Exposé

Essays from the Expository Writing Program
Harvard College, 2005–2006

Foreword

The Expository Writing Program publishes a group of essays each year to celebrate the energy and variety of the writing done in its classes during the previous year. Expository writing is the one activity shared by all students at Harvard, and a first-year course in "Expos" is the one academic experience required of every Harvard student. This has been so since the founding of the writing program in 1872. But Expos is more than Harvard's one required course; it is also the one place in which students get to concentrate, in an intimate instructional setting, on the craft of composing and revising their ideas.

And Harvard students rise wonderfully to the occasion, often composing essays that are startling in their analytical insight and personal engagement with a text or topic. They are all the more startling, of course, for having been written over the course of only a few weeks, usually on a topic fairly new to the student, while he or she was working on new and difficult topics in three other courses and battling tough deadlines in all of them.

Our thanks go to Gordon Gray, whose generosity allows us to publish *Exposé*. We are grateful, as well, to Stephen Greenblatt for writing this year's guest column. And we appreciate the work of the teachers who helped select the ten essays for this issue: Tom Akbari, Tony Cashman, Sarah Emsley, Mark Gaipa, Barry Gilbert, Gordon Harvey, Karen Heath, Charles Henebry, Marlon Kuzmick, Stephen Larsen, Eric LeMay, Judith Murciano, Sonja Plesset, Jane Rosenzweig, Andrea Volpe, and Eric Weinberger. Special thanks to Andrea Volpe, our Art Editor, as well as Julie-Ann Ehrenzweig, our Executive Editor, and Abigail Myers, our layout designer. We are also grateful to the artists, foundations, libraries, museums, and corporations who granted us permission to reprint images. Above all, we thank the freshman writers who worked—and the teachers who encouraged them—to bring their subjects to life, and whose words now become part of the intellectual experience of future students and the wider community.

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Front Cover Image: Abelardo Morell, *Le Antichita Romane by Piranesi #1* (1994), courtesy of the artist and Bonni Benrubi Gallery, NYC.

Back Cover Image: Abelardo Morell, *1841 Book of Proverbs for the Blind* (1995), courtesy of the artist and Bonni Benrubi Gallery, NYC.

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Guest Column

On Style: Ten Rules and a Desire

Stephen Greenblatt

Every year, Exposé invites a distinguished author to contribute a guest column on the art of writing. Stephen Greenblatt, Cogan University Professor at Harvard, is the founder of the critical practice called the "New Historicism," and is widely acknowledged as today's foremost specialist in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature, as well as a formidable stylist. "No one has done more," says former Harvard President Neil L. Rudenstine, "to shape the direction of scholarship and criticism over the past quarter century." Among Greenblatt's many well-known books are Renaissance Self-Fashioning *(1980),* Shakespearean Negotiations *(1988),* Hamlet in Purgatory *(2001), and the bestselling biography* Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare *(2004). His work shows a continuing interest in how "voices of the dead" can speak to us, through the writings of past cultures, with what Renaissance rhetoricians called* energia*, the power to cause "a stir in the mind." Here Greenblatt sets forth ten rules and a desire for energetic style in academic writing.*

Don't let anyone tell you that there are no rules for good writing. There are scores of them. That's the problem: if you followed them all, you wouldn't get a word down on the page. So you make a few of them your own and try seriously to follow them, though not so seriously that you wouldn't break any of them if the need arose. My personal rules are simple, obvious, and conventional.

1. I favor the active over the passive voice. The passive sounds great in German prose, but if used too often in English, it makes your writing sound like it's been translated from German.

2. I try not to pile up polysyllabic, abstract nouns but leaven them, whenever I can, with more direct and pungent diction. The difference can usually be traced to the distant origin of words: in modern English Latinate and Latinate French words sound different from words that come from Anglo-Saxon. But you don't actually need to know etymologies—only to sense the distinction in the level of style between, say, "stomach" and "belly" or "expectorate" and "spit."

3. I loathe split infinitives and am willing to make an effort, even an extravagant effort, to avoid them. The world probably doesn't care, but I do. And the cumulative effect, I believe, is subtly depressing. There is a reason that Shakespeare did not write "To perhaps be or not to any longer be."

4. I try to vary the rhythm of my sentences, so that my readers won't slump back too comfortably in their chairs. If you always know what's coming, you begin to doze. In the midst of a succession of long, sonorous sentences, a short sentence can say: wake up.

5. I try to vary the tone as well, but here I am much more cautious. I shy away from wild swings of diction, unmotivated (or undermotivated) lurches from dignified elevation to gritty colloquialism. After all, it is not queasiness but confidence and pleasure that I want to produce.

6. Though I love metaphors, I use them sparingly. The truth is that I wish I were better than I am at coming up with them. Aristotle thought that a command of metaphor was a sign of genius. Sigh. But it helps to know your limitations.

7. I use a substantial chunk of what, to borrow an ancient expression, I think of as my "word-hoard." But I am careful to take my readers with me. That is, I imitate a trick constantly employed by that lover of arcane

language, William Shakespeare. If Shakespeare was drawn to a powerful word—"incarnadine," for example—that he thought might mystify his audience, he provided an immediate gloss: "making red."

8. I imitate. Shakespeare is a hard act, and I don't recommend it. But one of the key steps for writing well is simply to identify someone who you think does it brilliantly. Then you copy. My own stylistic model, when I was starting out, was George Orwell. I read him first in high school and had been struck at once by the extraordinary way he managed to combine clarity, intellectual rigor, and passion. I deliberately set out to see how he did it and how I could get something of the same effect. Don't misunderstand me: I am advocating not plagiarism but rather a careful attention to diction, sentence structure, and rhythm. The choice of Orwell as model was a fortunate one for me, I think, because his gifts as a prose stylist—unlike those, say, of Henry James or Virginia Woolf—are imitable. But there is no magic in this particular choice: what is crucial is to find someone whose voice you passionately want to incorporate into your own. You will not succeed, but it is precisely in failing that you will eventually fashion your style.

9. I rewrite. My own preference is to rewrite sentences, often a dozen times or more, as I go along. It sometimes feels like trench warfare, advancing in the mud inch by inch. I know that some successful writers do it differently: they put it all down, as quickly as they can, and then go back and rework what they have written. Perhaps there are even writers—the thrice-blessed ones who have performed some miraculously good deed in an earlier incarnation—who do not have to rewrite at all. But I have never met any of these.

10. I struggle to achieve clarity. I think that if my sentences are murky, it is probably a sign that my thinking is murky. This does not mean that the ideas I am trying to express have to be simple, let alone simple-minded. But I have an ethical commitment to transparency, and I experience a distinct pleasure when I have succeeded in being clear. If I communicate the pleasure of clarity to my readers—if it courses through my prose—then I know that I am writing well.

One last note: I try, whenever I can, to give my writing the energy that comes from storytelling. This is not a rule but a desire. Narrative is certainly not the only game in town—in fact, most of the time when you sit down to write, you are being asked to make an argument, not tell a story. But if you can give the argument you are making some narrative power, you are way ahead of the game. After all, the idea is to make someone actually want to read what you have written. Decades ago, I remember popping out of my room and buttonholing a friend. "I've written the first sentence of my dissertation," I announced proudly, and I proceeded to read him what I had written: "Sir Henry Yelverton, the king's attorney general, was no friend to Sir Walter Ralegh." I must have cut a ridiculous figure, and there is nothing about the sentence that is particularly noteworthy. But I still remember the peculiar joy that it gave me: I wanted, and I hoped my readers would want, to know what the next sentence would be.

Being John Malkovich, Being Inauthentic—or Heidegger's *Dasein* and the American Dream

Kimberly Hagan

In her work on this essay, Kimberly Hagan found that revising can be a kind of learning. She saw from the draft stage that Being John Malkovich *had Heideggerian resonances. Trying to explore them took courage, as Heidegger is notoriously difficult. But Kimberly confronted the difficulty head on. The initial result didn't quite get Heidegger right, but she pressed on with revision and, in the process, learned a great deal about* Being and Time*, as well as* Being John Malkovich. *She also learned something about the writing process itself: "I plan a lot before I write. I draw out detailed outlines and pull quotes from my sources and I may agonize over what evidence is most important or how I want to phrase a thesis or a definition. But I've also found out that when I'm writing I need to be prepared for things to change." In the end, Kimberly produced an essay helpful to understanding not only the film but also the Heidegger. She is a History and Literature concentrator from Atlanta, Georgia. She wrote the essay for Tom Jehn's class, "Success Stories."*

In one scene of Spike Jonze's film *Being John Malkovich*, a greasy-looking Craig Schwartz sits across from his sharply dressed co-worker, Maxine. A virago whose cropped hair and angular face match her frank and dominating character, Maxine smiles as she reads aloud an advertisement she has written to place in the paper: "Ever want to be someone else? Now you can. No kidding." The duo—played by John Cusack and Catherine Keener—has found a portal leading into actor John Malkovich's head, and they sell the theme park experience of "being John Malkovich" for $200 a turn. The chance to "be Malkovich" sells prolifically as dozens of discontented Americans—common office workers, members of Overeaters Anonymous—come to experience life through Malkovich's eyes. J. M. Inc. promises its clients not just vicarious success but a meaningful and personal chance for self-realization. It seems that they can actually be a self—a self recognized *as* a self by everyone—as opposed to a mere personality designed to meet social expectations.

It is true, of course, that customers also use Malkovich to realize their dreams of success. The protagonist himself serves as the film's example when he realizes his dreams of puppeteer stardom through Malkovich, and still others—a lonely, overweight man and a group of cultish senior citizens—find longevity, youth and acceptance by permuting themselves with a successful identity. But more importantly, they use Malkovich's success to imagine that there is some stable being behind their everyday existence, that they do not consist merely of a scripted series of inauthentic gestures. When Craig's wife testifies to the experience of finding her true lesbian nature inside Malkovich, her words are indeed revealing in this respect: "Being inside did something to me," she remembers. "I knew who I was! Everything made sense, you know? I knew who I was." When Craig reminds her that she was not herself, but the celebrity John Malkovich, Cameron Diaz's character is only happier: "I was, wasn't I? I was John Malkovich! I was John f---ing Malkovich!" When all is said and done, what is important to her is *that* she was, not *who* she was. Getting into Malkovich seems to offer that illusion of being—as if transmuting the proper noun to the right of "being" into a signifier of success magically allows "being" to stand, momentarily, alone. I *was*. I had *being*.

Lotte's testimonial—the absurdity of her pursuit for self in a celebrity role—is significant, as the film itself, categorized as a fantasy and a comedy, is also a frighteningly accurate representation of Americans' search for self in successful identities. *Being John Malkovich* is a commentary on a culture

thrilled by transformation, consumed by the possibility of finding authentic being in an apparent alternative to everyday existence, the successful and hence well-defined self. Consider the plethora of make-over TV shows in the United States—MTV's *Starting Over*, ABC's *Extreme Makeover*, Fox's *The Swan*—and Jonze's characters seem neither fantastic nor comical, but rather portraits of the American norm, only slightly exaggerated versions of these shows' participants and their viewers. All of these shows, like J.M. Inc., allow Americans to "find themselves" by adopting successful identities accepted and praised by others. The same opportunity is offered in dozens of books in Amazon's online bookstore; titles include "*How to Become*" many different kinds of celebrated people: "A Hip-Hop Producer, A Marketing Superstar, A State Wrestling Champ" and even *How to Become Famous in Two Weeks or Less*—all of these titles listed, interestingly enough, on the same page with *How to Become a U. S. Citizen*, and all of them only a click away from other works of less specific, but similar goals of transformation: books like *28 Days to a New You*, *How to Become the Love of His Life and A New Beautiful You: Inspiration and Practical Advice to Transform Your Looks and Your Life*. These and still other venues of cultural instruction—from advertising (consider the U.S. Army motto "be all that you can be") to popular psychology (consider Dr. Phil's bestselling book *Self Matters* or his audio tape *Getting Real*)—draw a link between one's *success* and one's *identity*, often suggesting that we have some core hidden self, and that this new (or latent) successful role can be an existence beyond that of the mundane, everyday words and deeds that others have come to expect from us.

It is no surprise then that popular American culture has received the movie's philosophical message with ambivalence; while *Being John Malkovich* has elicited praise for its originality, still other critics, like Stephen Farber of movieline.com, have dismissed Jonze's film as "weirdness for its own sake," as a film with a "trippy flavor" and a "fuzzy" script. Still another critic, Kamal Larsuel of 3blackchicks.com calls the film "an odd movie with odd little characters," explaining that the film seems "convoluted…a big let down. I still don't get the ending." Finally, after summarizing the film's major plotlines to readers, Larsuel asks "Confused yet?" and answers "Yeah, I know. This movie was very confusing. Confusing and funny up until the last 30 minutes, then it just fell apart." Multiple reviews seem to note this kind of confusion, and even a kind of discomfort, at the situations presented by Jonze's film. Even more sophisticated reviews, like Janet Maslin's in *The New York Times*, correctly note that the film has something to say about the "reigning fears and obsessions" of our culture, but fail to articulate the film's actual argument. A survey of reviews shows that even critics who commend Jonze for his work have written little about the film's philosophical implications.

These critics, however, are not entirely wrong about the feeling that the film provokes in its viewers. They do, indeed, have a point: the film is confusing, as investigating authentic being is itself a confusing enterprise. As Martin Heidegger notes at the beginning of his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, it is notoriously difficult to investigate "being" in and of itself. In just the first pages, Heidegger writes "We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed. Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'? Not at all" (19). The film takes up this very question and its relevance to the American myth of success. *Being John Malkovich* motions towards Heidegger's work in its very title (which suggests the subject of "being") and in the clock that cameos repeatedly in the film, placed just above the portal into Malkovich's consciousness. The importance of both being and time dominate the end of the movie when a group of elderly people must—at the precisely correct time—climb into the portal to avoid death and continue their existence inside Malkovich's head. The film's setting—the bizarre 7½th floor which stands only around five feet tall—is a representation of Heidegger's concept of "leveling down." Heidegger explains how the inauthentic "they" self, the self informed by a "they" that determines cultural expectations, prevents any exceptional way of being by dictating what ways of being are valid and by closing off other possibilities: "This care of averageness reveals in turn an essential tendency…which we call the 'levelling down' of all possibilities of Being" (165). In Charlie Kaufman's original screenplay of the film, Maxine hints at the significance

of the setting when she says "The real story of 7½ is so evil that it could never be revealed to Americans raised on sitcoms and happy news anchors" (15). I have come across only one review, a brief online discussion for popular consumption, that notes the film's dialogue with *Being and Time*. Tom Smith's *Metaphilm* article "Being John Malkovich, Happiness Is a Warm Portal: On being a tour through the history of philosophy," picks up on the "visual cues" of the film, noting how the characters' "falling" down the portal is a literalizing of the Heideggerian term; Heidegger defines *falling* as the avoidance of our own groundlessness and possibility for being. But even Smith's article, while it points out Jonze's clever references, touches only briefly on the film's Heideggerian resonances, without fully examining their implications.

In drawing on Heidegger, Jonze's film goes beyond satirizing the American dream of success. In its very absurdity and implausibility, it illuminates the philosophical implications of the laughable fantasy that to have success is to *be* somebody. It shows that "Being," or the mere fact of human existence, termed "Dasein" by Heidegger, entails no innate substance or identity. The roles we choose to adopt—lawyer, doctor, millionaire, Malkovich—give us the *illusion* of having some such substance, all the while leading us away from recognizing that we are really "groundless"—without an inherent self, or, as Heidegger scholar Hubert Dreyfus puts it "interpretation all the way down" (25). Jonze's film presents characters who are laughable, and troubling, precisely because they believe that "being John Malkovich" is the most real thing—because they have literally "fallen" for what Heidegger calls "a sham of authenticity" (223). Sensing the absence of what they need to soothe their anxiety—inherent, static selves—the characters seek out the inauthentic public identity of Malkovich. As Heidegger puts it,

> With Dasein's lostness in the 'they,' that factical potentiality-for-Being which is closest to it (the tasks, rules, and standards, the urgency and extent, of concernful and solicitous Being-in-the-world) has already been decided upon…[The "they"] has tacitly relieved Dasein of the burden of explicitly choosing these possibilities…So Dasein makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity. (312)

By putting its inauthentic characters in stark relief, Jonze's film encourages viewers to reflect on their own desires to find comfort by forming (or falling into) an inauthentic successful identity. And it shows, at the same time, that successful identities do not offer any innate or privileged substance; they consist entirely of cultural interpretation.

Being John Malkovich embraces this task right from its opening scene: the first frame shows a full-screen shot of a stage with a closed curtain. Once the curtains part, a puppet resembling the protagonist looks out into the audience, and, noting their presence, begins to dance. The puppet in front of its audience illustrates the situation of everyday, contingent being, or what Heidegger understands as inauthenticity, which, from birth, finds itself always and already in the presence of others and affected by this "being-with-others." Heidegger explains being-with-others as a most undeniable fact of one's existence—so inescapable that it shapes all of one's understanding of being: "The everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed" (213). One's being then, in the way that it expresses itself in (and to) the world, is always public, always on a stage, and always informed by a cultural interpretation.

It is because of being-with-others that Dasein has a "preontological misunderstanding" of its own primordial or pre-world self, a misunderstanding that leads individuals to see their cultural identity as essential, rather than accepting that their being is "essentially *self*-interpreting" (my italics, Dreyfus 25). As Dreyfus explains, "Dasein has no nature. Yet Dasein always understands itself as having some specific essential nature. It grounds its actions in its understanding of human nature, and feels at home in belonging to a certain nation or a certain race" (25). This refusal to acknowledge one's groundlessness is a motivated

John Cusack as the puppeteer Craig Schwartz in *Being John Malkovich*, directed by Spike Jonze. © CORBIS SYGMA

mistake that Jonze's first scene narrates; the puppet seems to experience great angst as he moves frantically around the puppet stage, spinning—and even struggling—through a rapid succession of somersaults that the puppeteer calls "Craig's dance of despair and disillusionment." At one point in the dance, the puppet looks out into the audience for a reflective moment, and then, touching his forehead in a gesture of disbelief, turns to face a mirror. As he looks at his reflection, he shakes his head, agonized, shocked even, by the image, until the mirror suddenly shatters. The music of the puppet show reaches a violent climax, highlighting this interesting moment of introspection where the marionette seems to deal with the choice between owning up to his groundlessness and his self-interpreting structure—a choice Heidegger would describe as "authentic"—and forfeiting himself to the control of his audience and his puppeteer.

The film shows the similarities between Craig's puppet and the human Craig not only by their identical physical features but also by Craig's behavior in the scene; the camera cuts repeatedly from the doll to Craig to establish that their situations are closely related. And even if Craig *appears* to be the puppeteer in the scene, he suffers as much as the stringed doll, working his hands rapidly and visibly sweating from the effort he spends. In this establishing scene, the film already hints that Craig, like the puppet, will choose inauthenticity (and subjection to a cultural interpretation) over his authentic self-interpreting structure.

This choice offers itself when Craig begins working at a filing office. He introduces himself (notably, he presents who he *is*) to his co-worker Maxine by giving his name and his profession. In one of Kaufman's earlier drafts of the screenplay, Maxine's response comes from a nineteenth-century poem that anticipates the Heideggerian understanding of Dasein; in recognizing the constructedness of everyday existence, it offers what Heidegger understood as the first step in a path toward authenticity: "How dreary – to be

– Somebody / How public – like a Frog / To tell one's name – the livelong June / To an admiring Bog!" (15). These lines by Emily Dickinson, perceive the public and performative nature of an everyday introduction. Perhaps more telling is the first verse of the poem, which Maxine does not recite: "I'm nobody! Who are you? / Are you nobody, too? / Then there's a pair of us – don't tell! / They'd banish us, you know." In Heideggarian terms, the poem is significant because it recognizes the groundlessness or lack of substance in one's being—"I'm *nobody*! …Are you *nobody*, too?" The characters in the dialogue are both *nobodies*, and the poem mocks the question "Who are you?" by giving answers that have no substance or meaning. It even anticipates Heidegger's sense of "they" or the world present-at-hand in the line "*They'd* banish us, you know." Why would the "they" banish one who recognized the absence of authentic, primordial being? Dasein flees and *falls* from its groundlessness or nothingness by adopting the publicly validated and speciously "authentic" role of a somebody. In this way, Dasein is able to deceive itself and to avoid the uncomfortable recognition that it is actually nothing but interpretation—not fixed being: it "actively identifies with some social role such as lawyer, father, or lover or some socially sanctioned identity such as victim or sacrificing mother, which allows it to disown, or cover up, its true self-interpreting structure" (Dreyfus 25-26). It is this rejection of the groundlessness of the self that Heidegger terms *falling* in *Being and Time*, and that becomes literal in *Being John Malkovich* when characters plunge down the dark, membranous tunnel into John Malkovich's head.

