently inculcated with God’s ideology and further brainwashed by His angels who, before the Fall, discuss only the sin of turning away from God, of rebelling against God. But these ideologies only appear to be leading up to the Fall. Perhaps such a bipartite system simply reveals a manipulative ruler who only wishes to establish a legal system which merely possesses the appearance of agency. If such is the case, then God narrows the set of Adam and Eve’s decisions and actions; He eliminates a general compossibility, or coexistence of other possibilities beyond the derived ideology, within agency. Because of this lack of compossibility in decision, readers can hardly hope to ever fully explain Eve’s narcissistic self-admiration after her creation. Because of such a bleak outlook, can readers—can God, the embodiment of justice—simply ignore such opposition to the bipartite system?

Because Milton undeniably sets the stage for an Ideological State Apparatus, the idea of an Edenic bipartite system cannot be simply ignored. This stage is set most poignantly through Adam and Eve’s relations with God and the angels. For instance, when righteous, Adam and Eve did not “[shun] the sight/Of God or angel, for they *thought no ill*” (4.320, emphasis added). Through such a statement, Milton implies the possibility to sin through thought, though it still remains unclear as to whether that would actually ever happen and, if it did, whether or not it could also cause Adam and Eve to fall in the same way as they did after partaking of the forbidden fruit. Perhaps, if only viewing *Paradise Lost* through the lens of the Edenic bipartite system, one might believe such a statement, which indicates the possibility to feel guilt from sin, merely refers to and foreshadows what happens once in a fallen state. Only after the Fall do Adam and Eve, recognizing their nakedness, hide from the Savior and begin to think
ill of one another. However, other instances of ill thoughts appear even before
the Fall occurs, revealing that Eve's self-longing is not an isolated, accidental
incidence. Thus, since Eve's earliest encounter with sin is not the only complex-
ity of its kind in Paradise Lost, readers cannot feign blindness to it or any other
encounter with sin.

However, in order to determine what thoughts of Adam's and Eve's are "ill,"
we must first explore general definitions of "ill" and then relate them to defini-
tions of ill thoughts. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "ill" in its
noun form actually possesses a number of nuanced definitions, a few of which
might fit Milton's use in line 320 of Book IV. First, "ill" can be interpreted as
"evil, in the widest sense" or as "the opposite of good," though it is "now" con-
sidered as "chiefly in antithesis with good" ("ill" B.1.). Certainly Satan may be
said to have countless ill thoughts of this type, but claiming that the thoughts
of Adam and Eve are so starkly contrary to good, especially before the Fall, is
too questionable and probably incorrect. Moreover, the second definition of "ill"
in its noun form also does not quite mesh with Adam and Eve's state of mind
before the Fall, for it would be quite a stretch to characterize their thoughts as
those of "moral evil, depravity, wickedness, iniquity, sin, [and] wrong-doing"
("ill" B.2.a), especially since Adam and Eve are sinless up until the Fall. However,
the third definition—"hostile, malevolent, or unfriendly feeling, ill will," as in
"to take [something] ill" or to "take offence at it" ("ill" B.3.a)—actually might
connect to Eve's thoughts at one point before the Fall. During the episode
before Adam and Eve separate in the garden, though subtle, Eve actually takes
offence to Adam's unwillingness to separate, asserting, "[Satan's] fraud is then
thy fear, which plain infers / Thy equal fear that my firm faith and love / Can by
his fraud be shaken or seduced; / Thoughts, which how found they harbor in
thy breast / Adam, misthought of her to thee so dear?" (Milton 9.285–289). In
response, Adam uses "healing words" (9.290) in order to assuage her feelings
of hurt. Ironically, by blaming Adam of thoughts of ill towards her, Eve actually
engages in her own thoughts of ill. Perhaps this is not quite a sin, but it certainly
echoes the imperfections of Eve. But this is not the only time "thoughts of ill"
occur in Paradise Lost.