Craig chooses falling when he elects to overlook the questions posed by his discovery and to turn the portal into a marketing ploy. Despite his mop-like hair and muddied suit, Craig is not lost on the significance of being Malkovich when he returns from his first trip into the actor's head. He collapses into Maxine's office and, checking the hallway for eavesdroppers, begins to tell her what he has seen and what it might mean. "The point is it's a very odd thing," Craig tells his co-worker. "It's supernatural, for lack of a better word. I mean, it raises all sorts of philosophical-type questions, you know, about the nature of self, about the existence of a soul. You know—am I *me*? Is Malkovich *Malkovich*?" Even when Craig sees Maxine's skeptical reaction—her squinted eyes and shrugged shoulders—he seems sure that he is on the brink of some important revelation or questioning about being: Craig asks Maxine, "Do you see what a metaphysical can of worms this portal is?" Receiving no answer, Craig says, "I don't see how I can go on living my life the way I lived it before." Maxine points to the window, as if to suggest that he should jump, a gesture that is both comical and yet curiously appropriate; Heidegger calls the opposite of falling *leaping*—that is, one's bold acceptance of groundlessness and subsequent possibility for being. Craig, however, in his usual lost and confused fashion, decides to flee from any reflection about being and turn the portal into a product he can sell.

The results of such falling become apparent when the clients of J. M. Inc. come to believe that the role of Malkovich, rather than the kind of understanding illustrated by Dickinson's poem, enables genuine being. The error is perhaps understandable. Absent Malkovich's successful role, these characters either passively accept their place in the social structure (what Heidegger would call the undifferentiated mode [275]) or they accept other inauthentic roles that are also socially sanctioned: Erroll is the overweight outcast of society, Dr. Lester is an eccentric elderly man seeking the fountain of youth, and Craig is a dejected failure to anyone who looks upon his drabby suit or his sometimes disturbing craft. The characters look upon their successful Malkovich selves as a truer, more legitimate and more desirable way of being. The illusion is precisely the "sham of authenticity" that Heidegger names when he describes falling:

> The phenomena we have pointed out—temptation, tranquilizing, alienation and self-entangling (entanglement)—characterize the specific kind of Being which belongs to falling. This 'movement' of Dasein in it own Being, we call its *"downward plunge,"* …Dasein plunges out of itself, into the groundlessness and nullity of inauthentic everydayness. But this plunge remains hidden from Dasein by the way things have been publicly interpreted, so much so,

> indeed, that it gets interpreted as a way of 'ascending' and 'living concretely.' (223)

This is exactly the mistake that Kaufman's characters make when they confuse falling with ascending and inauthenticity with self-actualization. In one version of Kaufman's screenplay, when Craig leaves Malkovich's head, he screams "Don't you see, I gave up everything. Please! I'm wet and I'm cold! And I'm Craig! I'm nothing again!" (101). In the film itself, Craig shows similar agony at his loss of a self, standing on the side of the New Jersey Turnpike and screaming for Maxine to come back. Craig has mistakenly invested more meaning into an inauthentic celebrity role than into his own self-interpreting structure in which there is first nothingness or groundlessness, but also, consequently, an unknown possibility for being.

It is no mistake that Kaufman's main character is not so different from the archetypal unhappy American; the film's message becomes more challenging (and more confusing and dark, the movie's critics may say) precisely because our culture is full of people willing and eager to abandon their old selves for new identities, and because Craig could, with frighteningly few alterations, be any of these people. Craig is unattractive and disrespected and unemployed. He sleeps late on mismatched bed sheets, only to wake up in a wildly un-kept house where he plays out his fantasies—for respect, validation, or sexual authority—using dolls (objects that *obviously* have no authentic being as selves, and no possibility of achieving it by knowing this) in the privacy of his puppet workshop. If moviegoers cannot relate to Craig, they can certainly understand his desperately unfulfilled life and his subsequent decision to be Malkovich.

Some moviegoers have even said as much in their posts on an online movie message board that talks about the film. More than thirty people responded to the topic question "If you had a choice?" with a variety of celebrities, and a couple of historical figures that they would like to become. One woman chose Kate Moss "to see what it would be like to be so skinny," and while three bloggers chose Johnny Depp, still others wanted to be Johnny Depp's wife, or Angelia Jolie ("to be so gorgeous and so weird"). One post stated more explicitly one man's desire to feel validated or celebrated, to live more concretely by receiving others' approval: "I'd like to be in my girlfriend's mind, just to understand why she's with such an ugly, poor guy like me." But these bloggers—people who seem somehow dissatisfied with themselves, and eager to be someone else—have missed the point of Kaufman and Jonze's work; they have misunderstood the movie as pure entertainment when the movie actually comments on our mistaken desire to become someone else and the unfounded belief that certain roles can be the source of authentic being.

Jonze's film shows that being Malkovich is simply not that great. The film usually shows the actor doing dull and everyday things—showering, ordering from catalogs and reading the *Wall Street Journal*, and, as one Hollywood publication, *Mr. Showbiz*, noted, Malkovich himself is an actor who is "well-known, yet curiously uncelebrated." The filmmakers did not cast Tom Cruise or some more reputable actor precisely because the film intends to show that the celebrity identity that Americans idolize is an inflated kind of fiction. It is no coincidence that J. M. Inc.'s first customer, though tickled at the opportunity to be a "bon vivant" and "man about town," still calls Malkovich his "second choice." Malkovich himself has called the movie an argument, "making a point" about the mistaken notion that celebrities live more fulfilling or meaningful lives: "[T]he culture at large somehow think[s] our joys and sorrows and foibles and frailties and blowjobs are somehow more interesting than theirs. I never liked that. I don't think it's true. I've never accepted it. Nor do I think it should be legal. I think it should be a kind of prisonable offense" (Shaefer). This resistance to the "they" would be impressive indeed to Heidegger. Malkovich has the good sense to reject the belief that falling "can guarantee to Dasein that all the possibilities of its Being will be *secure*, *genuine*, and *full*" despite the "self-certainty and decidedness of the 'they,' which insists that there is no need of authentic understanding or the state-of-mind that goes with it." Normally, "the supposition of the 'they' that one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine 'life', brings Dasein a tranquility, for which everything is 'in the best of order' and all doors are open" (222). Whether or not Malkovich knows Heidegger, his understanding of his

film amounts to a Heideggerian rejection of tranquility and transformation that "the culture at large" speciously promises.

Malkovich also acknowledges, in the very same interview, the groundlessness of his existence and his roots in the "they" self. When asked by the interviewer "Are you playing a character called John Malkovich in this movie or are you playing yourself?" Malkovich responds: "It doesn't have much to do with me, but neither does John Malkovich. I often feel like I'm playing at being John Malkovich on a daily basis. It's a role I think I do particularly well." Throughout the interview, when pressed about Oscar nominations or his media image, Malkovich emphasizes that his public, they-centered self is "just another character…I don't really think about it in terms of me. Because I'm not related to that person." Malkovich even implies that there are no such people as "private citizens," acknowledging that no role (not even his own as a respected actor) is grounded in the "I," but rather the question of one's identity or "who" is always influenced by one's being-with-others, or being "another character."

To see such things is, for Heidegger, to face death itself, something the characters in Malkovich, reflecting so well the psyche that produced the American dream of success, absolutely refuse to do. The only experience in which one is not being-with-others, Heidegger argues, is death—that experience which individualizes Dasein and separates it from others, forcing one to reflect on one's own being. Heidegger explains that this fear of death comes from fear of one's non-relational potentiality-for-being, not from a fear of demise, perishing or disappearing:

> Death is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case. With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there. If Dasein stands before itself as this possibility, it has been *fully* assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. When it stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone. This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one (italics original, 294).

Whereas the "Self of everydayness is the 'they,'" the self in death is utterly alone and faced with infinite possibility for interpretation and ontological discovery (296). But here again, the film represents the choice of non-reflection, of escape, of falling. We find out, towards the end of the film, that the Malkovich portal has been constructed precisely so that its makers can preclude the possibility of dying. The film ends "happily" (as Hollywood requires) insofar as, just in the nick of time, just before the portal disappears, this group of old men and women manage to enter it so that they cannot die, so that they may survive—literally as what Heidegger calls a "they-self"—in Malkovich. Dr. Lester and his cult of elderly friends fall down the portal into Malkovich, with the mistaken belief that while they flee their authentic self-interpreting selves they might become more enduring and somehow more real or more vital. The result, instead, is that the they-self Malkovich finds himself yanked back and forth like a puppet, as the they within him pull him in different directions.

Perhaps the discomfort that some have expressed over the film is a taste of Heideggerian anxiety that in fact takes viewers a step closer to authenticity. Faced with the most comically inauthentic characters, viewers are forced to reconsider their own being; they fear the possibility of confronting their own groundlessness. But anxiety is what moves us towards a more authentic understanding of our being, as Heidegger's work describes: "Anxiety thus takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the 'world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted. Anxiety throws Dasein back upon that which it is anxious about—its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world" (232). By exposing a "sham of authenticity" and by showing viewers this first uncomfortable and confusing step to authenticity, Jonze's film criticizes the motivated falling of the American celebrated self, suggesting instead that we pause before the dark, membranous tunnel and reconsider "being John Malkovich."

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A Perpetual Childhood: Infantilization in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

June-Ho Kim

The idea that blossomed into June-Ho Kim's essay on infantilization in Nineteen Eighty-Four *came to him while he stood in line at Disneyland—though only later did he realize that Orwell's dystopia and Disney's utopia were both "lands of children and infantilized adults." The immediate inspiration came from dissatisfaction; he had written an early draft on how characters in* Nineteen Eighty-Four *avoided oppression through "the maintenance of dual identities, self and society," but found the topic "generic" and suitable "for a high school essay." The search for deeper insight involved detective work. "A large part of my formulating the essay topic and structure was extracting details and building connections across seemingly disparate literary works," he writes. Ultimately he found the key to the essay in the subtle but direct parallels between* Nineteen Eighty-Four *and Orwell's memoir, "Such, Such Were the Joys…". June-Ho wrote the essay for Eric Weinberger's class, "George Orwell." He is a Biochemical Sciences major, and his hometown is Cupertino, California.*

> The sobriety and subtlety of Mr. Orwell's argument . . . is marred by a schoolboyish sensationalism of approach. Considered as a story, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has other faults…but none so damaging as this inveterate schoolboyishness. (Symons 256)

Though revered as George Orwell's hallmark achievement in modern dystopian literature, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been condemned by critics such as British writer Julian Symons for a "schoolboyish sensationalism" that renders Orwell's portrayal of totalitarian dystopia "comic rather than horrific" (257). Symons and others charge that the "melodramatic idea of the Brotherhood," "the use of a nursery rhyme to symbolize the unattainable and desirable past," and "the nature of the torture which breaks the last fragments of Winston's resistance"—rats—weaken the novel's arguments against totalitarianism (256). Yet to dismiss the childishness of these images of torture and control as an inveterate stylistic habit of Orwell's that *mars* the terrors of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is to miss what is actually one of the novel's most sophisticated analytical insights: that a totalitarian society deliberately infantilizes its citizens as a means of control—perhaps as *the* means of control, the one that facilitates all the others. That some readers are unafraid of the rats is not surprising: after all, they did not grow up in Oceania. It is precisely by encouraging readers to register the difference between what will terrify them and what terrifies the infantilized Winston that Orwell succeeds in representing so vividly the evils of totalitarianism. And it is by this emphasis on the childishness of certain fears, and their proneness to manipulation, that Orwell offers his prescription for resistance to totalitarianism: maturity.

Orwell makes sure the reader of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* cannot miss certain disturbing features of how the Party relates to childhood: namely, the Party positions children as a source of both fear and awe for the adults around them—fear because the Party indoctrinates the children as Spies, and awe because both the Party and their parents lionize their actions in public. "Hardly a week passed," we are told, "in which the *Times* did not carry a paragraph describing how some eavesdropping little sneak—'child hero' was the phrase generally used—had overheard some compromising remark and denounced his parents to the Thought Police" (24). Even Mr. Parsons, whose own child denounces him, triumphantly declares his child's success as a Spy. Both the fear and the awe crucially depend on children being seen as pure exemplars of the Party, and we see the Party actively pro-

Paul Klee, (1879-1940) *Burdened Children*, 1930. Pencil, crayon and ink on paper and board. 65 x 45.8 cm. Tate Gallery, London.
Photo credit: Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY.

moting its vision of the "child hero" as it manipulates news past and present. Winston, tasked as an employee of the Ministry of Truth to purge a disgraced Comrade Withers from the already-published pages of the *Times*, concocts in his stead the fictitious "Comrade Ogilvy, who had recently died in battle, in heroic circumstances" (46). This fabricated hero is a child hero in the truest sense since "at the age of three Comrade Ogilvy had refused all toys except a drum, a submachine gun, and a model helicopter" (47). By six, Ogilvy was a spy; by nine, a troop leader; by eleven, a denouncer of thought-criminals; by seventeen, a district organizer of the Junior Anti-Sex League; by nineteen, a designer of a deadly hand grenade. By twenty-three, Ogilvy was dead. Through Winston, the Party creates an example of "purity and singlemindedness" in the character of Ogilvy, whose career exists only in childhood (47). Comrade Ogilvy is a paradigm for the ideal life of a Party member: an unwaveringly devout follower of the Party from infancy. This glorification of past and present child heroes promotes the Party's vision of childhood—a model that one should fear, an ideal that one should achieve.

In fact, even as it idealizes child heroes, the Party infantilizes its citizens to act like the children it glorifies. Symons argues that the idea of a rebellious Brotherhood led by Emmanuel Goldstein is schoolboyish in nature. But we are meant to see it that way—meant to find discomfiting the spectacle of Winston and the other adults shouting and yelling and throwing things at the telescreen like children. It is, precisely, a marker of the degradation to which Oceania subjects its citizens. The Party uses the insurgent Goldstein during the Two Minutes Hate to incite Party members into a group tantrum. Like the Parsons' son who bellows "Goldstein!" in the middle of his frenzied clamoring (24), adults during the Two Minutes Hate shout and yell as they throw objects at the telescreen, maddened by the figure of Goldstein and his Brotherhood. Even a rebellious Winston cannot resist as "the sight or even the thought of Goldstein" produces "fear and anger automatically" (13). The Brotherhood pervades the lives of every Party member, young and old, as a part of the government's infantilization of its citizens.

Indeed, the Party takes the goal of keeping its citizens in perpetual childhood so seriously that its interrogation and reeducation techniques are designed for nothing so much as reestablishing a suitable degree of regression; it breaks them down until, like the child Spies, they altogether adore "the Party and everything connected to it" (24). For instance, O'Brien, a powerful member of the Inner Party, acts as an agent of infantilization during his later interrogation of Winston. Throughout the interrogation, he affects "the air of a teacher taking pains with a wayward but promising child" (248). Not only does he belittle Winston; he degrades his subject as a mere child

deserving punishment alongside his lessons. As this treatment progresses, Winston is left as a child hiding in the shelter of a parent as he clings to O'Brien "like a baby, curiously comforted by the heavy arm round his shoulders" (250). He depends on O'Brien as a child depends on a guardian, foregoing any dignity and reason he has possessed before. Similarly, Parsons enters the Ministry of Love charged with treason and immediately acts as a child—blubbering and throwing a "servile glance at the telescreen" like a child whimpering before a cross parent (233). Throughout *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell portrays Party members reduced to raving or sniveling children—adults left to lead lives in perpetual childhood.

But why does the Party take the trouble of infantilizing? What is it about childhood that Orwell believes appeals to the Party? An answer suggests itself in the model of childhood that emerges from Orwell's reflections on his own formative years at the St. Cyprian's boarding school in "Such, Such Were the Joys…," an essay that Orwell wrote the year before he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In this memoir, which identifies St. Cyprian's with the pseudonym "Crossgates," the author writes that a "child may be a mass of egoism and rebelliousness, but it has not accumulated experience to give it confidence in its own judgements" (15). Children are reliant on others because they lack a previous history to which they can compare their experiences: a child will "accept what it is told, and it will believe in the most fantastic way in the knowledge and power of the adults surrounding it" (15). Without experience, a child is:

> […] a blank sheet. It neither understands nor questions the society in which it lives, and because of its credulity other people can work upon it, infecting it with the sense of inferiority and the dread of offending against mysterious, terrible laws. ("Joys" 47)

Orwell's view of childhood as a stage of hapless vulnerability probably arose from his adult reflections on how, at "Crossgates," he lived under the impression that Sim the headmaster was omnipotent and "that his agents should be everywhere" (16). Incredible as it may be that a headmaster can be all-powerful, a naïve child apparently accepts such fictions. Orwell did not realize that the "various codes which were presented to you at Crossgates…contradicted one another if you worked out their implications" (31), and his innocence in this respect rendered him subject to manipulation and deceit.

To see this model of a child's immediate acceptance of dubious rules and impotence to question is to see how skillfully Orwell weaves his understanding of children's vulnerabilities into his portrayal of the Party's tyrannical manipulation. Childhood is, quite simply, the easiest stage of life over which the Party can assert its influence. Once infantilized, once sufficiently susceptible to inferiority and dread, citizens of Oceania can be colored with whatever ideas and beliefs are ideal for the Party's purposes. Winston and others believe that the members of the Thought Police are everywhere. What is more, Party members blindly accept contradictions and "hold simultaneously two opinions which canceled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them"—or doublethink (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 35). The idea of doublethink—that a person could accept both the right and the wrong—is logically preposterous for even the most receptive reader. Yet it strikingly recalls Orwell's naïve childhood acceptance of the contradictory codes of "Crossgates." That people in today's society still gravely and regularly refer to this term from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* speaks to the surprising relevance of doublethink and highlights Orwell's ability to project a familiar model of childhood onto a totalitarian Oceanian society of controlled adults.

However, if this model is a projection by Orwell of his own childhood, it is also a source for something of greater value to the novel than what Symons derides as "schoolboyish sensationalism." What is remarkable about Orwell's vision of infantilization as a political means of control is just how prescient it seems in the context of real-world examples of totalitarian regimes, which recreate his projected "infantilization" model even down to the more subtle features. If we look at Romania under "comrade" Nicolae Ceausescu from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, we see, according to Magdalena Dumitrana, a system that featured

"infantilization inculcated into the whole nation by the repressive utilization of the communist ideology" as "one of the essential levers of manipulation." In order to keep its citizens in states like that of a "young child who knows only the reality of his own family," Romania strove to have them "locked inside a single political and socio-economic system, without any possibility of knowing another or even the capacity to imagine an alternative." Further, communist ideology dictated that a person should be "entirely economically *dependent* on the state, in the same way that children have their parents as their unique source of food and clothing" (emphasis added). And the government made it everyday practice to mete out "unfair punishment" and "irrational prohibitions," to induce an infantilizing fear in those who dared to test the boundaries of their limited reality (Dumitrana). Like abused children, the citizens were denied perspective, made dependent, and subjected to arbitrary punishments.

All these methods strike surprising parallels to Orwell's model of childhood, of naïve vulnerability, and elucidate how the Party infantilizes its members. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, citizens cannot see a different perspective because the division of the known world into three gargantuan superpowers virtually eliminates the possibility of experiencing any alternatives. In fact, it is "absolutely necessary to [Oceania's] structure that there should be no contact with foreigners" (196). These citizens then become wholly dependent on the government through its iron grip on rations and wages, trapping them in a single political and socio-economic system. Finally, frighteningly unpredictable punishments complete the process of infantilization: the Thought Police arrest and torture people for no reason other than their being too intelligent or saying that "two and two are four" (250). That such methods, made so conspicuous by Orwell's choices in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, held up for nearly twenty years in Romania attests to the effectiveness of infantilization as a means of control.