If utilizing such strong forms of "ill" which implicate a sense of "sin" and
pure "evil," then perhaps Eve's offence to Adam's supposed doubt of her "firm
faith and love" truly is the only offence of thinking ill thoughts. But not only
does this characterize Eve as the only imperfect human creation (which would
undoubtedly lead to a discussion on misogyny) but it also complicates the
actual Fall itself. If the Fall truly is centered on the agency to fall, then is this pivotal event really so organic and free, even when it is tied to perfect beings whose worst transgression before the Fall was taking offense? Before answering such a question, “ill” still might offer more clarity, for I believe it can be interpreted slightly differently in order to accommodate the mathematical set that characterizes the Fall. Though Milton uses the noun form of “ill,” the first adjectival definition of “ill” in the OED actually helps to unveil a more nuanced and significant form of “ill.” Similar to definition B.2.a, definition A.1 defines “ill” as meaning “morally evil; wicked, iniquitous, depraved, vicious, immoral” but also adds “blameworthy” and “reprehensible” (emphasis added). Of course, sins, evil, wickedness, and so forth are all “reprehensible” and “blameworthy,” but some actions may still be “blameworthy” and “reprehensible” without necessarily being “evil” or “sinful.” For example, Eve’s aforementioned dabbling in self-idolatry could be, to some extent, considered “blameworthy,” even though she still does not have to repent for her lustful thoughts. But again, this returns to the previous discussion of where to draw the line for sin and furthermore perpetuates the narrow focus on Eve’s blame in the Fall—unless, of course, Adam also displays instances of possessing thoughts of ill.

In Book VIII, Adam reveals to Raphael some of his own “reprehensible” thoughts while he relates his memory of the creation. Particularly while recalling his memory of Eve’s creation, Adam admits that “when [he approaches] / Her loveliness, so absolute she seems / And in herself complete, so well to know / Her own, that what she wills to do or say, / Seems wisest, virtuouest, discreetest, best; / All higher knowledge in her presence falls / Degraded, wisdom in discourse with her / Looses discountnanced, and like folly shows” (8.546–553, emphasis added). Not surprisingly, Raphael lightly reprimands Adam for such thoughts and warns him of misplacing Eve’s wisdom above even his own, only because of her entrancing physical beauty. In this sense, we do see that Adam possesses “reprehensible” thoughts—thoughts of ill. But similar to Eve’s thoughts of ill, Adam has not yet sinned in his thoughts. And yet his thoughts are not entirely pure, for he is placing Eve upon a pedestal raised above “all higher knowledge”—meaning he is even putting her wisdom above God’s. Indeed, this could be said to be yet another form of idolatry. Thus, recognizing hidden elements within the set of “ill” reveals that Adam and Eve, even before the Fall, do have some “thoughts of ill,” which returns to the aforementioned issue of needing to call into question the larger set of Eden as a bipartite system—a set much larger than “ill.”
Returning to the question of an Althusserian bipartite system in *Paradise Lost*, I still am not arguing that this structure should be entirely rejected; rather, I believe it is only one part of the whole—perhaps a set within another, inductive set. Unfortunately, when this set is only viewed alone, outside of the other set(s) in which it exists, it excludes compossibility of committing other sins within Milton’s Eden. However, even if focusing on the larger set, compossibility of sins (other than eating of the forbidden fruit) is still complicated. But these aforementioned “thoughts of ill” coordinate very well with how Adam and Eve both fell—Eve fell because of her pride and self-idolization while Adam fell because of his willingness to put Eve’s logic above God’s—that they cannot be coincidental. But if these “thoughts of ill” are precursors for the Fall, then that would most likely mean that the set of the Fall could not actually include “freedom” and “agency” as urelements.