In order fully to understand infantilization in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, though, one must explore Orwell's depiction of the place—Room 101—where Winston finally succumbs to the Party. Speaking in a "schoolmasterish manner," O'Brien tells Winston that this terrifying room in the Ministry of Love holds "the worst thing in the world" (383). This does not mean, as Symons seems to assume when he levels the largest part of his criticism at Orwell's depiction of the trials in this room, that it contains torture recognizable to everyone as horrifying. Rather, Orwell has O'Brien explain quite explicitly that the form the "worst thing" takes "varies from individual to individual. It may be burial alive, or death by fire, or by drowning, or by impalement, or fifty other deaths. There are cases where it is some quite trivial thing, not even fatal" (383-384). The "worst thing in the world," then, is anything that provokes a specific type of fear, the type that is most deep-seated and primal, ingrained since childhood, preserved in its immaturity in the pre-rational recesses of one's psyche. For instance, Winston sees rats and has "the feeling of being back in a nightmare which had recurred from time to time throughout his life" (144). Under such pressure, Winston gives in to the demands of the Party. If the fear of rats strikes the very adult Symons as "comic rather than horrific," that is hardly the point; Orwell is showing a Party that breaks its citizens down into regressive states, specifically by exploiting *childhood* nightmares.

If, then, in Orwell's analysis, the state of childhood is one of vulnerability, and an adult can be reduced to that state, what hope is there for resistance to totalitarian regimes? Interestingly, the hope lies in reclaiming one's own childhood by consciously recalling memories and forming a mature relationship to past terrors. The German historian Golo Mann, in his review of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, states that Winston "can free himself from the domination of Party ideology only by remembering his earliest childhood impressions" (281). The correlation between Winston's independence of mind and flashbacks to childhood is striking: as he increasingly resists Party ideology through his affair with Julia before his capture, Winston recalls more and more of his past.[1] With the Party's destruction and alteration of historical records, Winston's only (and powerful) source of truth is whatever he can remember of significant events prior to his mother

[1] For example, the entire Chapter 7, in which Winston and Julia reach the height of their affair in the room over Mr. Charrington's shop, is dedicated to Winston's childhood memories.

and sister's disappearance. At one climactic moment, Winston especially recalls an "enveloping protecting gesture of the arm" by his mother and understands the purity and untouchable nature of one's feelings and the importance of remaining human no matter how "useless" such gestures may seem (164). By reviving his childhood memories, Winston discovers truths about humanity long suppressed by the Party, and finds in those truths a potent source of opposition to the Party's infantilizations. The ability to recall memories actively is what allows Winston to mature and so to resist, with an independent, scrutinizing mind, the irrational restrictions imposed by the Party.

Yet Golo Mann's observation seems incomplete in light of Room 101: the terror of the torture room depends wholly on early childhood impressions. Thus, we realize that maturity is not merely the recollection of memories but the union of self-confidence and the independent reevaluation of childhood impressions. In childhood one remains docilely within preexisting boundaries; in maturity one critically questions the placement of those boundaries and seeks to rectify them. In "Such, Such, Were the Joys…," Orwell writes that "it can also happen that one's memories grow sharper after a long lapse of time, because one is looking at the past with fresh eyes and can isolate and, as it were, notice facts which previously existed undifferentiated among a mass of others" (5). By actively reevaluating memories and consciously comparing them to the present, one can see past contradictions and irrationality. For example, Orwell as a child could not express his fear of Sim the headmaster and his wife Bingo, as "a child which appears reasonably happy may actually be suffering horrors which it cannot or will not reveal.… It lives in a sort of alien under-water world which we can only penetrate by memory or divination" ("Joys" 44). However, as an adult, he looks back upon his childhood and asks, "What should I think of Bingo and Sim, those terrible, all-powerful monsters?" and he immediately dismisses them as "a couple of silly, shallow ineffectual people" ("Joys" 46). How a person evaluates childhood memories in relation to the present reveals that person's level of maturity.

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* hints at this maturity, this ability to reevaluate memories, through Winston's struggles with his greatest fear. When Winston sees a rat in Charrington's shop, he recalls a nightmare of "something unendurable, something too dreadful to be faced" (144). However, he also realizes that there is a prescription to overcoming this fear, that "with a deadly effort, like wrenching a piece out of his own brain, he could even have dragged the thing into the open" (145). This "deadly effort" is the mature act of pulling a childhood fear out into the open for reevaluation, and Orwell acknowledges the arduous challenge of such actions. Sadly, Winston, though initially rebellious, ultimately fails in demonstrating maturity. In Room 101, O'Brien taunts him, saying of his fear of rats: "you dared not drag it into the open" (284). Winston's refusal to engage his fear displays the fine line between control and independence. At the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "uncalled, a memory float[s] into his mind," a recollection of his mother, happiness, and intimacy barred by the Party (295). The memory exists; there is a small but present opportunity for Winston to recall and engage it. But he does not. Thus, Orwell presents memories as compelling sites of both manipulation by others and self-empowerment; how they are used depends on who handles the lever and for what purposes. It takes a mature adult to drag fears into the open, reevaluate them so as to grow beyond the childlike state desired by totalitarianism, and reach beyond passive acceptance of ideology.

What is so striking about Orwell's acclaimed 1949 novel—and one of the main reasons for its venerated status in current political literature—is Orwell's uncanny ability to predict and model the modern totalitarian regime. But even more powerful is his ability to expose the manipulative methods of totalitarianism and set forth warnings and prescriptions, specifically through his model of infantilization. Rather than marring Orwell's argument, the childishness that critics have noticed advances this agenda, revealing the need for maturity in government and the governed. As Orwell exhorts in his memoirs: "Look back into your own childhood and think of the nonsense you used to believe and the trivialities which could make you suffer" (47). The difference between the infantilized Winston and the mature reader is this: the reader can reevaluate and penetrate horrors with rev-

elations extracted from personal memories. Orwell's prescient insights impart a compelling emphasis on this power of mature self-knowledge as a corrective to terror and a perpetual childhood. The period of growth and maturation may be turbulent and trying, but its absence is more frightening indeed.

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New Niggers

Hannah Motley

Of her essay on the treatment of poor whites by academics, liberals, and conservatives, Hannah says, "I put much of myself into it." The essay does have a personal feel, but this hardly keeps Hannah in safe territory. As an African American, she strays far from her "comfort zone" by broaching the issue of white poverty. Perhaps her willingness to do this is what allows her effectively to exploit her personal voice and experiences. Still, she worries that she is vulnerable to misunderstanding. "I do not mean, by this essay, to say that the social condition of poor white people in the U.S. is by any means perfectly analogous to that of African Americans, past and present. I also do not mean to suggest that the injustices suffered by the black community no longer merit attention." A careful read should dispel misconceptions. Nevertheless, from title to conclusion, the essay provides an example of what it can mean to take real risks in writing. Hannah's hometown is Scarborough, New York. She is concentrating in History and in the History of Art and Architecture. She wrote the essay for Jim Herron's class, "Race in the Americas."

People frequently identify me as a "*white* black girl," a "coconut," an "oreo," or an "Uncle Tom." "There goes the white girl," an *authentic* black person said as I walked past him in Harvard Yard. "You're so white"; "You're one of us"; "I know you're black, but you're not really *black*," my white peers tell me. "Sometimes, I forget that you're black," an acquaintance remarked. I wondered if that was intended to be a compliment, and what exactly made the African American man asking for spare change outside the local CVS any blacker than I. Throughout my "tragic mulatto" life, as I've attempted to navigate America's roiling racial waters, I have found the criteria for "legitimate" blackness murky at best. What legitimate whiteness means, however, would seem to be clear: to enjoy education, wealth, and prestige. Yet people would be scandalized to hear me refer to myself as a "white" person. Most expect me to check the African American box—to take membership in that most downtrodden American subclass—for I am, formally, a "black woman." But if it is my affluent upbringing and first class education that whitewash me in informal terms, what claim, then, do disadvantaged whites have to whiteness?

Whiteness in North America is routinely meant to function in two ways—as a nominal racial distinction (governed by hypo-descent) and as a class-based designation. The former will diminish in the future; in an increasingly mixed global society, few will be able to claim the purity of racial whiteness. The latter supposedly prevails today as a vestige of past eras, when race determined social position, rather than the converse. The idea of whiteness as a class-based designation hearkens back to the time when all blacks lay at the nadir of the social hierarchy, and all whites, no matter what, enjoyed a modicum of dignity—a safety net hovering above the Negroes. But as the existence of so-called "white trash" reveals, whiteness as something determined by respect and social status is actually the stuff of legend. White trash possess only half the criteria of the whiteness ideal; while they enjoy the genetic component, they lack the mythical element of absolute privilege. They exist in a peculiar social limbo. What does their existence imply about the nature of whiteness? Does it help or hinder the hegemony of privileged whites? I suspect that while some conservatives may exploit poor whites for political purposes, their agendas receive help from an unexpected source—from those privileged liberals and academics who ignore or despise "white trash." Ultimately, it is the very idea of "white trash" that reveals how constricted America remains by the vise of racism.

Because we inhabit an era of extreme political correctness, such racism can be difficult to discern. After all, our intellectual tastemakers were college students during the Civil Rights Movement. Rather than say "big black guy," some would prefer to go out of their way (with the best of intentions) to say things like, "he had a large build, dark skin, dark hair, and dark eyes." For many, there is something awkward about a news anchor reporting on "a six-foot two, 200-pound African American male suspect." Such discomfort does not, in fact, signal an end to racial bias. There is an implied and often unquestioned liberal notion that hovers over much of our social discourse that all whites enjoy endless political, economic, and educational opportunity, and that all blacks are hopelessly deprived of such advantages. Maurice Berger contends in *White Lies*, "Whiteness is not just a genetic, biological, or cultural category; it is one of society's most imperious signifiers of power and status" (1999: 166). George Lipsitz, in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, supports this idea with a wealth of evidence, proving precisely how America's white community perpetuates its political and economic domination over people of color. Berger tells us that whiteness provides automatic entrée to the ancient but thriving annals of wealth and power. Lipsitz seems to be of the same mind, writing, "Whiteness has a cash value…[with] consequences for the distribution of wealth, prestige, and opportunity" (2006: vii). In this view, white trash does not figure.

These perfectly well-intentioned liberal ideas are misguiding analyses of whiteness. The privileges Lipsitz describes are those that the American social order long denied *all* African Americans, rather than those that it has ever afforded *all* whites. He emphasizes the direct "relationship between whiteness and asset accumulation" (Lipsitz 2006: viii). My own experience, however, does not validate this conclusion. I have a childhood memory of waiting in line at a Grand Union behind a young white woman who bickered with the cashier about how she could use her food stamps. Her children clawed through the bars of their shopping cart at candy I could easily have purchased with my pocket money. In the car on the way home, I asked my mother if we were "rich," and if they were "poor." She taught me that an appropriate way to describe my family was with the phrase "very well off." Now, as I did then, I wonder what "assets" that woman's family had accumulated, in comparison to mine.

Lipsitz also decries a "social structure that gives value to whiteness and offers rewards for racism" (2006: viii). While there may be truth to such assertions, they fail to account for people like the indigent woman I stared at in the check-out line. What is her reward for being white? A "Get Out of Lynching Free" card? I imagine that the nepotism and *quid pro quo* of Fortune 500 boardrooms are just as inaccessible to her as they are to her black neighbors. Lipsitz also tells us, "The federal government has played a major role in augmenting the possessive investment in whiteness" (2006: 6). If there is an "investment" intrinsic to whiteness, if a "new white identity" (Lipsitz 2006: 7) derives from the material benefits conferred upon whites, then I am indeed guilty as charged: I am white. Certainly, I have more in common with most wealthy white people than their destitute white trash counterparts do. I attended a ritzy private school from kindergarten onwards, played tennis and rode horses at an exclusive, Stanford White designed country club, and vacationed the world over, just like my white friends. If mine is a "white identity" gleaned from the alleged investment Lipsitz identifies, how can *white trash* be white? Lipsitz's liberal conception of whiteness brazenly ignores a substantial demographic: poor whites.

The illogic of these current liberal theories of race—the absurdity of labeling people like me as "white" and rendering poor whites invisible—is obvious. This is a new brand of racism, transferring antiquated, essentialist reifications of race to the new domain of sociological jargon. Yet it endures in part because it appeals to the white liberal guilty conscience. As it makes race a purely social distinction, those who subscribe to it avoid the taboo idea of "races" as groups of people sharing similar physical attributes, an idea which R.C. Lewontin (2005) has so deftly deflated. Lipsitz suggests a categorical definition of whiteness as access to privilege, and no more than that. But his characterization of the black community as mired in poverty by "deindustrialization, unemployment, and lack of intergenerational transfers of wealth" (2006:

11) is also an accurate description of the condition of those whites chronicled by John Hartigan Jr. in *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People* (2005).

Poor white people do exist, outside the liberal definition of whiteness, and their condition merits analysis. Indeed, the destitute white population of the U.S. is considerable. If you evaluate the situation by the numbers alone, whites constitute the bulk of people living below the poverty line—22,739 of them, or 9.9% of all Caucasians (Proctor & Dalaker 2003: 2). Much contemporary liberal thought on the nature of race in America (as articulated by Berger and Lipsitz) is given to knee-jerk associations between whiteness and privilege, and blackness and poverty, which exclude these whites as a topic from academic discourse. This oversimplification of race and how it works in society may provide a comforting catharsis for white liberal guilt. At the moment, academic treatment of race requires rejuvenation. To cling to ideas about white privilege and black disadvantage established in the 1970s and go no further imprisons us in an intellectually static discussion

We suffer from politically correct paralysis. Hartigan illuminates this, writing, "A problem arises… in the linkages between whiteness, dominance, and the racialness of white people. In whiteness studies, all three are typically treated as equivalent, which promotes a unified view of white people as a collective order sharing a common cultural identity" (2005: 188). He argues that, in fact, many whites occupy a "conflicted and heterogeneous social position" (2005: 189). He also suggests that historians like Lipsitz, who say that race is a social construct of mythical proportions, and then make sweeping generalizations about "white culture," "the white agenda," and "white privilege" may be guilty of hypocrisy. One cannot group a people according to social opportunities alone, especially when they do not share equal access to them. As Hartigan says, "generalizations about white culture undermine an attention to the disparate circumstances of whites in various settings" (2005: 198). Though I may share little in common with poor whites, this issue resonates with me, because such generalizations about race also ignore educated and affluent people of color like myself.

Liberal theories of whiteness such as that of Lipsitz unwittingly feed interests besides those of guilt-plagued whites. They prompt an all-too-familiar question: do poor whites deserve any sympathy? After all, with such a wealth of opportunity, those "outliers" who didn't make it into even the middle class must be floundering amongst the dregs of society due only to their own laziness and stupidity. These are the very fictions that white supremacists have long created about people of color! Consider, for instance, the website of "Stormfront," whose logo calls for "White Pride Worldwide," and which features contributions condemning people of color "who are just to lazy to get a job [*sic*]" and "would rather be on welfare then try to become a productive member of society [*sic*]" (Christine 2005). We must recognize that similar thinking stigmatizes many whites. I myself once followed this insensitive line of "reasoning," until it occurred to me that many criticize people of color in a similar way. In my youthful ignorance, I even went so far as to announce to an economically disadvantaged white acquaintance that I had no sympathy for her ilk, as they did not bear the burden of slavery's legacy and thereby "had no excuse." I harboured a disdain for poor whites that perhaps rivaled the contempt that many white people once held for my black forebears. I am a recovered racist.

Poor whites are today a group against whom liberal elites may acceptably discriminate. I imagine that a being from another planet, genuinely color blind, might infer from a sampling of our culture that poor whites are truly seen as the residuum of American civilization. Hartigan writes, "class and regional lines blur the stark racial divides, even to the point where the 'social bottom' is no longer assuredly linked to blackness" (2005: 201). We need not look far to realize this ourselves. In the very halls of Harvard, derogatory, elitist epithets such as "hillbilly," "hick," and "redneck" pop up from time to time with reckless, politically incorrect abandon. It was hearing an otherwise conscientious professor and a group of my peers casually use these terms with no hesitation and make sweeping generalizations about what "they" look like and how "they" behave that prompted me to ponder this topic. Of course, no one would accuse them of using racial

slurs. These are people who would rather be shot in the foot than caught expounding on the inferiorities of "niggers," "spics," "kikes," or "chinks."

The fairy tale notion that America is a classless society persists, and snobbery does not even begin to garner the same level of widespread disapproval as racism. The truth of the matter is that "hillbilly" is as offensive as "nigger." The former lacks the searing power of the latter only because it is not linked to centuries of outright violence and subjugation. It is hateful nonetheless. As Hartigan observes in his study of poor whites in Detroit slums, "Whenever *hillbilly* was used, it carried a volatile charge of social contempt, a contempt these brothers alternately reviled or rejected" (2005: 214). This is not unlike how black people feel about the "N-word" in America today. Why can Hartigan's white subjects say "nigger" to their black neighbors in certain contexts? According to the U.S. Census Bureau, they are no less formally "white" than their suburban counterparts, than a police officer who might fire the same word at a young black man. But tellingly, they can occasionally say "nigger" to their African American friends without offending them, because they are not perceived as a threat to the blacks with whom they live side by side (Hartigan 1999: 114-15). They are a threat, rather, to white suburbia.

This is a threat largely to the confidence of the privileged that their privilege is not as much of a birthright to them as their physical features. By deviating from the established notion of whites as completely superior, poor whites pose a psychological and political threat to middle- and upper-class whites. The menace of white trash looms ominously for many middle and upper class whites. According to Barbara Ehrenreich there is a "fear and dread of falling into the lower classes…behind many of the stereotypes of and prejudices against poor Americans" (qtd. in Newitz & Wray 1997: 183). Ehrenreich rightly points out that poor whites are in effect the whipping children onto whom more comfortable whites project their economic insecurities. "Trailer trash," as minstrelized in films like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Joe Dirt*, and *Pink Flamingos*, are the repository of white nightmares about losing social position. As Newitz and Wray remark, "During times of economic uncertainty or downturn, poor white trash is the ghastly specter that haunts the white middle class" (1997: 183). Racism has always worked to defend inequitable distributions of power and wealth; this divide between wealthy and impoverished whites is no exception. It expresses the increasing anxiety of privileged whites about their social dominance.

What, exactly, is the effect of liberal theorists such as Lipsitz on this situation? Since their definition of whiteness as synonymous with privilege enjoys such widespread assent, have white trash become less white? Have I become less black? No. Although we now know that "race" is not a biologically valid concept, people continue to categorize each other into groups according to physical appearances, at least privately. The liberal quest to define race as merely a social construct governed by economic and educational advantages is unrealistic in that it does not accommodate the way in which we *actually* think about race—in terms of how people look. It is an admirable attempt at fostering equality, but it fails, making only a superficial impact. However we try to reconstruct its meaning, the terminology of color can never be color blind.

White trash remain white, as I remain black in spite of the momentary forgetfulness of some of my acquaintances. Yet if white trash are colored white, their whiteness has become a defect. Identifying the short-sightedness of views like those of Lipsitz, Newitz and Wray observe, "the whiteness of white trash signals something other than privilege and social power" (1997: 169). And yet, as my own experience demonstrates, Lipsitz's opinion continues to be ubiquitous. It is precisely this freakish contradiction—precisely the fact that poor whites are considered fully *white* and also "trash," that makes "white trash" the vulnerable targets of malice and dread. Americans cannot leave the One Drop Rule behind—the rule that gives even the most destitute white person a legitimate claim to formal whiteness. These poor whites, then, stand out as offensive anomalies within the accepted social structure, like an obese model on a runway, or a dwarf on an NBA basketball court. They are marked because the very existence of white trash is an insult to ideals of white prestige. What the whiteness of white trash signals is something foul, dirty, and unnatural—some-

thing wrong. The sociological equation of whiteness with absolute privilege compounds this problem.