In terms of freedom and agency’s possible annihilation in *Paradise Lost*, John Tanner’s *Anxiety in Eden*, though focused on Kierkegaardian philosophy within *Paradise Lost*, provides an analysis on the question of a fall before the Fall, which if true, would conflict with the “freedom” and “agency” urelements’ compossibility. First of all, Tanner asserts that because Milton emphasizes the origination of Adam and Eve’s guilt as occurring after the Fall, Adam and Eve are not subject to original sin; thus, in *Paradise Lost*, “though Milton initially describes such evil desire [concupiscence] as a precedent mode of sin—normally related to evil deeds as cause to effect—he ends the chapter resolving to treat concupiscence as a ‘consequence of sin’” (18). But even though the Fall stands as the line between innocence and guilt, Milton’s depiction of this event is as a “gradual process” (20). But do “Milton’s proleptic hints of the Fall [come] to be seen as explanations of it” (21)? Or, as others have misconstrued, do these hints indicate a fall before the Fall? Tanner, referencing Stanley Fish’s *Surprised by Sin*, claims that this assumption removes free will—the most vital component—from the Fall, and so a fall before the Fall could not be possible. So why provide such “thoughts of ill” before the Fall, especially when a Milton scholar like Tanner suggests that “the point of the scenes in Paradise from Book IV to Book IX is their irrelevance, as determining factors, to the moment of crisis experienced by the characters” (27)? According to Tanner, such hints create an Edenic “borderland of becoming, a profoundly nebulous region located somewhere between innocence and guilt” (28). If true, this radically alters the preconceived set of Eden, even if it provides a means of free will’s compossibility in Eden.
If Eden truly is a borderland between innocence and guilt, then the strict structure of an Althusserian bipartite system is not an appropriate description of Edenic laws. But again, this idea should not be simply deemed useless, for the concept of an Ideological State Apparatus does help describe a great deal of what occurs in *Paradise Lost*. In fact, if we apply set theory’s axiom of pairing, we can better envision how a smaller set of a bipartite system could still coexist with another nuanced set describing Eden’s legal system, all within the larger set of Eden. Therefore, we cannot forget that restricting Eden’s set to certain elements or sets that only partially make up Eden’s legal system creates a harmful suture. And so, how exactly does entertaining the possibility of a borderland-like Eden that is governed by a bipartite legal system alter notions of the set of Milton’s Eden? For one, free will and “thoughts of ill” can simultaneously exist within Eden. Additionally, Adam and Eve already begin receiving a moral education, allowing them to additionally begin the process of progression and digression. And though the seemingly proleptic hints may not actually point to a fall before the Fall, perhaps in the borderland of Eden, they instead simply highlight Adam and Eve’s individual weaknesses, which then unsurprisingly end up being manifest in the Fall. Just as some have greater tendencies toward certain sins, so it is with Adam and Eve. However, one question still remains: would this Edenic set allow for a different kind of fall?

As aforementioned, Badiou greatly stresses the importance of compossibility, which encourages his readers to not just limit their imaginations to philosophy but to imagine their entire worlds differently. With compossibility, though circumstances may currently be one way, that does not necessarily mean they could not be otherwise. In reality, the principal restrictions upon otherness, upon being otherwise (compossibility), are artificial sutures. I propose that we, if even for a moment, remove the suture that the Fall must occur by partaking of the forbidden fruit. As evidenced in Books IV through IX, Adam and Eve do grow and learn and, throughout these processes, are visibly fallible. As such, if Satan did not ever tempt Eve, could the Fall have happened otherwise because of this process of growth? Clearly, Satan’s role is not to bear the entire brunt of the blame but instead is primarily to catalyze the Fall; he quickens the process that might otherwise have been more prolonged in an experimental borderland-like Eden. And although Adam and Eve's “thoughts of ill” seem to be of a lesser degree of “ill-ness,” the compossibility of those “thoughts of ill” progressing (or perhaps digressing) to a degree at which Adam and Eve would
shun the presence of God and His angels seems probable in this de-sutured set of Milton's Eden.