Whites, no matter how poor, must check the Caucasian box. This forces them into accepting a meaningless veneer of privilege. Sociological essentialism, in all its hypocrisy, has become official policy. Why did we not dream up a race for them, like the U.S. Census Bureau's "non-white Hispanic" designation? Why don't we classify them as "off white?" Perhaps keeping white trash white—allowing them a claim to the official *word* for privilege, courtesy of hypo-descent, benefits truly privileged whites. Is this not how white elites have always duped America's working and sub-working classes into accepting social inequities? W.E.B. DuBois, in *Black Reconstruction in America*, explains this best: poor whites "exchanged unnecessarily low wages for a 'public and psychological wage. They were given deference because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools'—privileges that did little in the short term to improve their economic standing" (quoted in Berger 1999:167). If whiteness itself did not bear some artificial badge of excellence, and if poor whites could not claim whiteness in name, American labor unions might be as formidable as their European counterparts. Their empty claim to the name of privilege still separates poor whites, by mere fantasy, from poor blacks. "Nigger lover" is a phrase that persists, pointing, as Hartigan writes, "to a reservoir of anger and confusion felt strongly by whites who left [Detroit] towards those who stayed behind" (2005: 219). If poor whites did not bother to distinguish themselves from poor blacks, the two groups would have made natural partners in a working class political coalition.

Surely the dual connotation of whiteness that allows it to signify privilege and simultaneously denigrate poor whites can only aid the agenda of preserving the power that whiteness *can* mean in the hands of the few. Certain bourgeois liberal intellectuals pretend, in public, that poor whites do not exist, and snigger at them privately. Meanwhile, conservatives and others who make no apology for unequal distributions of privilege happily discuss the group. For them, white trash is not reducible to a threat and projection of fear alone; it functions to *protect* the white privilege that, for them, is real. The undeniable existence of white poverty serves as evidence of "white victimhood" (Newitz & Wray 1997: 174) to chip away at the minority monopoly on suffering that propels affirmative action. "If I were starting off today," says Donald Trump, "I would love to be a well educated black, because I believe they have an actual advantage" (Feagin & O'Brien 2003: 75). Trump fails to disclose that he never "started out," he never endured the experience, with which he attempts to empathize, of being a poor white. His father, Fred Trump, died a millionaire many times over (Rozhon 1999). Such indirect efforts to suggest kinship with poor whites belie the quiet construction, articulated by the well-intentioned liberal identification of whiteness with social power, of what might as well be a racial divide between white trash and white elites. Such efforts also work, obviously, to conserve the fissure between whites and blacks.

I knew a wealthy, conservative white girl, who often spoke rather self-righteously of her parents' humble beginnings in a "really bad neighborhood where, like, everybody was black." She seemed to believe that because her white parents were once poor, they had to work twice as hard as their black neighbors, and, of course, became more successful. Her point was that "black people could make it if they tried, like my parents." As Newitz and Wray realize, being the victim of prejudice of any kind "often grants you a special and even sanctified identity" (1997: 174). For white conservatives, harping on the hardships of poor whites is "…principally a way of explaining white identity through narratives of victimhood" (Newitz & Wray 1997: 173). Additionally, for this girl, the condition of her extended family, who remained impoverished, helped her comfortably to avoid a "white guilt" complex. I suspect that the presence of people who ostensibly enjoyed access to the same opportunities as her parents but made nothing of them helped her to feel deserved of luxury. In order to counter minority "whining" about disadvantage, whites use "white trash" as a convenient crutch, a claim to the political capital of hardship.

By observing the plight of poor whites, the liberal association of whiteness with absolute privilege can

only play into the hands of those who would exploit "white trash" for political purposes. One aspect of that exploitation is the relegation of all blame for American racism onto the exploited, people who bear only the useless color of privilege, with little or no advantage over the African Americans whom they allegedly oppress. It is obvious that some Americans of fame, influence, and power also happen to be racist—but the obvious is often forgotten. Conservative Capitol Hill pundit Ann Coulter publicly christened the world's billion-strong Muslim population "rag heads," "camel jockeys," and "jihad monkeys" (Midgley 2006: 2). This was not long after former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi publicly bemoaned the fact that Strom Thurmond was never elected president on his segregationist platform. In the same year Lott declined, with 13 other Republican Senators, to endorse a resolution that formally acknowledged the legislature's insensitivity in failing to adopt a proposed anti-lynching law a century ago. Ms. Coulter continues to collect on hate speech, Lott remains a Senator, and Thurmond never lost his seat.

Yet there is a prevailing stereotype of poor whites as the nation's last racists. Like the exception to the rule of white prosperity, this excuses wealthy whites from the responsibility for their own more covert prejudices. It reduces racism as a social ill to something perpetrated by rogue individuals, like the men who murdered James Byrd in Jasper, Texas. Such incidents fuel the stereotype of poor whites like Edward Norton's character in *American History X* (1998) as neo-Nazis and obscure the macro-level scale of America's most prevalent forms of racism. The image of "white trash" savages serves to support the notion, propagated by both liberals and conservatives, that lynch mobs of backwoods whites are our only racists. It drags America deeper into its denial about the outrageous racism still practiced by those for whom whiteness has proved a truly lucrative investment, those in the highest echelons of the nation.

Newitz and Wray tell us, "We don't say things like *nigger trash* precisely because 'nigger' often implies poverty" (1997: 169). Similarly, the term *white trash* suggests inherent, normative white superiority. "Trash" acts as a qualifier—the term reads implicitly as "white *but* trash *nonetheless*." The idea of "white trash" is racist in two ways. Firstly, it brands everyone who is *not* white as obviously trash. Secondly, in marking poor whites apart from the rest of the white population, it implies that it is somehow natural for whites to prosper, and that they should. If they do not, they are considered worthless—trash. No matter who says "white trash," it is a racial slur. And the well-intentioned liberal and academic effort to redefine whiteness as privilege is its polite equivalent. This effort unwittingly fuels the subtle racism of our era, which is perhaps best characterized by Writer Malcolm Gladwell: "In the new racism as in the old, somebody always has to be the nigger" (1996: 81). In this time and place, in which it is taboo for black people to remain niggers, the whiteness of white trash makes them a comfortable replacement.

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Laissez-Faire Morality

Justin S. Becker

Justin's essay attests to the value of sources in expository writing, and also—in contrast—to the value of making a topic one's own. Certainly Justin had his own ideas about the assignment. Eager to focus exclusively on "Last Rights" by Michael Sandel, he decided only to "pay lip service" to his preceptor's requirement that he use three sources. But Sandel was responding to another source, so in the draft, Justin already found himself discussing two. Where would the third come from? Justin found it in Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty." And in revising, he discovered that this was crucial to articulating the principles underlying his argument. "I guess it shows me that there is in fact something worthwhile in following directions. But I'd say it is just as important to be stubborn when you choose what to write about; there is no point spending hours crafting and revising an essay unless you care about what is at stake." Justin is a Molecular and Cellular Biology concentrator from Cortlandt Manor, New York. He wrote the paper for Thane Weedon's class, "Conflicts of Conviction and the Challenge of Tolerance."

The task of governance is considerably easier when the sphere of public concern can be kept separate from all that is personal and intimate. But these distinctions are quickly blurred when private decisions attract public scrutiny, particularly when an individual's choice seems to have significant implications for the perceived moral standing of the entire community. On such issues, we wonder not only whether the individual ought to select one option or another, but also whether we—as a society—are guilty for leaving the choice up to the individual and thereby giving him or her the chance to make the wrong decision.

Such are the questions raised by the notion of physician-assisted suicide. Although the decision by a terminally ill patient in unbearable pain to hasten his or her death is a fundamentally personal choice, one that stems solely from the individual's own desires and that may harm no one else, it nonetheless challenges the State's traditional duty to protect the right to life, and it calls into question whether society itself has committed a transgression by permitting the individual—and the individual's physician—to proceed with the grim task. Resolving this matter has proven difficult not only because of the obstacle of reaching a consensus on such a subjective moral question, but also because it seems that either way the State rules, it will have adopted one particular moral outlook and rejected another. In other words, it seems that whether the government ultimately justifies or prohibits physician-assisted suicide, it will inevitably have endorsed a specific conception of the good life—a conception that, for many, has religious implications—and will have despotically imposed that creed upon its citizens.

Some contend, however, that it is still possible for the State to establish a right to assisted suicide without violating the principle of ethical neutrality. Such is the position of John Rawls, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Robert Nozick, Ronald Dworkin, Thomas Scanlon, and Thomas Nagel, a team of renowned liberal philosophers who filed a friend-of-the-court brief (or *amicus curiae*) in anticipation of a 1997 U.S. Supreme Court decision. The authors explain:

> These cases do not invite or require the Court to make moral, ethical, or religious judgments about how people should approach or confront their death or about when it is ethically appropriate to hasten one's own death or to ask others for help in doing so. On the contrary, they ask the Court to recognize that individuals have a constitutionally protected interest in making those grave judgments for themselves, free

> from the imposition of any religious or philosophical orthodoxy by court or legislature.[1]

The authors maintain that a government should remain neutral on the moral questions raised by physician-assisted suicide, recognizing that competent, autonomous beings deserve to be able to make those choices for themselves. After all, the philosophers argue, "'[t]he choice between life and death is a deeply personal decision'… Most of us see death—whatever we think will follow it—as the final act of life's drama, and we want that last act to reflect our own convictions."[2]

But this conception of the meaning of death seems far from ideologically neutral. Indeed, according to Michael J. Sandel, who responds to the philosophers of the *amicus curiae* brief in his article "Last Rights," the belief that death should be treated as a matter of choice is an unverifiable moral assumption, one that contradicts many alternative views about what makes life valuable. Sandel elaborates:

> The philosophers' emphasis on autonomy and choice implies that life is the possession of the person who lives it. This ethic is at odds with a wide range of moral outlooks that view life as a gift, of which we are custodians with certain duties. Such outlooks reject the idea that a person's life is open to unlimited use, even by the person whose life it is. Far from being neutral, the ethic of autonomy invoked in the brief departs from many religious traditions and also from the views of the founders of liberal political philosophy, John Locke and Immanuel Kant. Both Locke and Kant opposed a right to suicide, and both rejected the notion that our lives are possessions to dispose of as we please.[3]

In other words, according to Sandel, the State is in a double bind: either it must leave the evaluation of the moral validity of assisted suicide to the individual, portraying the decision as a matter of autonomy and thereby endorsing a particular view of what makes life meaningful; or it must pass judgment on assisted suicide itself, making the intimate and subjective decision of whether compassion for the suffering should outweigh the commitment to protecting life. Believing neutrality to be impossible, Sandel recommends that the State abandon its hope of avoiding a controversial moral choice.[4]

Sandel is correct to recognize that the philosophers' opinions regarding life and death are far from universal, and that, by endorsing such a perspective, a government would cease to be morally neutral. However, he mistakenly assumes that permitting choice in *any* form on a matter like physician-assisted suicide implies a biased assessment of the moral value of life. I aim to show that there is a critical distinction between merely resolving, for reasons of neutrality, not to *interfere* with terminally ill patients seeking assisted suicide and, on the other hand, declaring that individuals are *entitled* to exercise that choice. The former strategy—noninterference—stems specifically from a desire to avoid entangling the government with a particular moral outlook, as the State would essentially recuse itself from having to levy judgment on how individuals should value their lives. Although such noninterference would still preserve the right to assisted suicide, the government would in no way have endorsed the philosophers' argument that people *deserve* to be able to make decisions about the way they die, and so the policy would convey nothing regarding the moral significance of death. Just as an individual who is unable to make up his or her mind about the value of life—whether to view it as a "possession" or as a "gift"—would not stop another person from seeking assisted suicide, so too can a government resort to inaction because of a principled refusal to adopt any particular conception of the meaning of life.

Note that my position, while similar to that of the *amicus curiae* brief in that it advocates the removal of prohibitions on assisted suicide, employs a wholly

[1] John Rawls, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Robert Nozick, Ronald Dworkin, T.M. Scanlon, and Thomas Nagel, "Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief," *The NewYork Review of Books* 44–5 (27 Mar 1997) <http://www .nybooks.com/articles/1237> (22 Jan 2006).

[2] Rawls, et al,

[3] Michael J. Sandel, "Last Rights," *The New Republic*, 14 April 1997), 27.

[4] Sandel, 27.

distinct justification. The problem with the philosophers' reasoning is that, by assuming a crucial part of autonomy to be the individual's ability to act upon his or her convictions regarding "how and why human life has value,"[5] it implies that people are necessarily entitled to treat their lives however they please. In other words, the philosophers' argument rests on the belief that, if they are rational and independent agents, terminally ill patients *deserve* the choice to hasten death. Without actually endorsing the specific decision to partake in assisted suicide or claiming that it is morally valid, this rationale nonetheless implicitly endorses the assumption that our lives are possessions to be disposed of at will. Its bias, then, is not that it leaves choice up to the individual, because simply permitting citizens to engage in a controversial practice does not rule out the possibility that that practice is morally repugnant. What causes the violation of neutrality, rather, is the conclusion that citizens' status as autonomous beings in and of itself grants them a right to make that judgment for themselves. Such an argument necessarily precludes the perspectives of those who view life as a "gift" having fixed and objective value, a group that according to Sandel encompasses Locke, Kant, and various religious adherents.

But if any suggestion that terminally ill patients either deserve or do not deserve a choice to seek assisted suicide would entangle the government with a particular set of "convictions about what makes life worth living,"[6] then shouldn't the government avoid such entanglements by resolving to do neither? Like an individual who couldn't decide whether to view life as something we own or something we receive as a gift, the State could make a principled decision to extricate itself from this intimate moral judgment, neither interfering with terminally ill patients' choices to hasten death nor proclaiming that they have legitimate grounds to exercise that choice. In particular, such a policy would obligate the State to repeal bans on assisted suicide for terminally ill, pain-ridden patients and at the same time refrain from explicitly endorsing (in legislation or legal judgments) the view that life is a possession and that its value is subject to the beliefs of the possessor. This strategy for settling the debate would not suffer from the same flaw as the autonomy rationale, because merely resolving not to interfere with patients who "choose death rather than continued pain and suffering"[7] is far different from asserting that individuals are *entitled* to select this grave option so long as they desire it; the former carries no moral connotations.

The subtle yet essential distinction I have drawn between the two ways in which the State can establish a right to physician-assisted suicide is elucidated by Isaiah Berlin's analysis in "Two Concepts of Liberty." This work bifurcates the notion of freedom, suggesting that there are crucial differences between so-called "negative" liberties, which function as guarantees that no outside power will interfere with an individual in pursuing some course of action, and "positive" liberties, which go a step further to empower "the individual to be his own master."[8] These respective approaches to freedom reflect differing intents on the part of the State. For whereas the establishment of a negative right stems from a desire to avoid the problems created when a governing power interferes with the private sphere of the individual, the establishment of a positive right implies that "I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, …to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes."[9] In other words, rights in the positive sense are declared with regard for the actor himself, and they specifically imply that individuals *ought* to be able to make a given decision based on the fact that they are rational and autonomous. Thus, positive liberties differ from their negative counterparts in that they stem not from a mere aversion to State restrictions on choice but rather from the conviction that the freedom to make such choices is compelled by the inherent qualities of the citizen.

As Berlin concedes, positive and negative liberties at times overlap, in the sense that the freedom to do

5 Rawls, et al.
6 Sandel, 27.
7 Rawls, et al,, editors' note.
8 Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 122, 131.
9 Berlin, 131.

something may be understood as positive from one point of view and as negative from another, but the *implications* of each point of view may differ considerably.[10] A positive right has more significant normative implications and is thus less accommodating of diverse moral outlooks when the liberty involves controversial questions about the meaning of life. In such cases, therefore, the *reasons* the government chooses to allow or prohibit a particular freedom are as important, from a constitutional, if not personal or religious perspective, as *whether* the government allows it. The question of assisted suicide, I would argue, is one of the instances in which the rationale behind the State's ruling is of critical significance. So intimately related are both sides of this issue to personal conceptions of right and wrong that even leaving the choice up to the individual is not necessarily a neutral action. For instance, if the State were to declare, with the philosophers' brief, a positive right to assisted suicide, the law of the land would be intimately linked to the belief that the value of life is subject to the discretion of the possessor. Conversely, I propose that the State recognize a right to assisted suicide only as a negative liberty, a choice that the State has no grounds to eliminate but not one that individuals necessarily deserve on their own merit. The fact that this alternative form of freedom conveys nothing regarding the moral significance of life stems from the distinct rationale behind it. Devoid of the language of personal entitlement, such a negative right is more a statement about the government—that it cannot reasonably prohibit or legitimize assisted suicide without implicitly endorsing a biased moral outlook—than it is a statement about how individuals should determine the value of their own lives.

To some, the notion of deliberate inaction by the government on a topic so relevant to justice may seem irresponsible, or at least out of character for a body whose fundamental purpose is to ensure that justice is consistently upheld. And in the instance of a Supreme Court decision on physician-assisted suicide, clearly the justices must decide one way or another; they cannot simply resolve to issue "no decision." After all, on such an important matter, when citizens look to the State to establish firmly whether they would ever have the option legally to hasten their own deaths, and to provide an explicit and justifiable rationale for their ruling, any ambiguity would constitute a serious failure of government.

However, I am not advocating pure inaction by the State, but rather a principled and proactive decision to stop the government, at any level, from interfering with a terminally ill, pain-ridden patient's desire to hasten his or her death. If enacted through a Supreme Court case, such a policy would indeed require the justices to overturn the many state laws that currently prohibit assisted suicide, as well as to block any future legislation that would impose upon the citizenry a particular view about why life is valuable. Such a proactive mandate would also be implemented with great care, coupled to aggressively enforced provisions that protect patients' rights and ensure that assisted suicide is only permitted under extremely specific conditions. For instance, regulations should certainly stipulate that a terminally ill individual can only be given the option to hasten death if he or she is sufficiently conscious and rational to give consent, if suicide has been his or her unwavering preference for an extended time, and if all possible palliative measures have already been exhausted. Such safeguards are consistent with the principal of neutrality, for while the State certainly has no place in making this difficult and personal decision for the patient, it has a compelling interest—irrespective of the moral consequences of assisted suicide—in ensuring that the patient is capable of an informed judgment. Moreover, legislators should certainly delay the legalization of assisted suicide if they sincerely believe that such regulations could not yet be consistently enforced, or that vulnerable patients—such as the poor or elderly—might be pressured into making their decision prematurely. This reservation may or may not be realistic (the philosophers' brief goes on to offer several reasons as to why it is not), but what concerns us here is to recognize that if the State did in fact rule that legalization were too dangerous because of concerns pertaining to implementation, the fact would still remain that that permitting assisted suicide would still be the best policy in principle. The government would thus be obligated to ensure that that these institutional barriers were gradually corrected so that,

[10] Berlin, 131-2.

A visitor walks between the works of Donald Judd (rear) and Richard Long (foreground) at the Art and Exhibition Hall in "The Guggenheim Collection" on exhibit in Bonn, Germany 2006-2007. © Felix Heyder/dpa/Corbis

in the long run, terminally ill patients in unbearable pain had the option to receive medical assistance in hastening death. Otherwise, these pragmatic concerns would have simply become an excuse to prohibit physician-assisted suicide for the sake of masking an underlying moral or ideological aversion to the practice. The attitude I propose that the government adopt, then, is not one of callous indifference. Rather, I advocate that the government use noninterference carefully as a tool to prevent ideological despotism, stopping the State from venturing into dangerous assertions of positive liberties.

The importance of this check on government power should not be underestimated. Sandel himself, despite characterizing neutrality as an "attractive but mistaken principle," provides us with a compelling analysis about the dangers that stem from State endorsement of a biased moral outlook.

Depicting the problems that could arise should the government embrace the autonomy rationale, he expounds:

> …changes in the law can bring changes in the way we understand ourselves. The philosophers rightly observe that existing laws against assisted suicide reflect and entrench certain views about what gives life meaning. But the same would be true were the Court to declare, in the name of autonomy, a right to assisted suicide. The new regime would not simply expand the range of options, but would encourage the tendency to view life less as a gift and more as a possession. It might heighten the prestige we accord autonomous, independent lives and depreciate the claims of those seen to be dependent. How this shift would affect policy toward the elderly, the disabled, the poor and

[11] Sandel, 27.

> infirm, or reshape the attitudes of doctors toward their ailing patients or children toward their aging parents, remains to be seen.[11]

As Sandel concedes here, the problem with violating neutrality is not merely that the State has adopted an unverifiable moral assumption, but that it causes one particular creed to gain authority and reshapes the way individuals think about their lives.