In the end, while aiming to de-suture Milton's Eden, our aim is not actually to discover exactly what happens in Milton's Eden; Milton has already adequately explicated the action. Our objective actually primarily centers on the internal (Adam and Eve's thoughts, the internalized moral/legal system, etc.) rather than the external action. In doing so, due to the complex nature of the internal, our focus shifts to compossibility. Even if Adam and Eve did not actually experience a fall before the Fall, determining its compossibility is important to identifying key urelements of the set that makes up the story and to recognizing the behavior of these urelements. Most likely, if a fall occurred before the actual Fall, then it would utterly alter the nature of *Paradise Lost*, but this alteration is not conducive because of the absolute necessity of free will to the Fall. However, removing Satan—the catalyst—from the story just might reveal a possibility of a different means of falling. If Satan were not part of the set, might God have given different restrictions on sin that would be more encompassing and that would, thus, better suit the progressing/digressing original parents of mankind? Such questions reveal limitless possibilities for scholarship on an author's work that has been already thoroughly studied limitless possibilities, possible through a de-sutured version of Eden.
Endnotes

1 This is only a (very) shortened version of Badiou’s *L’Etre et l’evenement*. In the abridged version, he does not even mention mathematical set theory (which I will explicate in the following paragraph), but the conclusions he makes are based on it. And, I believe, in order to really understand what Badiou is doing, we must also delve into set theory (at least the basics).

2 In math, a set is depicted with braces. For instance, if we have a set with the numbers 7, 44, and -128, we would depict it as so: {7, 44, -128}. A set can be chosen arbitrarily, but more often than not, in mathematics, a set indicates some sort of relationship between the numbers. For example, we might be given a function y=3x. Perhaps we arbitrarily choose to plug in 2, 5, and -3 for x, which means that our set for x would be {2, 5, -3}, but then our set for x would necessitate that our set for y would be {6, 15, -9}.

3 Today, the commonly used set theory is an axiomatic one called the Zermelo-Fraenkel system—or ZFC, as it is more commonly known (Ferreirós 366).

4 This idea is quite significant when imagining Eden and determining how to describe its behavior, for it opens up the possibility of multiple sets—or structures/systems—existing and operating within one larger set. This does not necessarily demand that these two smaller sets within the larger set overlap (or possess some of the same urelements), nor does it dictate that these two smaller sets cannot overlap whatsoever.

5 These concepts of breaking down larger sets and building up smaller sets are probably the most important concepts within set theory in relation to Badiou’s ideas (and, consequently, my ideas for reimagining Milton’s Eden), for they provide flexibility and even creativity in seemingly fixed and determined structures without actually tearing apart those structures. Thus, ironically, they allow for a seemingly contradictory existence of a pliable structure or framework.

6 Certainly, we cannot simply deem all sutures as doing only harm and no good. In fact, surgical sutures (stitches) are meant to heal, and even philosophy’s sutures have helped philosophy advance—but only so far. Just as surgical sutures must ultimately be removed in order to keep from restricting movement, so must philosophical sutures be removed. Keep this in mind when considering Eden’s legal system as an Athusserian bipartite one.


Leontes’s abject insanity is readily apparent from the first moments of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, and its prominence in both the characterization of Leontes and its subsequent importance to the play’s plot demand that the nature of his insanity be closely examined. The nature of madness is perhaps the most intriguing question of the recent literary age and, though recent scientific advancements have offered numerous and effective treatments, the great cause of insanity, madness, and delusion remains elusive.

From its Freudian inception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, psychoanalytic criticism has diagnosed the majority of our tragic heroes with one form of mental illness, syndrome, or complex. However, the critical power of psychology rests primarily in diagnosis—psychoanalysis is a pragmatic and necessary discipline, but it is a scientific one. It, like most other scientific fields, is primarily external, and concerns itself with describing rather than explaining. It is the “what” rather than the “why,” and it is not enough.

No critic can read Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* without tackling the question of Leontes’s madness, but a strictly psychoanalytic approach can only offer strictly scientific answers—it is better at describing than explaining Leontes’s condition, and, in the text, Leontes’s madness is given no definite
cause. Leontes himself meanders from reason to reason to justify his increasingly erratic and paranoid behavior, but the very nature of Leontes's character prohibits the reader from trusting these interpretations of himself. Shakespeare clearly presents Leontes as a man disconnected from the reality of the other characters, but his outright refusal to propose any sort of reliable reason for Leontes's insanity means that we must turn elsewhere to understand it. We must work backwards from its effects—examining the linguistic clues readily apparent in the text—through the marriage of psychoanalytic and linguistic literary theories.

One of the most readily apparent effects of Leontes's lost mind is acute paranoia leading to a form of interpretive hallucination. He does not descend into this madness in the play but is infected with it from the play’s inception; in Scene 2, Leontes immediately follows his dear Hermione’s successful plea for Polixenes to linger longer with a paranoid aside, raving at their supposed and imagined courtship. Leontes’s psychosis is compatible with modern definitions of schizophrenia; however, his actions and speeches lead to a deeper understanding of the inner-workings of the deluded mind. Leontes’s schizophrenia is both an effect and a cause of his paranoia, which in turn is both caused by and causing a mis-interpretation, a mis-reading, of the world around him.

Leontes’s world, and therefore, his madness, is built by the language used by and presented to him, and language itself is a slippery slope of sign, signifier, and signified (Tyson 251). According to linguistic theory in general, a linguistic sign, or a word, consists of both signifier and signified. A signifier, essentially, consists of the medium by which the sign is transmitted. It can be a series of runes or letters, a sound, a gesture, or even, as in the case of Leontes, the actions of a beloved wife and a dear friend. The signified on the other hand, is just that—the meaning of the signifier. It is the concept to which the signifier refers, but, unlike the signifier, it is intangible, individual, and unique. “Different people,” according to Lois Tyson, “will probably picture different” signifieds when presented with the same signifier.

Leontes’s madness, therefore, lies not in the observation of signifiers, but in his schizophrenic misinterpretation of the same. He is an extremely observant individual, taking the most literal sense of the word. When Camillo challenges these observations, calling them nothing, Leontes responds with a litany of signs he has noted since Polixenes’s arrival. “Is whispering nothing?” he rejoins, Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career
Of laughing with a sigh?—a note infallible
Of breaking honesty—horsing foot on foot?
Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift?
Hours, minutes? Noon, midnight? And all eyes
Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,
That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing? (I.II.283–291)

Leontes has no difficulty observing signifiers; it is in the creation of a sign, in
the amalgamation of signifier and signified into one linguistic unit, that his
madness becomes apparent and, eventually, dangerous.

Diagnosing Leontes, both because of his fictional nature and my lack of
medical degree, must be done broadly to be done responsibly. Leontes, it must
be remembered, is a fictional representation of a mind and not a mind in fact.
Though we can describe his actions using psychoanalytic terms, the question
of his insanity becomes a primarily linguistic question, and we must therefore
primarily examine the language he employs in order to responsibly analyze
both him and his madness. In the text, he exhibits several symptoms consist-
tent with paranoid schizophrenia, most notably, Leontes experiences acute
states of “psychosis, apathy, and social withdrawal” leading to, as this paper
argues, “cognitive impairment” and “impaired functioning . . . in interpersonal
relationships” (Mueser 2063). Leontes’s psychosis and paranoia is apparent in
Shakespeare’s play from his very first aside. “Too hot, too hot!” Leontes declares,
upon witnessing Hermione’s successful bid in staying his friend Polixenes,

To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.
I have tremor cordis on me: my heart dances;
But not for joy; not joy. This entertainment
May a free face put on, derive a liberty
From heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom,
And well become the agent; ’t may, I grant;
But to be paddling palm and pinching fingers,
As now they are, and making practiced smiles,
As in a looking-glass, and then to sigh, as ’twere
The mort o’ the deer; O, that is entertainment,
My bosom likes not, nor my brows! (I.II.109–119)

Here, we first glimpse Leontes’s impaired mentality both in the content of
his words as well as Shakespeare’s masterful construction of his language.