But the most compelling reasons for State neutrality do not even rest on the potential for the coercion of individual thought. What separates the realm of moral ideology from that of traditional political debate is that the former is so fundamentally internal—arising from the most personal of sentiments and defining our very sense of identity—that it ought not be subject to the same forces of compromise and debate, the same adversarial competition of ideas that is used to resolve most policy issues. Certainly there is a difference between telling people that they are mistaken in supporting the government's new tax plan and telling people that they are mistaken in being Catholic. For while we are justified in taking our own conceptions of the good life extremely seriously, and in using those moral views to influence and even direct our daily decisions, we should at the same time respect the fact that imposing such perspectives on others might lead them to feel profoundly violated, just as we would feel threatened if our fellow citizens took aim at our own beliefs and asserted their inferiority. Ultimately, as a society, we do not want government to provide specific answers to complex moral questions, because the varying conceptions of the good life are too important to personal identity to be pitted against one another and dissolved into a single State-sponsored creed.

Resolving such complex moral questions is by no means unavoidable in the legislative process. For whereas the ethical beliefs of a single citizen or government official may and often should influence his or her opinions on specific issues like the provision of foreign aid or treatment of the poor, the government's ultimate decision regarding these issues need not presuppose the validity of particular moral creed. A piece of legislation, for example, that favors an egalitarian redistribution of wealth could indeed be justified by a wide variety of ethical and pragmatic sentiments, and in this sense the policy would perhaps "feel" moral. But so long as no single ideological justification is encoded in the wording of that law, the new policy could still be supported from an infinite range of moral perspectives and thus would in no way impose upon the citizenry a *particular* conception of the good life. Since the goal of neutrality is no more than to avoid living in a society where the government proposes or precludes specific answers to intimate ethical questions, it is permissible for laws to have a perceived moral character—drawing on the diverse convictions of the constituency—so long as they do not have a unilateral moral agenda.

This notion, that legislation is consistent with neutrality so long as it can be justified from multiple ethical perspectives, helps to explain why the policy of noninterference need not extend to all forms of suicide. One might have objected, after all, that if the State ought not endorse any particular view about what makes life meaningful or worth living, as I have argued, then it would have no grounds to prevent any person—even a healthy, pain-free individual—from trying to end his or her life. But in these instances, interference does not necessarily violate neutrality, because there exists a compelling pragmatic justification—reasoning that does not imply a particular answer to complex moral questions—for stopping these individuals from seeking death. Here the philosophers in the *amicus curiae* do have it right: "A state might assert, for example, that people who are not terminally ill, but who have formed a desire to die, are, as a group, very likely later to be grateful if they are prevented from taking their own lives. It might then claim that it is legitimate, out of concern for such people, to deny any of them a doctor's assistance [in committing suicide]."[12] In other words, the State can justify preventing, for example, a lovesick teenager from committing suicide, because it is highly *probable* that such an individual would soon change his or her mind, and because the government has a legitimate duty to prevent its citizens from making devastating personal decisions based on a fleeting, irrational emotion. Although it is impossible for the government to determine absolutely whether a given person will later

[12] Rawls, et al.

regain the desire to live, such an outcome does at least have a *plausible* chance of occurring for any non-terminal or non-suffering individual—a chance that carries great significance when we treat such individuals as a large group. With these considerations, the traditional prohibitions against suicide seem valid. Thus, what makes a law against assisted suicide for suffering, terminal patients unacceptable in terms of moral neutrality is not that it pertains to suicide *per se*, but rather that the usual pragmatic justification for stopping an individual from ending his or her life can no longer even *possibly* be right.

Although the neutrality principle places critical limitations on the power of the State, its purpose is by no means to exclude moral thought from the process of political decision-making. Certainly individual citizens or government representatives should not be obligated to bracket their personal, moral, or religious beliefs in developing a stance on public issues, for such an expectation would force them to suppress a vital part of themselves in order to engage in political dialogue. I do not dispute the claims of law expert Daniel Conkle, who warns that, as a result of restricting moral and religious thought in the process of lawmaking, "religious believers [would] be torn apart in their efforts to maintain a private religiosity alongside a public secularity, and it is hard to believe that this kind of religious schizophrenia [could] be maintained indefinitely."[13] But Conkle's very words, I would argue, help clarify why what we need is not secularity of the lawmakers but neutrality of the laws. It is out of recognition of the very importance of moral thought, and its inextricability from the identity of a person as a rational being, that the language of the law and of legal judgment ought to refrain from culling a single conception of the good life out from the infinite number of ethical perspectives that citizens might hold dear. This task becomes increasingly difficult when an intimate moral question becomes a matter of public concern, tempting the State to judge, in the case of physician-assisted suicide, whether life should be treated as a possession or as a gift. But it is in such instances that ideological neutrality becomes most essential, and by responding with a hands-off mentality—resolving neither to interfere with individuals making a controversial choice nor ever to suggest that they are morally entitled to exercise that choice—the government can ensure that obeying the law does not condemn citizens to lives**,** or—in this case—deaths, that appall them.

[13]Daniel Conkle. "Different Religions, Different Politics: Evaluating the Role of Competing Religious Traditions in American Politics and Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 10 (1993): 31.

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A Marriage of Convenience

Ana Ines Mendy

In crafting her essay on how today's Republicanism was formed, Ana tried an alternative to the technique of writing under pressure "at the wee hours of the morning, with a cup of coffee at hand, ink-smeared fingers, and rock-and-roll pounding." This time, she was able to start early, carefully assembling copious notes on post-its. Over the holiday break, she drafted the essay methodically, "under the auspice of the Caribbean sun" at her home in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. The process allowed her the leisure to revise her thinking, even before she had begun her first draft. "At first, I thought I would argue that traditionalists and libertarians had much in common and thus naturally united" to the benefit of the Republican Party. "However, I realized that the preponderance of my evidence pointed in a different direction." The result bears witness to the advantages of the strategy that Ana summarizes this way: "No rush. Not this time." Ana is concentrating in History. She wrote this essay for David Hecht's class, "Apocalyptic Visions."

Published in 1960, Barry Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative* heralded the political revolution that eventually shattered the hegemony of the Rooseveltian Democrats. As Washington Post columnist George F. Will observes, Goldwater's set of ideals can be described as a "muscular foreign policy backing unapologetic nationalism; economic policies of low taxation and light regulation; a libertarian inclination regarding cultural questions."[1] But it was not merely Goldwater's resuscitation of languishing conservatism that enabled the Republican revolution of the 1980s. The Republican ascendancy materialized, mainly, due to the powerful union of these new, radical Goldwater "libertarians," as historian George H. Nash calls them, with the moral-social conservatives or "traditionalists" (later the "Christian Right") in their fight against what they perceived as modern liberal secularism.[2] By Reagan's ascendancy in 1980, the two brands of conservatism had become so interwoven as to be almost indistinguishable in the new amalgam of conservatism dubbed the New Right.[3]

Nash argues, influentially, that the union of the two strands of conservatism stemmed from compatible values shared by the libertarian and the moral-social conservatives, such as their opposition to government control of arms. According to this logic, the 1970s witnessed the manifestation of a natural union between two compatible elements of conservatism. More interesting, but nevertheless incomplete, is the kind of argument advanced by historian Justin Watson—that these two strands of conservatism united due to prominent figures of the time such as Ralph Reed, Pat Robertson, and Ronald Reagan, who saw religion and politics as inseparable. In other words, while the union materialized artificially, out of a conscious attempt to join two elements with much in common under the umbrella of the Republican Party, it was nonetheless idealistic, expressing the genuine religious convictions of key political figures of the time.

1 George F. Will, "A Goldwater Revival," *The Washington Post*, September 2, 2004, A23.

2 In *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), historian Justin Watson observes that the "Christian Right" during this period was primarily concerned with "restoring America to its status as a Christian nation" (2) in response to "the great successes of secular and liberal forces, principally operating through the specific agency of the courts" (21). For the terms "libertarian" and "traditionalist," see George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, New York: Basic Books, 1976), xii.

3 While definitions of "New Right" abound, it is generally defined as a "backlash" political entity characterized by being anti-big government, anti-union, anti-welfare, anti-ERA, anti-busing, anti-abortion.

Careful analysis of the dynamics between traditionalists and the Democratic and Republican parties suggests, however, that the union was neither natural nor rooted in religion. Rather, the new bond between traditionalists and Goldwater conservatives stemmed from the sheer self-interest of both groups: for Goldwater conservatives now under the Republican banner, the union served to widen the Republican base and pave the way for the Republican revolution; for the traditionalists, it ensured that the government would address the moral and social issues that, in their eyes, threatened American society. This kind of union, fueled by self-interest, stands not as an exception in the maneuvering of the Republican Party, but rather as the norm that characterizes and unites it.

Clearly, libertarian conservatives owe much of their present-day success to the traditionalist wing of the party. As Goldwater biographer Edward Lee narrates, "the mid-1950s seemed to be a time of eclipse for the American conservative moment." Goldwater's libertarian message of small government, laissez-faire economics, and protection of individual privacy could not have prevailed without help. Goldwater conservatives were, as Lee puts it, "uncoordinated and inconclusive";[4] in 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson seized the White House from Goldwater in one of the most lopsided elections in American history. And Carter's ascendancy in the aftermath of Watergate showed that, by the 1970s, Goldwater conservatives stood in dire need of a larger electoral base.

Like libertarian conservatives, traditionalists could not have succeeded on their own. This moral-social conservative faction encompassed mainly Christian fundamentalists and some orthodox Jews who, according to Watson, "want[ed] to restore the public role and authority of evangelical morality and belief, values that modernity [had] defined as private matters with no standing in public life."[5] Their aversion to the present stemmed mainly from the traditionalist backlash to the kind of "modernity" that took reign during the 1950s, as seen in Elvis Presley's alleged "satanic dances" or the rise of a counterculture Beat Movement. They called for "the return to an idealized past," as historian Fritz Stern puts it, a past characterized by "traditional American families," pro-life, small-government societies, similar to Jefferson's nineteenth century utopia.[6] In order to make their voices heard, however, these traditionalists required a government sympathetic to their pleas—a conservative government unlike the pro-ERA, big-government, pro-gun control government erected in Washington during the 1960s.

Certainly, there is a degree of overlap in the ideologies of both strands; both saw the particular way in which the government was expanding as problematic. But in other respects, they held radically divergent views. In fact, Goldwater called for the very type of separation between private and public realms that, according to Watson, provoked the main traditionalist backlash.[7] In his *Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater insists that government should stay out of people's lives on family matters, or personal issues, after having drawn a clear distinction between the public and private realms: "I believe that the problem of race relations, like all social and cultural problems, is best handled by the people directly concerned. Social and cultural change, however desirable, should not be effected by the engines of national power."[8] Tellingly, a 2005 article, "Come Back Barry!" from the British magazine *The Economist*, which considers today's politics through a Goldwater lens, remembers Goldwater's averseness to governmental meddling in private affairs, implicitly acknowledging the deviation of the current Republican Party from Goldwater's vision of it:

> He thundered that social conservatives such as Jerry Falwell deserved "a swift kick in the ass," and insisted that the decision to have an abortion should be "up to the pregnant woman, not up to the pope or some do-gooders or the religious right." For *Goldwater*, abortion was "not a conservative issue at all." For many Republicans today, it often seems to be the only conservative issue.[9]

[4] Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 75, 77.
[5] Watson, 21.
[6] Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), xvi., qtd. in Watson, 20.
[7] Watson, 21.
[8] Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Washington D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1990), 24.
[9] Adrian Wooldridge, Come Back Barry! *The Economist*, May 12, 2005, 375.

It thus appears oxymoronic to the 1970s observer of American politics to witness Goldwater followers join ranks with evangelicals and fundamentalists who sought to facilitate federal government meddling in private affairs. And similar views actually prevailed among conservative leaders and thinkers generally. Though Russell Kirk showed some interest in religion in his political writings, he also advocated a small government with "as little governing by [it] as practicable," which would have no business in the private arena.[10] William Buckley, founder of *National Review*, and Frank Chodorov, among others, explicitly stated in their early columns that lest America seek a "Leviathan State," private concerns should remain private, and government should remain divorced from such concerns.[11] Hence, the argument that the union between traditionalists and libertarians was natural seems unsound: after all, before the union, both strands provided contrasting rhetoric to the public and to their target audiences.

The history of fundamentalist support for—and disappointment with—Jimmy Carter in the early 1970s further serves to discredit such a "natural union" argument. When Carter, a born-again Christian, announced his candidacy for Presidency at the Democratic Convention, fundamentalists around the country threw their support behind the Democratic campaign in hopes that Democrats would capitalize on traditionalist concerns regarding the "moral degradation" of America. This marriage between traditionalists and big-government, New Deal Democrats clearly undermines the natural union theory. Following the Georgian peanut-farmer's victory in the 1976 showdown, various interest groups who had helped Carter seize the White House, including women and minorities, had immediately asked the new President-elect for something in return. As Richard Viguerie notes, for instance, African American leaders had reminded Carter "almost daily that they supported him in 1976 and that they wanted their just rewards."[12] Carter responded to this pressure with a record number of appointments of women, blacks and minorities to the government and the judiciary. By contrast, Carter's fundamentalist supporters, who may have been the deciding factor in his narrow victory over Ford, "asked for nothing but to be left alone."[13] But Carter did not leave them alone. He not only ignored them in terms of appointments and his agenda, but also took steps to alienate them by passing legislation that hurt them.[14] For example, in 1978 the IRS head, appointed by Carter, attempted to strip the tax-deductible status of Christian schools that failed to meet or set racial quotas. Furthermore, Carter went so far as explicitly to announce his will to veto any attempt made by Congress to pass bills that would allow voluntary prayer in public schools. And when re-shuffling his Cabinet, Carter, who could have salvaged his lack of political savvy by appointing born-again Christians to his fresh Cabinet, appointed instead people who seem, from the traditionalist perspective, to have rejected the Bible or spat venom on fundamentalists.[15]

Hence, despite the initial traditionalist support for the Democratic Party, Carter's lack of political acumen permanently alienated the traditionalist base that had assured his victory in 1976. As Viguerie comments: "it is hard to believe that Carter was so callous to his most important and biggest supporters in 1976. But it's true. No wonder they voted for Ronald Reagan in 1980."[16] The traditionalists' support for the Democrats in the late 1970s reveals that something other than a natural impulse to join a similar school of thought drove traditionalists into the arms of the Republican Party. The marriage between Democrats and traditionalists in the late 1970s signals that their subsequent alliance with the Republicans did not derive primarily from natural ideological affinity.

But also insufficient is the suggestion that this alliance derived from the religious convictions of such charismatic figures as Ronald Reagan. Viguerie, one advocate of this view, points to the Carter-traditionalist allegiance as proof that traditionalists remained separate from blind party allegiance and were, instead,

10 Nash, 70.
11 Nash, 71.
12 Richard Viguerie, *The New Right:We're Ready To Lead* (Virginia: The Viguerie Company, 1981), 124.
13 Viguerie, 124.
14 Viguerie, 124.
15 Viguerie, 125.
16 Viguerie, 125.

concerned with "moral issues" *per se*.[17] Because Carter promised to address such issues and managed effectively to garner support among fundamentalist circles, traditionalists lined up with Democrats in 1976. Likewise, the logic of this argument suggests, Reagan's godliness helped the Republicans to attract the same faction in 1980. However, this argument fails to acknowledge that while the traditionalists slowly gathered momentum during the early 1970s, they did not constitute a major political voice. Had this group and their values been identified as key to the Carter administration, Carter would have tried to curry favor among fundamentalist circles rather than overlook them.

From left to right: *Republican Presidential nominee, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, campaigning in California. September 8, 1964; President Jimmy Carter shakes hands outside Plains Baptist Church, January, 1977; Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan campaigning in Cincinnati in preparation for the Ohio state primary, May 28, 1980.* © Bettmann/CORBIS.

In fact, the leaders of Carter's Republican opposition focused more of their rhetoric on political and economic questions than on religious ones. It was not Carter's failure to live up to the religious expectations of the traditionalists that first and most effectively rallied his Republican opposition but his entry into the Panama Canal Treaty. While traditionalists began to criticize Carter's disregard for their tacit demands, libertarian conservatives such as Viguerie and Paul Weyrich immersed themselves in a mission to galvanize the Goldwater conservatives into barring the Carter administration from giving back the Panama Canal. Publications of the time such as *National Review*, and Richard Meyer's earlier *Conservative Mainstream*, spent the bulk of their coverage on politics and economics, rather than social questions, thus suggesting that if key figures thought of religion and politics as inseparable, they did not, by the late 1970s, reveal such thought. Even Viguerie goes so far as to state outright: "because of Panama [conservatives] are better organized. We developed a great deal of confidence in ourselves, and our opponents became weaker."[18] Moreover, if Carter largely ignored his fundamentalist supporters in the 1970s, so did Reagan in the early 1980s. His rewards to the traditionalists, like Carter's, were limited to rhetorical support for certain key issues. While he perhaps held devout religious views, little of his domestic policy addressed moral issues. In fact, he himself signed a piece of legislation that would sanction the death penalty—something many pro-life traditionalists would balk at—for offences that involved murder and drug trafficking.

This is not to deny that key conservative figures were ultimately responsible for bringing traditionalists and libertarians together; rather it is to suggest that their success depended less on their religious convictions than on their sense of self-interest. Traditionalists, now displeased with the Democrats, searched, by default, for an ally in the Republican Party; after all, what other major party could they resort to in order to ensure their voices would resonate around the nation? Republicans, in turn, capitalized on Carter's blunder in order to expand the Republican base (until then a minority of American voters) and ensure Goldwater libertarian thought would become the law of the land. Unlike Democrats, Republicans were

[17] Viguerie, 19-27.

[18] Viguerie, 71.

quick to understand the power of the religious right. Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), commented to his supporters in 1979 that "we have together with the Protestants and Catholics, enough votes to run the country. And when the people say, 'We've had enough,' we are going to take over."[19] Consequently, figures such as Richard Viguerie, "The Godfather of the New Right," consciously sought to stir traditionalists into the political arena and affiliate them with the G.O.P.[20] Viguerie identifies Paul Weyrich in Washington D.C. and Howard Phillips at a grassroots level, as important to the project of gathering traditionalists and encouraging them to "get involved in conservative politics."[21] According to Viguerie, libertarian conservatives rallied traditionalists disillusioned with the political system, helping Christians to "get more involved in politics" by propelling the creation of Christian coalitions.[22]

The formation in 1979 of the Moral Majority Inc., for instance, serves to illuminate the self-interested union of traditionalists and libertarians.[23] As Viguerie narrates, conservatives Paul Weyrich and Howard Phillips actively set out, in the late 1970s, to recruit fundamentalist leaders they thought displayed the necessary ability to stir traditionalists toward the Republican Party.[24] Weyrich enticed preacher Jerry Falwell to lead the newly created Moral Majority into the jaws of a Republican Party thirsty, by 1980, for victory. As historian Justin Watson contends in *The Christian Coalition*, this organization was part of a "general attempt by the New Right to develop a conservative political majority, and a particular attempt to elect Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980."[25] The Moral Majority Inc. alone claimed, by the early 1980s, to have registered 2.5 million new voters, and re-registered 1.5 million voters among its adherents.[26] It is thus no surprise that in 1980, ABC News's Lou Harris noted: "Ronald Reagan won his stunning victory last week not because the country as a whole went conservative but because the Moral Majority Inc. gave him such massive support."[27]

The emergence of the Moral Majority Inc. could be seen as the birth of an organization that meshed politics and religion due to their compatibility. It is revealing, however, that these traditionalists seem to have had little knowledge of the issues Goldwater conservatives cared about. Consider Weyrich's account, as reported in *The Washington Times*, of the traditionalists' introduction to conservative economic theory:

> When Jack Kemp came up with supply-side economic theme in the 1970s, the religious right had no idea what this meant or how it fit in with anything they cared about," Mr. Weyrich said. "So Kemp came over and briefed our whole assemblage at the time and convinced the leaders of the religious right to support his tax-cut bill, and that gave it an extra push it wouldn't have had except for that meeting."[28]

Moreover, Weyrich himself has admitted his role as "coach to the various groups that are now called religious right—to get them to the point where they could function politically and then to put them into a coalition where they could work together."[29] Other conservative activists such as Charley Staley used the media to facilitate the union of libertarian conservatives and traditionalists. Staley's video *Stand Up America!*, for example, directly invigorated traditionalists to become involved in politics while Christian broadcasts, under the auspices of Weyrich and his associates, as well as direct-mail targeted for Christian audiences, made self-evidently conscious attempts to unite both conservative strands. These obvious efforts to bring politics to traditionalists and

19 Viguerie, 126.
20 Edwards, 185.
21 Viguerie, 53.
22 Viguerie, 123.
23 The term "moral majority," curiously enough, was coined by Paul Weyrich in a meeting with Jerry Falwell. Upon realizing the power of the phrase he unwittingly coined, Weyrich and a politicized Falwell adopted the term to encompass traditionalists. See Edwards, 198.
24 Viguerie, 53-55.
25 Watson, 21.
26 Viguerie, 127.
27 Viguerie, 128.
28 Ralph Z. Hallow. *The Washington Times*, June 17, 2005, <http://www.washtimes.com/national/20050617-125248-4355r.htm> (August 13, 2006).
29 Ibid.

entice them to join ranks with the Republican Party confirm that the union between the two conservative strands was indeed a vested interest of traditionalists and libertarians alike.