Before continuing, “psychosis” must be defined. It is not, as it is com-
monly used, merely an impaired mental state, but an impairment resulting
in a complete disassociation from reality. It is a debilitating, crippling state of mind that removes the self from external reality and results in both delusions and hallucinations. Leontes’s psychosis becomes apparent in this passage not because what he is seeing is not there, but because his interpretations of events have been removed from the standard causal chain and have been replaced with his own deluded substitutes.

Returning to the quoted passage, it may perhaps be most beneficial to gleam Leontes’s psychosis from the formal elements which Shakespeare includes before examining what, precisely, Leontes is saying. Language is inherently slippery, and as much meaning can be derived from the aesthetics of its form as from its strict, defined meaning.

The first and most apparent quality of Leontes's aside, and his speech in general throughout the play, is his use of quick, staccato phrases, often culminating in his repeating himself throughout his longer asides. Shakespeare uses these linguistic elements to establish the fact of Leontes’s madness that we, too, must establish before we can examine it. The quoted passage even begins with both a repetition and a short phrase—“Too hot! Too hot!” he says. This interruptible, repetitious rhythm creates a frantic, pitiable diction more consistent with mental ward patients than Sicilian royalty. The effect of Leontes's chaotic speech patterns are only heightened when compared to Hermione's and Polixenes's relatively elegant turns of phrase. Contrast, for example, “One good deed dying tongueless / Slaughters a thousand waiting upon that” (1.2.92–93) and “We were as twinn’d lambs that did frisk i’ the sun, / And bleat the one at the other” (1.2.67–68) with “As now they are, and making practiced smiles, / As in a looking-glass, and then to sigh, as ’twere / The mort o’ the deer” (1.2.114–116). The first two examples, taken from Hermione and Polixenes, respectively, have an elegant turn about them, a beautiful, quotable simplicity the modern reader has come to expect from Shakespeare. The last example, said by Leontes, can only be said to struggle. The clauses are short, almost frantic in their delivery, as if Leontes is only thinking rationally long enough to speak every few seconds. His words spill over themselves in tormented fervor, evoking images of a lunatic in a madhouse, and his diction in general starkly contrasts with those around him, only heightening the effect of Shakespeare's affects.

The content of Leontes’s asides, as much as the quality of their delivery, shape his character in the eyes of the play’s viewer. It is in this aside, quoted in part above, that we first view the effects of Leontes’s jealous frenzy. In it, he claims to see the “paddling palm and pinching fingers” indicative of his wife's
unfaithfulness and his friend’s betrayal. Then he goes on to brag about his powers of perception as if he has solved some great riddle, or uncovered a great secret hidden in their “practiced smiles,” and, either from sarcasm or denial, claims that these gaping emotional wounds “Too hot, too hot!” to bear, which give him “tremor cordis,” are but “entertainment” to him. But then, as if revealing too much about his own insecurity, goes on to ask, “Mamilius, / Art thou my boy?” in order to reassert not only his social status, but to deny his already apparent inability to participate in social schema. Leontes, even from the very beginning of the play, is revealing his willingness to descend into “apathy and social withdrawal” (Mueser 2063)—tell-tale signs of clinical madness.

However, his madness, though easily classified as schizophrenia, cannot be said to be caused by schizophrenia. Such diagnoses are not causes, but descriptions of an immediate cause—a classification of a group of symptoms, useful in the medical field but ultimately meaningless, without context, in the realm of literary criticism. To say that Leontes is simply schizophrenic and think your critical task finished is to ignore the prime directive of criticism: Understanding through exploration. Leontes, in the end, is a fictional character, and diagnosing him does little good, as he cannot be treated, and, if we were to stop here, does the critic little good, as there is not much to be understood by a simple label.

Linguistic criticism offers one possible tunnel to explore. As mentioned earlier, language is a slippery beast made, essentially, of LEGO bricks without studs. Linguistic signs consist of two parts, signifier and signified, which come together to create one linguistic unit, one packet of information whose meaning can be transmitted and derived. These separate but equal processes are essential in understanding Leontes’s madness through a critical lens, and, though they cannot satisfactorily explain the absolute basis of his psychosis, they can give some insight into the immediate cause.

The first thing that must be understood in examining Leontes’s signifier/signified construction of the world is that, for the purpose of this paper, we are equating all forms of communication with linguistic signs. Essentially, all forms of interpretable action are being taken as a signifier leading to a signified, which creates a sign. This is done precisely because Leontes’s actions themselves seem to demand it. His rambling asides are rife with his personal interpretations of Hermione’s and Polixenes’s actions, and differentiating between certain interpretable acts therefore becomes more an exercise in futility than a
useful critical move, for it is in this moment, this liminal space between signifier and signified in which Leontes’s madness exists and persists.

Leontes has no difficulty identifying signifiers, and most of his asides contain a litany of interpretable acts to which he assigns meaning. Furthermore, there is little to no textual evidence provided by Shakespeare that allows us to assume that the actions of Hermione and Polixenes he observes are complete fabrications of Leontes’s mind—they are not hallucinations in whole, only in part. The reader can assume that, even though Leontes is himself mad, the “smiles” and “paddling palm and pinching fingers” and occasional “sigh” are, in themselves, factual acts.

What is not factual, and where Leontes’s madness, or at least the immediate source of his madness, lies, is in the signified to which he assigns these signifiers. His construction of meaningful signs has shifted from the mean, from a rough approximation of the actual truth of the situation—that his friend Polixenes and his wife Hermione are friends who have friendly chats and, in the course of such chats, sigh, as one would, touch hands, as one would, and smile, naturally—to his own, misguided interpretation. “Smiles,” in Leontes’s mind become “practiced smiles,” lying smiles refusing to admit infidelity, “paddling palm and pinching fingers” become signs of spousal unfaithfulness, and even “friendship” becomes “too hot, too hot!” in the face of such mis-aligned and mis-constructed signs.

In this way, the entirety of Leontes madness becomes the product of an unfortunate linguistic shift consistent with the clinical definition of psychosis. It is a detachment from reality not in observation, but in perception. Leontes suffers from a type of interpretive hallucination just as debilitating, if not more so, than an outright fabrication of sights and sounds. The standard causal chain between signifier and signified has been disrupted and corrupted, leaving those around him to argue with a madman not about the facts, but about the interpretation and logical application of those facts. It leaves those around Leontes with no recourse of action, for he still has a foundation upon which to stand; namely, that which he saw happen did indeed happen. Instead, those left must argue logic with a madman whose entire interpretive framework for the world has been shifted just enough from the truth, or, perhaps more accurately, from the general consensus of the truth, that their logic no longer applies.

It must be remembered that all human experience is inherently interpreted experience. Normalcy, then, exists when that interpretation coincides with the interpretation of the majority, and madness occurs in an interpretive shift, a
digression from the mean in assigning meaning to signifiers. Hallucinations, paranoia, and psychosis are not simply irrational outbursts of a frenzied mind, but rational fears produced by a deluded mind. In this light, those who are mad cannot be simply cast away, for they are, essentially, no different from us. They are interpreting the world the only way any one can and anyone is—through an imperfect union of signifier and signified. To cast aside the mad, the insane, to label them and classify them simply, is to simplify not only the nature of madness, but the nature of ourselves.


Contributors

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