With the 1980 election looming, the late 1970s witnessed the emergence of various single-interest groups led by libertarian conservatives who, in a conscious attempt to widen the Republican base, capitalized on most of the traditionalist issues hitherto underemphasized by the government. By focusing on single issues within the traditionalist agenda, and targeting different segments of the American population eager for a party that would address their concerns, the Republican Party managed to solidify the union between traditionalists and libertarians. But the repeated use of single-interest groups suggests that that the purely self-interested alliance was habitual to the Republicans—not merely a one-time event involving the traditionalists. Thus the anti-Equal Rights Amendment movement led by Phyllis Schlafly, "Stop ERA!", addressed one particular hot button issue among traditionalists, and effectively targeted segments of American population vulnerable to being steered into the arms of a Republican Party eager for victory in 1980.[30] Mormons, heretofore divorced from the traditionalist thrust, united with the larger traditionalist-libertarian push as a result of Schlafly's call to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment. While the "Stop ERA!" movement was only one of the many single-interest groups spotlighted in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the mechanisms used to bring traditionalists into the Republican Party serve as a model for the rest of the single-interest groups of the time such as the anti-abortionists, and opponents of gun control. As Viguerie writes: "[single-interest groups] made specially targeted mailings . . . held training schools . . . bought advertising exposing liberal voting records in their special interest publications . . .[and] spent generously on purely lobbying and educational activities which raised public consciousness of their issues."[31] By allowing these groups to focus on single issues, the Republicans managed to bring together different elements of the American population that would otherwise have disagreed. Many of Schlafly's adherents advocated gun control; however, in encouraging them to focus solely on defeating the Equal Rights Amendment, the Republicans created a permanent link between the single-interest group and their party, ensuring that, whatever their opinions on other matters, this segment of the American population would remain loyal, and thus do its part to pave the way for the Republican Revolution.

"We are different from previous generations of conservatives…We are no longer working to preserve the status quo. We are radicals, working to overturn the present power structure of this country,"[32] exclaimed Paul Weyrich in 1984, referring to the fruition of the movement born out of Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative*. This was not a "positive" agenda but a "negative" one, in the sense that the self-interested union enabling it, could only be an instrument of negation, designed to purge the liberal establishment erected and perpetuated since the end of the Second World War. The coalition between traditionalists and libertarian conservatives created in the late 1970s, as well as the predominance of single-interest groups, has remained alive until the present day as evidenced in George Bush's repeated allusions to the Bible, the importance of "moral values" in the 2004 elections, and the continued appearance of religious leaders such as Jerry Falwell in Republican rallies. While many have debated the nature of this union, the preponderance of evidence suggests that it was not natural to the ideologies but rather forced by the self-interest of the parties involved – a marriage of convenience.[33] And as the proliferation of single-interest groups in the wake of the 1980 election further reveals, this marriage stands not as an exception, but rather as a norm, for the maneuvering of today's Republican Party.

30 Viguerie, 103-104.
31 Viguerie, 75.
32 Viguerie, 56.
33 I owe this term ("marriage of convenience") to James E. Berg, whose help throughout the process of editing this essay I greatly appreciate.

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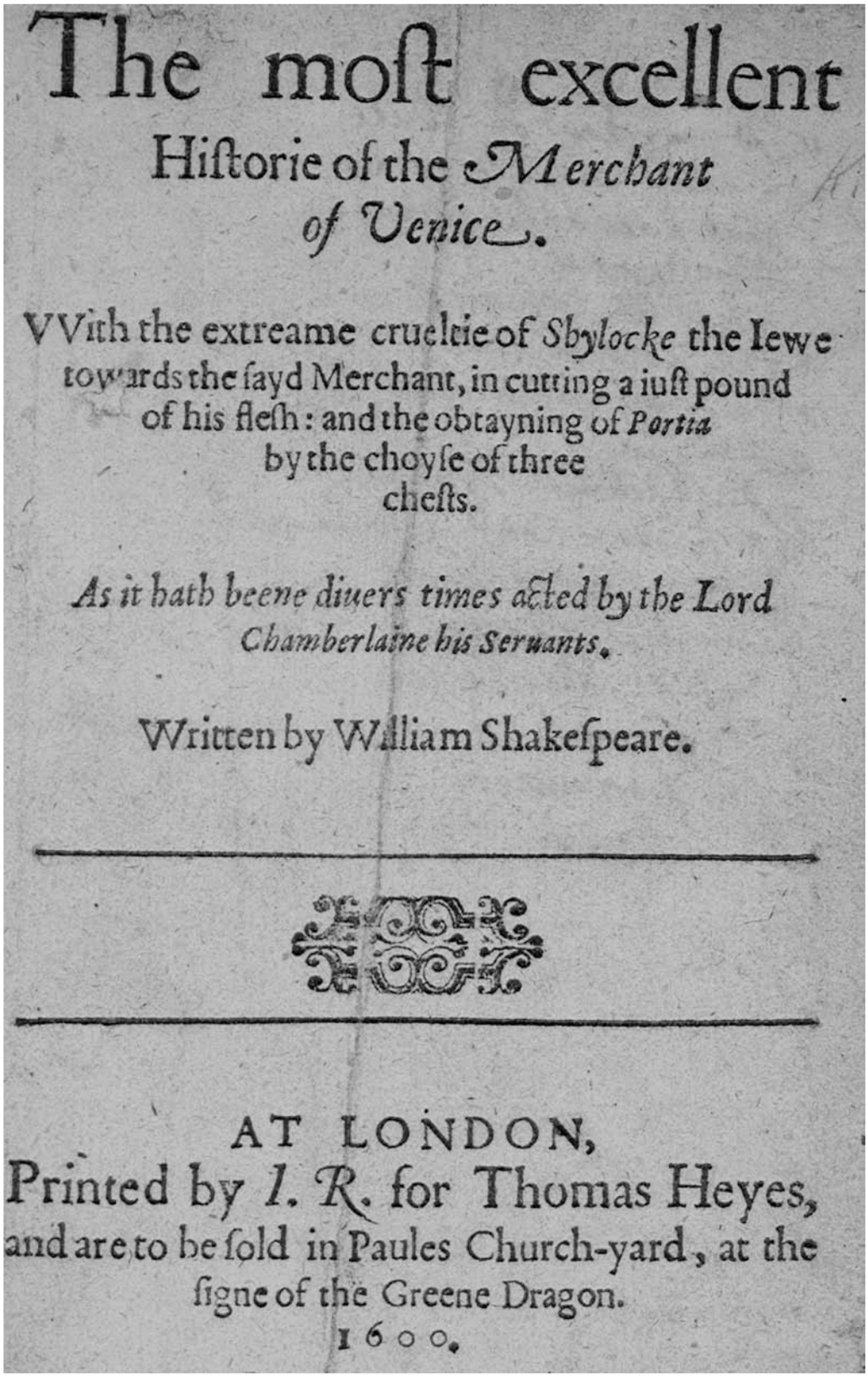

The moſt excellent
Hiſtorie of the *Merchant*
of Venice.

VVith the extreame cruelтie of *Shylocke* the Iewe
towards the ſayd Merchant, in cutting a iuſt pound
of his fleſh: and the obtayning of *Portia*
by the choyſe of three
cheſts.

As it hath beene diuers times acted by the Lord
Chamberlaine his Seruants.

Written by William Shakeſpeare.

AT LONDON,
Printed by *I. R.* for Thomas Heyes,
and are to be ſold in Paules Church-yard, at the
ſigne of the Greene Dragon.
1600.

Title page, William Shakespeare, *The Most Excellent History of the Merchant of Venice,* London, 1600. Shelfmark C.34.k.32. © The British Library.

Bound by Portia's Ring: Character Change and Femininity in Michael Radford's *Merchant of Venice*

Jennifer DeCoste

Something bothered Jennifer DeCoste about the Portia in Michael Radford's version of The Merchant of Venice, *and initially she couldn't quite figure out what. Instead of turning away from the problem, she explored it in depth. As she puts it, "I sensed that if it bothered me, it probably bothered other people as well, and might make an interesting starting point for my essay." This strategy led to success, but it did not make the process easy. At first, nothing came to her, so she decided to "choose a few scenes, tear them apart word by word, gesture by gesture," until she had "wheedled some meaning out of it all." When she looked at the first draft she had produced, she realized that she had formulated "the seeds of ideas without even realizing it." Ultimately, she produced an essay not only with an interesting claim about the character in question but also with fascinating implications for literary and cinematic techniques of characterization and their effects on the representation of gender. Jennifer is a Molecular and Cellular Biology concentrator from Richmond, Kentucky. She wrote this essay for James Berg's Class, "Shakespeare's Characters."*

Characters in modern literature and film are generally expected to achieve complexity through the personal transformations they undergo. No such expectation existed, however, in Shakespeare's time, and characters written for the Elizabethan stage could instead derive complexity from simultaneous combinations of conflicting desires, beliefs, or needs. Portia in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is an example of such a character, for while her language often conveys humble deference to male authority and willingness to function as a prize to be won, she always wields undeniable power and authority over the men she encounters. As Karen Newman points out, these contradictory elements in Portia allow her to enter into the traditionally male structures of exchange in a novel way, acting simultaneously as the gift and the giver. Her hijacking of a male-dominated system of commerce is both crucial to the development of the plot and central to the meaning of the work as a whole.

So in adapting *The Merchant of Venice* for his recent film, director Michael Radford was faced with a two-fold challenge regarding his treatment of Portia. On the one hand, he obviously wanted to create a dynamic character that conformed to the modern conception of character complexity. To achieve this, he presents the image of an innocent and utterly submissive Portia right up to a carefully contrived turning point, so that at that time she can undergo a striking transformation to a self-assured and dominant woman. On the other hand, as the film's full title—*William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice*—implies from the outset, Radford also recognized an obligation to interpret the characters in a way consistent with the basic structure of Shakespeare's plot. As an attempt to meet this obligation, his interpretation of Portia ultimately fails, and fails in a revealing way. Although the techniques he employs to construe Portia as a paragon of feminine innocence are in themselves convincing, limiting her to these traits, even for a portion of the film, is fundamentally incompatible with actions she must perform in order to serve her function in the story. The failure of the interpretation arises from Radford's attempt to highlight Portia's initial attitude of artless innocence even where the structure of the story requires her to assert power directly and obtrusively.

To produce a well-defined original state from which Portia's transformation can proceed, Radford pointedly emphasizes the straightforward innocence of her initial attitude toward Bassanio. In the scene in which Bassanio arrives at Portia's estate, Shakespeare's text implies that her speech is the beginning of a dialogue between her and Bassanio, but Radford choos-

es to place her alone on a veranda so that she speaks her first lines outside of Bassanio's hearing. By having Portia speak these lines to herself, Radford underscores the frankness and sincerity of her love, eliminating the possibility that her speech could be designed to manipulate her suitor. As she speaks, she paces anxiously, wringing her hands, and her chest rises and falls heavily with gentle feminine emotion. When Bassanio approaches from below and looks squarely up at her, Portia timidly turns her head down and to the side. These gestures create the image of a delicate young girl in love, and the fact that she behaves in such a way when she is alone suggests that one should take her description of her feelings at face value. Also telling is the ecstasy with which Portia declares that she belongs wholly to Bassanio, particularly as she repeats the possessive pronoun "yours" in her line, "One half of me is yours, the other half yours—mine own I would say; but if mine then yours, and so all yours!" At this point in the film, Radford makes it clear that Portia is still willing to be ruled and even owned by men.

The impression created by this scene is entirely different when one considers how it would likely have been performed on the Elizabethan stage. The stage directions and the context of the speech as part of a dialogue make it clear that Portia would have spoken her lines directly to Bassanio. In this venue, we are more likely to be struck by Portia's boldness than by her submissiveness. She speaks at great length to Bassanio in an explicit attempt to influence his decision to try his luck at the caskets. The sheer length of the speech is evidence that in an Elizabethan performance, Portia would have taken on a more active role in the courtship than she does in the film. "I speak too long, but 'tis to peize the time, / To eke it and to draw it out in length, / To stay you from election" (III. ii. 22-24), Portia readily admits to Bassanio. By cutting this acknowledgment by Portia of her intention to influence Bassanio, Radford has chosen to remove the artfulness already present in her character at this point, presumably so that he can create a more striking change when she acquires it later on in the film.

But even in Radford's version, Portia's presentation of the ring awkwardly betrays how much is lost in his strategy to represent her complexity within the modern paradigm of character change. Radford's problem is that if the film is to be identifiable as Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia absolutely must give Bassanio the ring. With the ring must come the warning and the assertion of power. Only a Portia in whom an appearance of feminine submissiveness exists simultaneously with an underlying awareness of her own value would be capable of an act in which humble generosity is so smoothly blended with a claim of power. By removing the dimensions of Portia which allow the giving of the ring to be convincing, Radford both eliminates an essential element of Portia's character and alters the message conveyed by the work as a whole regarding gender relations.

Even in the moments directly preceding the giving of the ring, Radford persists in presenting Portia in a manner consistent with her previously established straightforward innocence. So the boldness she exhibits in giving the ring is puzzlingly out of place, not only in the context of Radford's overall interpretation, but also in the immediate context of the scene, which occurs right after Bassanio chooses the proper casket and wins Portia's hand in marriage. A celebratory banquet is Radford's chosen setting, and Bassanio, already assuming control, presides over Portia's table. We observe Portia's expectant, upturned eyes and timidly fluttering lashes as she listens to Bassanio speak, and we observe the ease with which she yields to his strong hand on her jaw as he kisses her. When she tentatively stands to begin the monologue that will end with her giving Bassanio the ring, she speaks tearfully and with humble sincerity as she commits her "gentle spirit" to Bassanio's "to be directed / As by her governor, her lord, her king" (III.ii. 164-165). In the original text, Portia declares, "But now I was the lord / Of this fair mansion, master of my servants, / Queen o'er myself" (Act III.ii. 167-169), but true to his tendency to reject, from the first part of the story, anything that would contradict his one-sided portrayal of Portia's naïveté, Radford cuts these lines.

Finally, at the end of her now earnest and teary-eyed speech, Portia introduces the ring, saying:

> This house, these servants, and this same myself
> Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring,

Lynn Collins as Portia in Michael Radford's *Merchant of Venice*. © Shylock Trading Limited.

> Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
> Let it presage the ruin of your love,
> And be my vantage to exclaim on you.
> (III.ii. 170-4)

These lines are inseparable from the structure of *The Merchant of Venice* on its most basic level; the remainder of the plot hinges on the ring and its accompanying warning. This single action which Portia must perform also constitutes the most disconcerting challenge to Radford's interpretation of her character. By anticipating the possibility of a "vantage to exclaim on [Bassanio]," Portia's words leave no doubt that she is both aware of her power over him and willing to use it. For viewers of the film, the warning can only have a disorienting and unsettling effect, because up to this point, Radford has painstakingly removed all aspects of Portia's character consistent with it. It may at first seem that the giving of the ring—which in itself comprises only a few seconds of the film—is too small an inconsistency to threaten the legitimacy of Radford's interpretation of Portia. However, because this action has vital implications for the remainder of the work, its successful integration into the performance must take precedence over less essential interpretive goals of the director, including the character change in Portia which Radford arbitrarily chooses to create.

One might argue that, far from constituting a failure of Radford's interpretation, the action of giving the ring is the beginning of Portia's growth as a character or an indication of her potential to mature. But this cannot be the case, since Portia reverts to her former girlish mannerisms directly after giving Bassanio the ring, modestly looking down and drawing her breath sharply in a delicate and passionate response as he speaks. Her gift of the ring is at odds with all other interpretive decisions Radford has made regarding her character, and he does nothing to adjust his interpretation so as to make the gift believable. Indeed, her submissiveness is arguably most obtrusive at this very point, as if Radford were attempting, unsuccessfully, to compensate for the effect which the action has had on the image he has created of Portia.

Only later does Radford create a single dramatic turning point which allows for a dominant element in Portia's attitude to develop. He locates this in the next scene, in which Bassanio receives the letter telling of Antonio's misfortunes. In Radford's portrayal, Portia becomes aware through this letter of the true extent of the financial advantage she has over Bassanio, and that realization spurs her suddenly to assert the power of which she was previously unaware. The scene has been engineered so as to create a single, high-impact moment in which Portia's realization and resulting change in attitude toward Bassanio occurs. However, Radford's attempted interpretation is again undermined by the giving of the ring in the previous scene. Portia cannot suddenly acknowledge the power that accompanies her wealth and learn to exploit that power, because the giving of the ring has revealed that she already possesses that knowledge and has already used it to her own advantage.

It is apparent that Radford has carefully structured the scene so as to create this moment of realization and change in attitude, despite the fact that, as we have already seen, his interpretation is inconsistent with the fundamental demands the text places on Portia's character. At the beginning of the scene, Portia's tone of voice and body language still communicate her submission to Bassanio. She rushes into the room, again wringing her hands, and when she observes Bassanio's anguish, she hastens to his side. As Bassanio explains to her that he has caused his dear friend Antonio to be indebted to his enemy, Portia remains kneeling at his feet, her eyes modestly downcast. However, after Antonio's situation and Bassanio's part in bringing it about are made clear, Portia's behavior changes. Upon learning that Antonio owes Shylock three thousand ducats for Bassanio's sake, Portia throws her chin in the air and says, haughtily, "Pay him six thousand and deface the bond. / Double six thousand and then treble that, / Before a friend of this description / Shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault" (III.ii. 299-302). Through her dismissive tone in referring to the money, Portia implies that the amount, so daunting to Antonio and Bassanio is insignificant to her. Her inflection when she refers to "a friend of this description," contains an air of superiority, which might arise from a new awareness that the friend considered so valuable by Bassanio is worth nothing compared to her. Radford uses this change in Portia's manner of

speaking to imply that she is, for the first time, beginning to understand the power she holds because of her monetary worth.

Portia next requests that Bassanio read her Antonio's letter, and after he does so, silence falls for a moment, allowing the full import of his final sentence to sink in for both Portia and the viewers of the film. "If love does not persuade you to come, let not my letter," he reads. As soon as he speaks this line, the camera cuts to Portia and slowly zooms in on her face. This camera technique emphasizes Portia's reaction to the letter and causes the viewer to consider what effect this line will have on her—in other words, it sets the viewer up for the monumental realization which Portia is about to experience. Portia is silent for a long moment before she whispers under her breath, "O love!" indicating a second vital recognition: that the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio might be a threat to her own relationship with Bassanio. Here is the point of realization for which Radford has been preparing us; at the moment when Bassanio finishes reading the letter, Portia has gained both an awareness of her own capacity for power and a motive to exploit it. When Portia speaks again, her tone and deportment are completely transformed. We observe no more of the heaving breaths of a girl overcome with emotion, no more of the timid, down-turned, and fluttering eyelashes, and no more of the speeches delivered unintelligibly, in passionately wispy gasps.

Instead, we see a close-up of Portia as she stands still with her eyes fixed on Bassanio, and she delivers a sequence of orders in a deliberate and commanding voice: to marry her, to proceed to Venice to relieve Antonio of his debt, then to return, bringing Antonio with him. "You shall have gold to pay the petty debt twenty times over," (III.ii. 306-7) she says, and her confident tone serves as an assertion of her advantage, a reminder to Bassanio that, though the debt is larger than Bassanio could ever pay, it is "petty" compared to her monetary worth. The point is underscored by her inflection in the next line: "When it is paid, bring your true friend along" (III.ii. 308). Through the irony expressed in the delivery of this line and her emphasis on the word "true," she again calls attention to the fact that Bassanio owes much more to her "in money and in love" (I.i. 131) than his dearest friend Antonio could ever give him. Finally, when Portia says, "Come away, / For you shall hence on your wedding day" (III.ii. 310-11) she stresses the word "shall," which accentuates the imperative mode of her speech.

Radford further manipulates the text to represent this moment of change by altering the sequence of the lines themselves, and only in this new form do the lines create the powerful and sudden transformation we have observed in Portia's character. In the text, the passage during which Radford places Portia's transformation is actually located *before* Bassanio reads Antonio's letter aloud. In the film, Portia's sudden change of attitude is a direct response to the final line of Bassanio's letter, so it is impossible that a stricter interpretation (leaving the lines intact) could produce this sudden moment of realization. Radford's need to contrive this dramatic moment by manipulating the sequence of events indicates that in its original form, the Elizabethan text does not lend itself to character change at all. In an Elizabethan performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia would not have undergone a change between two simple and straightforward states, but rather she would have exhibited a combination of shrewdness and innocence through the entire play.

Radford's version of *The Merchant of Venice* suggests that Portia entirely relinquishes certain aspects of her femininity in exchange for power. The assumption that stereotypical femininity and authority cannot coexist underlies his decision to create a Portia who is transformed from a state of girlish innocence to a state of self-assurance and independence. However, in Shakespeare's text, Portia uses her stereotypically feminine qualities to enhance her power over men, and her ability simultaneously to exude both femininity and authority parallels her ability to act as both the gift and the giver in the systems of exchange within Shakespeare's play. Even a viewer who was previously unfamiliar with *The Merchant of Venice* would be left searching in vain for evidence of the preexisting shrewdness and dominance which Portia lacks in Radford's version, for his interpretation fails to provide his heroine with traits adequate to explain her actions. The unavoidable presence of the ring in Radford's film is a reminder that an arbitrary process

of character change cannot be imposed upon Portia without fundamentally altering the impression of femininity that her character conveys.

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Carol Elisabeth Green's essay was awarded the 2006 Lawrence Lader Prize in Expository Writing

Capricious Sacrifice: The Enhanced Hedonism of Bassanio in Michael Radford's *Merchant of Venice*

Carol Elisabeth Green

Carol recognized a passion that often inspires fine expository writing when she asked herself why she was enjoying Michael Radford's version of The Merchant of Venice *even after countless viewings. "True, the film was superb; but my inspiration came from something besides the quality." After some soul-searching, she saw that she was enjoying her own outrage at the decadent character Bassanio, who profits, at others' expense, from good looks and manipulative behavior. This helped her to recognize a large issue at stake in Bassanio's conduct, identified by Shakespeare and amplified by a film designed to speak to our narcissistic times. None of the characters "lives beyond himself, not even Shylock and Antonio (though their selfishness is subdued, relatively)." And so the social disease that captured Carol's attention also got her thinking, leading her to this essay. Or as she puts it, "the illness had its use: it was the initial inspiration for my essay, and it also provided an emotional stimulus to keep writing." Carol is concentrating in English, and her hometown is Concord, Massachusetts. She wrote the essay for James Berg's class, "Shakespeare's Characters."*

A bleating goat, hung upside down, is abruptly silenced by a knife to its throat. The blood surges in crimson streams, accented by the scene's chiaroscuro lighting. The arresting contrast between light and dark seems to urge the viewer to consider the meaning of the image. And indeed, the gory spectacle has symbolic resonance throughout Michael Radford's 2004 interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*. Heralding the film's marketplace scene in which the infamous idea of the "pound of flesh" is introduced, it suggests that one of the three major characters involved will make a sacrifice—of himself or another. Does the merchant Antonio embody the sacrifice of the slaughtered goat, as he offers his own "pound of flesh" for the happiness of his lover, Bassanio? Does Shylock the Jew then correspond to the "butcher," who viciously seeks Antonio's life in his role as the comic villain? Or does Shylock rather serve as the sacrificial goat for Christian anti-Semitism, with a Christian—Antonio or Portia or the Duke—as his tormenter? While Elizabethan performances would likely have emphasized Shylock's role as Antonio's attempted "butcher," modern performances tend to draw attention to Shylock as the pitiable scapegoat. Which is the "right" interpretation, corresponding to the spirit of the text? According to Shakespeare scholar Harold Bloom, "we tend to make *The Merchant of Venice* incoherent by portraying Shylock as largely sympathetic" (172). But how, in a world still fresh with memories of the Holocaust and other anti-Semitic atrocities, can Shylock the Jew assume the burden of the play's only villainous role? The vilification and subsequent humiliation of Shylock touches too tenderly upon centuries of anti-Semitism. It is, therefore, an impressive accomplishment for any director to balance a sympathetic treatment of the Jewish Shylock with a coherent interpretation of Shakespeare's text.

Interpretations of the text, coherent or not, frequently rest upon the discord between the two "main" characters, Antonio and Shylock. Joan Holmer depicts the conflict as a "protagonist and antagonist . . . 'bound' by murderous hatred," alluding to the important symbol of "binding" sacrifice in the text as well as the film (144). But Radford seeks to moderate the antipathy, or at least remove it from central focus, as illustrated in the omission of Shylock's seething line, "I hate him for he is a Christian" (I.iii.39). Instead, he introduces another element to "murderous hatred" and its appetite for sacrifice beyond the closed rivalry of Antonio and Shylock. He surprises us, turning to a character frequently disregarded as insubstantial in comparison to the other two: Bassanio. By many interpretations, Bassanio is the charm-

ingly shallow "boy-toy" of Portia and Antonio, lacking the substance sufficient to act as antagonist to both Antonio and Shylock. Bloom dismisses him as "not a bad fellow, but no one would want to try the project of distinguishing between Bassanio and Lorenzo, two Venetian playboys in search of heiresses" (179). Even so, the devil-may-care character of Bassanio serves to initiate the explosion between the reactive elements in Antonio and Shylock. He happily avoids commitment on any issue of significance in both the play text and movie (whether religion, friendship, or sexuality), while Antonio and Shylock stand inflexibly upon their mutual hate, prepared to detonate at Bassanio's first move.

Yet Radford's film twists this standard interpretation of Bassanio to make him more than a glittering, lighthearted catalyst for the conflict between two characters of real significance. The movie not only amplifies Bassanio's hedonism and fecklessness; it also embraces these traits. Why does Radford choose to shift the play's emphasis from the hateful dichotomy of Antonio and Shylock to the loose morality and frivolity of Bassanio, and, by extension, of Venice? For one, Bassanio's inconstancy acts as a foil to emphasize the virtue and constancy of both Antonio and Shylock. This shifts the understanding of the play from the likely Elizabethan interpretation of Shylock as a comic villain and Antonio as a martyr—an interpretation which is no longer acceptable in the post-Holocaust era. Radford's film can then develop as a "coherent" interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* while remaining religiously respectful: both Shylock and Antonio secure audience sympathy and increase in apparent nobility of character, while Bassanio becomes emblematic of all of Venice. Thus Bassanio personifies the amorality of the Venetian people as well as the city's ostensibly "Christian" leaders. He becomes the butcher who sacrifices traditional morality on his altar of hedonism.

In Radford's film, the corruption of Christian values in Venice assumes thematic importance even before Bassanio, Antonio, or Shylock are introduced. In the opening scene, a monk, riding on a gondola, condemns all who practice usury and condones their punishment. Usury, as the intertitle explains, was forbidden in the Christian tradition, so Jews, compelled by law to distinguish themselves by wearing red caps outside their ghetto, often assumed the role of money-lenders. The film's Venetians, though apparently recipients of Jewish loans, eagerly obey the monk's command as they throw a hapless Jew into the river. Red-capped Jewish extras continue to permeate the film in later scenes, subtly evoking the stars of David required by the Nazis. But instead of letting the focus remain on the Christian-Jewish conflict within Venice, Radford also includes apparently incongruous images of bare-bosomed prostitutes, a sight particularly shocking in the presence of the hateful clergy of the opening scene. The juxtaposition of two forms of corruption—debauchery and religious persecution—suggests correlation as well as antagonism between them. The Venetian people and the "pious" clergy have both transgressed from genuine morality. But while the flawed church attempts to hold onto some form of "truth," even if it is manifested as cruelty to Jews, the crowd flippantly disregards the need for a moral code. And so Venice lusts as well as joins the clergy in hate. Correspondingly, Bassanio, it will be shown, lives a life of hedonism that ultimately does as much as intentional persecution to destroy both Antonio and Shylock.

The first moments of the marketplace scene accentuate Bassanio's harmful impact on Antonio. As the camera lingers on the butchering of goat meat, Bassanio discusses his business proposition with Shylock. Three times, they repeat the phrase "Antonio bound." By strategically coupling a gory image with the dialogue, Radford emphasizes Antonio's role as a sacrifice. The phrase "Antonio bound" connotes the loyalty that will cause his grief as the film progresses: to his detriment, he is "bound" to Bassanio by love. Indeed, in his pursuit of Portia's wealth and his own pleasure, Bassanio "binds" Antonio while avoiding "binding" himself as well. In an earlier scene, he has kissed Antonio after describing his passion for Portia—baiting Antonio with eroticism while denying him fulfillment. And now, in the marketplace, Bassanio further reveals the equivocal nature of his allegiances as he and Shylock walk through the streets. Shylock leads, his posture hunched but his gait determined. In humorous contrast, Bassanio follows but proves

distracted when his head turns to gaze at a prostitute's uncovered chest. This moment identifies Bassanio's hedonism with the debauchery of Venice: he cannot focus upon the task at hand because the city's offerings distract him with lust. It also shows his inconstancy as a lover: though he tempts Antonio sexually and also professes his love for Portia, he cannot stay loyal to either and is quickly tempted by sights on the streets. With a few quick images, then, Radford connects Bassanio with the streets of Venice and its mores, and this self-indulgence with a sacrifice of Antonio as wretched as the goat's slaughter.

While such imagery highlights Bassanio's injurious sexual inconstancy and associates it with Venetian mores, Joseph Fiennes, playing Bassanio, uses body language to highlight his fickleness to Antonio and foreshadow its devastating consequences. The scene in which Bassanio, Antonio, and Shylock negotiate the bond—the movie's marketplace scene—contains few lines spoken by Bassanio in the play's text. It is clear that Shylock and Antonio are in bitter discord; it is up to the interpreter to decide the significance of Bassanio's few lines. Radford and Fiennes's interpretation emphasizes the unreliability of Bassanio as a friend. As the three men enter Shylock's office, Antonio is the only character who remains standing. When Shylock grumbles about the cruelty of Christians, Antonio begins to fume, his body leaning forward towards Shylock in aggression. Bassanio then leans in as well, apparently "ganging up" against Shylock. Moments later, however, Shylock insists "I would be friends with you and have your love" (I.iii.135). The camera cuts to a medium shot of Shylock, though Bassanio is still visible: leaning in towards the camera eagerly, he has adopted a position similar to Shylock's. He has rapidly shifted positions and now appears in league with Shylock, later emphasizing the "kindness" of his offer. While in Elizabethan performances, Bassanio's statement "This were kindness" (I.3.140) might have been spoken with intentional irony towards the villainous Jew, Fiennes' genial smile and relaxed posture discount any interpretation other than Bassanio's admiration for Shylock's beneficence. When Shylock finally states the details of the bond, the anxious, pained look of Bassanio proves that he has no motives to harm Antonio. His inconstancy of friendship, however, has proved as destructive to Antonio as intentional sacrifice.

Fiennes' acting reveals, in other words, that there is an innocence to Bassanio's fickleness—that the profound consequences of his inconstancy are unintended. Similarly, the Venetian people frequently exude more interest in their own pleasure than in the harm of others. For example, when Shylock walks into the brothel to speak with Solanio and Salarino, the two show little antipathy toward their "enemy;" they are preoccupied with their prostitutes. But the camerawork of the marketplace scene specifically points to the dangerous element of Bassanio's (and Venice's) hedonism. As the bond is discussed, Bassanio whispers to Shylock, both faces highlighted above a dark foreground of other customers. The camera quickly cuts to a close-up of Shylock, the talking mouth of Bassanio just visible above his chin. The close-up serves two purposes: it introduces Shylock as the merchant Jew and (anti)hero of the play, and it also emphasizes Bassanio's influence, or attempted influence, upon Shylock. The talking mouth, cut off from eyes that would bestow more humanity upon the figure, could make Bassanio appear as a menacing stimulus who whispers plots of revenge into Shylock's ear. On the other hand, Bassanio's eyeless "whispering" and mouthing could be interpreted as a sign of seductiveness. Such an interpretation appears particularly likely when Bassanio softly asks Shylock, "Will you pleasure me?" as he requests his support of the bond. The uncertainty of his moral stance—is Bassanio naive, seductive, dangerous, or all three?—correlates blithe hedonism with something more pernicious. It suggests that that self-indulgence extends beyond the self, harming others by its blind self-focus.

Bassanio's lack of commitment, and of clearly chiseled character, reflects the atmosphere of Venice. Both are passively destructive to persons of commitment and consistency, such as Antonio and Shylock. Bassanio's philosophy of self-indulgence lures Antonio to offer his money and eventually his life; it also influences Shylock to take revenge and ultimately initiate his own demise. Similarly, Venetian hedonism is generally complicit in Antonio and Shylock's misfortune. It feasts upon Shylock, exploiting his wealth while at the

Joseph Fiennes as Bassanio in Michael Radford's *Merchant of Venice*. © Shylock Trading Limited.

same time condemning his Jewishness. And as illustrated by pleasure-seeking Solanio's voyeuristic prod in the opening scene ("Why then, you are in love"), it cruelly tempts Antonio to express his love for an unattainable young man, while at the same time refusing to acknowledge it as legitimate.

Nor is Shylock merely a victim of anti-Semitism. Like Antonio, he is also influenced by the city's hedonism. Though his stooped posture and impassive facial expression might suggest that Bassanio's attempted seduction has not moved him, Radford leaves little doubt that fleshly temptations of the kind that Bassanio embodies are integral to Shylock's lust for vengeance. Though he may be waging a religious war, he also appears to have made uneasy peace with Venice's version of morality. When he walks into the bordello to demand from Salarino and Solanio the whereabouts of his daughter Jessica, he does not flinch at the depravity of brazen prostitutes and their defiance of Biblical purity. It appears that he has accepted Venice's debauchery. This acquiescence to Venetian decadence also manifests itself in his reaction to Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo: he immediately envisions her depravity, assuming (falsely) that she sold her dead mother's cherished ring for a monkey and other tasteless amusements. The very prurience of his anxious fantasies suggests that Venice's atmosphere has sullied his mind and attitude towards others.

Shylock's mute tolerance for Venice's pleasure-seeking ironically connects him with his nemesis Antonio in the banquet scene. The camera focuses upon Shylock, positioned between two merry lovers and looking blatantly "alien" (IV.1.347) to the culture in which he serves a vital role as object of hate. Antonio, shadowed, sits towards the corner of the screen, appearing nearly as out-of-place as Shylock. The two rivals are further associated by Antonio's hypocritical endorsement of Venice's amorality. Though Antonio attempts through his hatred of Shylock to be a "good Christian," he also condones hedonism by loving

its embodiment in Bassanio. The opening scene portrays this dichotomy: Antonio kneels before a priest as Bassanio rides by, saluting Antonio with a glass of wine. Though evidently Bassanio's only faith is hedonism, the longing in Antonio's eyes and his whisper of Bassanio's name demonstrate Antonio's affection. Just as Shylock cannot avoid Venice's influence, Antonio must make himself a part of its heedless pleasure-seeking by loving Bassanio. Thus even the rigid religious element of *The Merchant of Venice*—exemplified by the tension between Shylock and Antonio—cannot transcend the influence of Venetian hedonism that Bassanio personifies.

Radford's choice of a goat to symbolize the sacrifice of both Antonio and Shylock serves to highlight these negative elements that the two characters have assumed, as goats have negative connotations in both Christianity and Judaism. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus compares sinners to goats in his description of Judgment Day: "He will separate the people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left"(25:32). Though Shylock and Antonio pride themselves upon their commitment to their respective religious traditions, their mutual hate and acceptance of hedonism defy genuine Judeo-Christian morality. They can be considered goats on the "left" because of their waywardness. Radford's choice of a goat also seems appropriate to a Shakespearean context. It recalls, for instance, the villainous Edmond's ironic praise of "whore-master man" in *King Lear*, in which he relates "lechery" to a "goatish disposition" (I.ii.111-115). Radford's Bassanio, it can be said, binds Antonio and Shylock together to the figure of the goat, bestowing upon them its Shakespearean association of "lechery" to their shame and ultimate destruction. But at the same time, because neither has actively followed Bassanio's self-indulgent path, Bassanio's blatant goatishness in some measure ennobles Antonio and Shylock: they are persons of commitment while Bassanio would stand firm for nothing. Like the goat itself in the marketplace scene, they are sacrificial victims, having assumed the shameful attributes of others as a means of recompense. No longer are they caricatures of good and evil; Bassanio's enhanced hedonism has brought out their imperfections and strengths, creating a nuanced portrayal of their characters.

Radford's emphasis on the hedonism of Bassanio and Venice serves an important role in the film at large. The amorality of the entire state—from its corrupt religious leaders to its gluttonous people—lifts up both Antonio and Shylock and reveals noble aspects of their characters. Unlike Bassanio, they stand for ideals of right and wrong and show reliability in their relationships. In particular, the dignity of Shylock is amplified by his contrast with Bassanio's disgraceful behavior, creating a coherently sympathetic character. Nonetheless, Antonio and Shylock prove to be "seduced" to a significant degree by the hedonism of Bassanio and Venice, indicating that they are not impervious to their culture's influence. This, therefore, draws each away from the prototypic role of protagonist or antagonist, letting Radford fashion fuller portraits of human beings. Such an accomplishment serves to make the film sensitive to modern culture; at the same time, Radford insistently points to a theme of perhaps greater importance. More profound than the re-development of the characters of Antonio and Shylock, the dangerous hedonism of Bassanio affirms the potential of corrupted power to pervert a faith. Instead of practicing Christ's teachings, church leaders shamelessly use the political trick of a common enemy—the "apostate" Jew—to incite and unite the city. They ignore the blatant depravity of prostitution before them, perhaps hoping that a scapegoat can indeed recompense their sins. Likewise, Shylock blames his established enemy, the Christians, for the license of his eloped daughter, Jessica. For both Jew and Christian in this film, hatred and hedonism confederate, enabling and augmenting each other.

And Radford provides no escape from the grievous self-indulgence: no character stands firmly against it—though two endure sacrifice in payment for it—nor does the film unequivocally denounce it. Certainly, Radford garners pathos for Shylock and Antonio from the misfortune that Bassanio's amorality effects. But hedonism ultimately triumphs as the rising sun colors a gray room in Belmont and Bassanio and Gratiano lead their wives into separate bedchambers. The camera shifts to a dejected Shylock, alone in the street as the

gate to Venice's Jewish quarter closes upon him forever. This image then contrasts with a lonely Antonio, awkward and alien in a room vacated by the lovers in Belmont. As the room brightens and the camera refocuses upon the merriment of the newlyweds, the audience is reminded of the sacrifice that has allowed the lovers such pleasure. While never providing a concrete judgment upon Bassanio or Venice, Radford lets the audience determine the moral implications of the film. But only with difficulty can the contemporary viewer ignore the depravity that the film impartially portrays, for Venice's unbridled hedonism proves surprisingly dangerous. Church leaders encourage and actively practice violence and hate; Bassanio and the Venetian people blithely lust. Yet when the time comes, both entities willingly bring Shylock to the slaughter. Similarly, though Bassanio has no motive to harm Antonio, his self-indulgence brings his friend to the sacrificial altar as well. The selfishness of hedonism cuts as deeply as does a city's hate.

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Redrawing the Lines: A Disability Perspective on Mental Illness

Malorie Snider

Taking "Madness and Medicine: Themes in the History of Psychiatry" concurrently with Licia Carlson's Expository Writing class on "Normal and Abnormal" led Malorie to start making connections. Disturbed to notice how consistently discussions of mental illness "in the media, the entertainment industry, and in everyday conversations" were "cloaked in biologically objective terminology and yet infused with stigmatizing assumptions and misconceptions about mental illness," she began to question the legitimacy of a purely medical model for these disorders. While reading the work of Amundson and Silvers, she found "their description of physical disability paralleled in many ways the experience of the mentally ill." This essay, then, was an "opportunity to integrate ideas from multiple courses, as well as from personal experience, into a cohesive academic argument." Writing it, Malorie had to outgrow her habit of treating a finished first draft as an "inviolable entity." "Even though the process of revision can be painstaking," she writes, "I now realize that revision is the best and arguably only way to expand the depth and clarity of an argument that I am passionate about in order to incite this same passion in my reader." Malorie is a Biological Anthropology concentrator from Friendswood, Texas.

Is mental illness, in all cases, solely an illness? This may seem an absurd question. But as psychiatrist Kay Redfield Jamison writes in her memoir *An Unquiet Mind*, "in the language that is used to discuss and describe mental illness, many different things—descriptiveness, banality, clinical precision, stigma—intersect to create confusion [and] misunderstanding" about the true nature of mental disorders (Jamison 179). Afflicted with manic-depression herself, Jamison has experienced first-hand the injustices and the injuries to self-esteem familiar to individuals affected by mental illness, whether directly or through familial or social connection. Careful consideration of the ways in which the medical profession and broader society interact around the issue of mental illness suggests that the traditional medical model of mental illness may be both inadequate—in that it mislabels as individual pathology what may better be understood at least in part as social construct—and harmful—in that it contributes significantly to the injustices and injuries that Jamison and others experience. An alternative model, one that takes into far greater account the ways that social structures and standards contribute to the disadvantaged status of the mentally ill, is available: that of classifying certain kinds of medical disorders as *disabilities*. In fact, some mental illness has already been so classified, as part of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; however, the legislative denotation has not yet filtered into either popular consciousness or medical practice to the extent that would be desirable. Applying a "disability perspective" (the idea that disadvantages traditionally attributed to certain types of impairment may in fact be the result of social rather than biological constraints) to mental illness promises not only to reduce the stigma and social barriers that the mentally ill face, but also to render their medical treatment more ethical. These advantages, along with our growing understanding of the complex etiology of mental disorders, provide a morally compelling case for the reform of modern perspectives on mental illness.

Medical definitions of normality powerfully impact social attitudes, creating a basis on which to judge the acceptability of certain appearances, practices, and conditions. In his article, "Biological Normality and the ADA," Ron Amundson characterizes the concept of normality as applied in the field of medicine as being based on typicality: "what is frequent is normal and therefore healthy" (105). This view, he argues, though at first glance uncontroversial, associates atypicality with unhealthiness, which often has meant the false assumption (labeled by Amundson "functional

determinism") that any individual who functions in a way that is different from the vast majority of other individuals is not only objectively abnormal (as in atypical) but also subnormal (as in low-functioning) (104). In other words, an inherent flaw exists in the way science has traditionally assessed functional normality; specifically, the ability of an individual to function "properly" is judged based not only on biological factors but on social norms as well.

The assumption of functional determinism is false because it fails to distinguish "levels of function" from "modes of function" (106-107). "Level" describes the degree to which a function is successfully carried out, while "mode" refers to the manner in which the function is completed. It is entirely possible for someone with a disability to function at a normal or even higher than normal level through an atypical mode: witness a blind reader of Braille, or a wheelchair user completing the 26.2 miles of a marathon (107). The disability perspective offered by such writers as Amundson and Silvers views disabled individuals as operating not necessarily at a decreased level of functionality but, rather, in a different functional mode altogether. It is precisely the failure to recognize this difference that leads to the stigmatization of disability, as these alternative modes of functioning are rejected by society because of the notion that "disability is not a 'natural kind'" (Silvers 186). According to Amundson, it is this rejection that leads to the construction of social institutions and physical conditions that unnecessarily degrade disabled individuals' *levels* of function by refusing to accommodate their alternative *modes* of function. In effect, then, the disability perspective removes the stigma of "unhealthy" or "subnormal" from the category of "atypical" and challenges the way the lines are drawn between normal and abnormal function. It is a paradigm of diversity, equality, and acceptance of functionally "different" individuals (Amundson 102).

Sam Walker, *Cinch*, 1996,
etching 26" x 22".
© Estate of the artist.

This emerging disability perspective has both practical and ethical implications. It has encouraged a range of favorable trends, from increased function for disabled individuals to more autonomy and choice in treatment to decreased social stigma. As Anita Silvers points out, the disabled have experienced "a history of exclusion that disregards and devalues the facts of their functionality and competences," leading to a discriminatory condition in which the personal autonomy of disabled individuals is limited by the effects of medical labels and social pressures (190). Ethicists Tom Beauchamp and James Childress assert that principles such as patient autonomy and social justice are important factors that now must be considered in formulating medical decisions in order to prevent such exclusion and violation of rights (57; 225). For health care professionals, the principle of autonomy mandates an obligation of respect, "involving acknowledging decision-making rights and enabling persons to act autonomously" (Beauchamp and Childress 63). The treatment of disabled individuals, however, has historically produced an effect contrary to this mandate, as much of the exclusion associated with the disabled condition has been the result of stigma rooted in past medical classifications (Silvers 181). In its failure to address false assumptions and dispel stigmas, the medical field contributes to the social construction of disability and actually reduces the opportunities and options available to disabled individuals, rather than enhancing them. The field of medicine must learn from the injustice that has occurred in past treatment of the disabled and recognize the role that medically rooted stigma plays in perpetuating discrimination, if it hopes to fulfill its ethical responsibility not only to treat patients'

disabilities but to protect their rights as well. With the introduction of the "disability perspective" there has been significant improvement in the way disabled individuals are viewed and treated medically, legally, and socially. By seeking to eliminate the socially constructed dimension of physical impairment, this shift in mindset represents a large step forward in the struggle to foster social justice and equality for disabled individuals.

Might such a shift of paradigm apply to mental illness and produce a similarly positive effect? We might begin to answer this question by noticing how historians critical of psychiatry portray the development of our modern understanding of mental illness. This understanding, they consistently observe, derives from the classification, exclusion, and containment of individuals under the rubric of deviance, and it suggests an underlying psychiatric model of "normality" similar to the "functional determinism" that Amundson critiques. R.D. Laing, for example, sees madness as merely a state of nonconformity and claims that historically "the basic difference between sanity and insanity was one of adaptation to social and cultural norms; those who refused to adapt were labeled insane" (Grob 264). Michel Foucault puts forth a similar view in his description of the development of the mental asylum, an institution that, in its earliest form, he views as "an instrument of moral conformity and of social denunciation" (Foucault 259). For each of these writers, the distinction between the mentally "ill" and the mentally "sane" is made based on individuals' ability to function "normally" within the context of society. This emphasis on the historical importance of behavioral conformity within society correlates directly with Amundson's analysis of the stigma associated with "functional abnormality."

Furthermore, Thomas Szasz makes a case—again in striking parallel with the disability perspective—that a significant proportion of the functional changes labeled mental illness are misclassified as reductions in level of function when they are better understood as alternative modes of function. Asserting that modern psychiatry "remain[s] shackled to a scientifically outmoded conceptual framework and terminology," Szasz argues that both the field of medicine and society as a whole have failed to realize that our classifications of mental illness rely on socially constructed concepts of normality and abnormality (20). The medicalization of mental illness has led society to evaluate these "disorders" relative to the conditions that exist in the rest of "normal" society rather than on their own terms. Szasz views the mentally ill as functionally different, rather than functionally inferior or pathological, grounding his arguments in the idea that "mental illness" is not actually an illness at all but is instead the label conferred onto deviant individuals by a medically oriented society.

Szasz's critique is useful in that it identifies one of the largest flaws of the medical model of mental illness, namely the unwillingness to recognize the role that social norms play in turning a deviance into a disorder. However, his emphasis on social construction raises the question of whether there is *any* biological foundation for mental illness. In fact, a progressively better understanding of many mental disorders suggests a much greater biological basis than Szasz's categorical rejection of biological influences seems to allow. Amundson and Silvers's focus on the same socially constructed dimension of impairment in their writings reconciles the science of impairment with the social causes of disability. The disability perspective, in their view, does not need to deny the existence of biological impairment in order to note that this impairment becomes a "handicapped" or "disabled" condition only or mainly "as a product of stigmatizing social values and debilitating social arrangements" (Amundson 105; Silvers 185). From this explanation, it becomes clear that with any given disability a distinction can be drawn between impairments caused directly by biological factors and those caused by associated social constructions of abnormality and stigma.

The ADA's definition of disability incorporates this distinction. The ADA describes disability as a "substantial limitation of one or more major life activities due to a physical or mental impairment, or having a history of such, or being regarded as having such" (Silvers 189). The "physical or mental impairment" indicated by this piece of legislation is of a very specific nature, for in order to be considered a "disability," part of the disadvantage incurred by the impairment must spring

from its social context, most notably through the act of discrimination. Thus, a disability is distinct from an illness, pathology, or disease. Silvers makes this distinction explicit. Pathology or illness, she claims, is a biological *inadequacy*, an impairment that has an inherent negative effect on an individual's ability to function. Disability, on the other hand, is a "social construction"; the functional problems associated with disability are the result not of an a priori condition but rather of "their being situated in environments that are built and organized in ways hostile to them" (Silvers 178). Opponents of the disability classification of mental illness might point to this dichotomy as evidence that the medical model is the most appropriate way of understanding these conditions, claiming that mental disorders are in fact pathological and thus qualify as diseases and not disabilities. This conviction, however, exhibits a limited and inadequate view of the complex constitution of mental "illness."

In fact, our growing understanding of the complex forces that shape an individual's state of mind has made it increasingly clear that a purely medical model of mental illness (one that sees the disadvantages associated with mental disorders as arising solely from organic impairments of the brain) is inadequate. In his recent critique of the diagnostic standards of modern psychiatry, Dr. Steven Hyman summarizes studies of the inheritance patterns of mental illness as revealing a mixed etiology, with manifestation of mental disorders dependent not only on complex genetic risk but on the influence of environmental factors as well. Equally significant has been the discovery that the genetic factors associated with many mental illnesses are in fact "common genetic variants, not rare deleterious mutations" (141); this means that the biological "risk" for mental illness is fairly widely shared, and the manifestation of it not inevitable. The condition becomes harmful and disabling when a combination of both genetic and environmental influences push the trait too far "along [the] continuum from normal" (140-141). If this is indeed the case, it means that the biological basis for such mental illness is in fact a "natural kind" of human variation, having its roots in common genetic variants, and that the harmful manifestation of these traits (the mental "illness") is not entirely biological. Accordingly, a better model for mental illness than the purely biological one would be a "biopsychosocial" one which "places emphasis on a necessary physical basis of the disorder but requires that an etiological assessment also consider the person's psychological and social context" (Johnson 554). Further, Hyman points out that due to the continuous nature of the range of phenotypes, "thresholds [between normal and abnormal] cannot help but be partly socially constructed" and for this reason somewhat arbitrary (142). Thus, the latest science tends not only to support the applicability of the "disability perspective" to mental illness—since social context influences how the medical profession constructs the normal-abnormal boundary—but also to suggest that the social context may matter even more in mental disorders than it does in other forms of disability, in that social factors can play a *causative* role in the very manifestation of mental illness.

This brings us back to the question of whether applying the disability perspective to what is now labeled mental "illness" can produce positive effects akin to those that the ADA (and the thinking behind it) has helped foster in terms of general disabilities; namely, as previously noted, increased autonomy and justice, decreased social stigma and better accommodation of alternative modes of function, and more ethical treatment by the medical community. That such positive effects are morally imperative can be seen from how frequently, in the history of society's treatment of the mentally ill, the rights of certain classes of mentally ill individuals have been devalued and violated. Most notable of these violations has been disrespect for patient autonomy on the part of the medical profession. From the 1950s through the 1970s, thousands of institutionalized patients in the United States were forcibly subjected to procedures such as lobotomy and sterilization. While modern psychiatry no longer performs such procedures, the practice of nonconsensual medication has raised ongoing concerns about patients' rights (Dain 13-14). Even if enforced confinement of the "criminally insane" (those individuals who pose an imminent danger to others) may be justified on the basis of protecting the lives and rights of others, involuntary commitment and forced treatment of non-criminal individuals remains problematic.

From an ethical standpoint, the medical field has the responsibility not only of abiding by a patient's autonomous decisions but also of "enabling" those decisions (Childress and Beauchamp 63); however, the practices of nonconsensual treatment and forced commitment are in direct conflict with this obligation. These practices exemplify the tendency to view the mentally ill as incapable of making important life choices (based on the conviction that such individuals are a danger to themselves). Such assumptions, however, become morally questionable when placed in the context of social disadvantage as emphasized by the disability perspective. Because of the complex relationship that exists between social norms and both the manifestation and classification of mental illness, it has proven difficult for psychiatric diagnoses and decisions about commitment not to be influenced by such biases.

Further, we might note that, even without such biases and without violations of autonomy in treatment, the reduced ability of mentally ill individuals to function "normally" within society is reinforced and complicated by the very act of medical labeling, as the label "mentally ill" carries with it considerable stigma in wider society—stigma that remains a major source of disadvantage. The continued existence of such stigma is conveyed in the arguments of advocacy groups, such as the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) (Johnson 553-554). Researcher D.L Rosenhan, in his critique of the labeling practices of mental hospitals in the 1970s, identified this social discrimination as the direct consequence of medical labeling, asserting that "the label [of mental illness] endures beyond discharge" from the hospital (253). Hospitalized patients, he claims, are not simply described as *exhibiting* abnormal behavior, but are defined as actually *being* abnormal themselves. "A psychiatric label has a life and an influence of its own," such that once an individual is deemed mentally ill, he or she remains ill in the eyes of society even after treatment is completed (Rosenhan 253). In this way, modern psychiatric labeling has a very clear impact on the perception of the mentally disabled, defining them in such a way that they become subject to social prejudices against mental illness. When a psychiatric diagnosis is made, psychiatrists do not simply identify a medical pathology; they actually create a new framework for the way in which society views an individual. For this reason, the question of treatment is by no means simple, as it has a lasting impact on a patient's relationship with society. When autonomy and the ability to choose treatment options are denied, psychiatry takes away a patient's right not only to make his own medical decisions but also to define his place in society. Because of the socially constructed disadvantages that come with the label of mental illness, forced treatment results in forced social inequality.

The disability perspective would challenge the assumption that abnormal patterns of thought and behavior were necessarily "subnormal" patterns, and it would look to ways for society to accommodate alternate modes of functioning. This would likely not only have the effect of improving the lives of the mentally ill and their integration in society, but it would also fulfill demands of justice that the current model of mental illness fails to satisfy. In the most general sense, justice mandates equality of treatment of individuals understood to be equal (Beauchamp and Childress 227). The disability perspective, by maintaining the view that disabled individuals are the biological, moral, and medical equals of "normal" individuals, insists that they therefore deserve the same basic rights and respect given to the rest of society and should not be subject to unjust discrimination on the basis of impairment. Such discrimination is necessarily an injustice, for it "denies people benefits to which they have a right" and "distributes burdens unfairly" (226). Though the disability perspective cannot fully eliminate socially constructed disadvantages that limit the personal autonomy of the mentally ill and deny them equal access to resources and opportunity, it can shift the burden of intervention. Rather than trying to normalize the mentally ill, those caring for them could seek to correct social conditions of discrimination and injustice, and to create environments conducive to unfettered, autonomous life choices. Thus, the disability view of mental illness holds the promise of improving the social treatment of this class of individuals.

As we have seen, in the cases of both physical and mental disabilities, biological impairments complicated and worsened by social constructs can be ameliorated

by better social constructs. In other words, we can bring about significant, positive change in the disabling experience of mental illness simply by modifying the discourse surrounding it. By recognizing mental disorders as complex disabilities rather than states of subnormal pathology and illness, we can influence the ways both society and the medical field view and treat the people who suffer from them. A disability perspective on mental illness—a model that views mental illness as the intersection between biological impairment and socially conferred disadvantage—provides a beneficial and ethically sound alternative to current understandings of mental illness. As Kay Redfield Jamison asserts, "attitudes about mental illness are changing, however glacially," but only by incorporating these new attitudes into the culture of everyday society can we hope to bring about lasting change and to secure justice for a group that has historically been oppressed (183). The ADA enacted a change in the legal status of the disabled; it will be improved medical models and more nuanced social attitudes that will enact changes in their fundamental status.

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Going West to Strike it Real: How History and Reality TV Collide in PBS's *Frontier House*

Caroline Amelia Smart

Choosing to write about Frontier House *felt right to Caroline almost instantly; the show had piqued her interest for several years. Jane Rosenzweig, her preceptor in the Expository Writing course "True Stories," encouraged her to write about it; though not standard academic fare, the program actually provided a great opportunity to analyze ideas of truth as expressed in popular culture. It was difficult at first to find her bearings: the show seemed new and indefinable, at the crossroads of several genres. Once Caroline identified the central tension in* Frontier House*'s construct, however—the conflict between the show's purposes and its techniques—the essay started to fall into place. Caroline writes, "Anyone can pick an obvious topic and give a cursory or surface explanation of it. But to pick a cool topic, and say something original and meaningful—something worth writing about and, even more importantly, worth reading—requires rigor and lots of revisiting…I would counsel any student undergoing a revisions process that an idea which is creative, and complex, and involved will take work." Caroline comes from Belmont, Massachusetts and she is concentrating in History and Literature.*

The opening sequence of the PBS series *Frontier House* invites viewers to learn the truth about life on the American frontier. As music plays, we are offered this promise: "Fictionalized, mythologized, often romanticized—now see life on the real frontier."[1] The show that follows introduces viewers to three modern American families who have been transported to a rigorously researched, meticulously constructed pioneer settlement circa 1883 in the Montana valley. They are set loose for six months, and followed by cameras. The objective of the project, as viewers are explicitly reminded, is to reveal the truth about life on the frontier; the packaging on the video expresses this agenda by posing the question "What is the meaning of frontier family values, as each family must work together for a common goal, and every hand is needed?" The promise that answers are forthcoming, and that truths will be revealed, coupled with the fact that *Frontier House* airs on PBS, sends a clear message to the audience that the purpose of the program is to educate viewers about the past.

But at the same time, *Frontier House* closely aligns itself with the genre of reality TV, using the material conditions of the past to provide a kind of challenge course for "real-life" participants, and employing nontraditional documentary techniques that entertain viewers by giving them voyeuristic access to the inner lives of those participants. This hybrid program—part documentary about historical reenactment, part reality TV—raises questions about the show's purpose. Should the promise to show us something "real" be understood as a promise of truth about the frontier, or should it be understood as akin to the promise of other reality TV shows: that the participants will, under the stress of the challenges and unwinking eye of the camera, ultimately reveal their "real" characters? In other words, to what extent does the show offer a mere social game with costumes, and to what extent does it provide genuine and sustained insight into the past, and the truth of what it meant to live in 1883?

One way of looking at *Frontier House*—a way that seems consistent with the producers' stated goals—is that these reality techniques are an innovative way to foster understanding of the frontier for the viewer, who is merely an observer to the project. There seems to be no doubt that the project's participants have found historical reenactment enlightening; it is a chance to interact with the past, as they learn to make their livelihoods and care for family and build community, in order to understand it. So the

[1] All references to scene and dialogue in *Frontier House* are to the VHS version published in 2002 by PBS (WGBH Boston).

producers, in a seemingly feasible attempt to bring us closer to the historical reenactment occurring in Montana—to engage us directly with what the "time-travelers" are learning and experiencing about life on the frontier—have employed a series of interactive techniques readily identifiable with reality TV. The underlying assumption is that these reality TV techniques, which make the viewer privy to the thoughts and feelings of the time-traveling participants in a way that traditional documentary could not, build for the viewer an intimacy with the reenactment. It is an intriguing way to invite the viewer into the lived experience of 1883, and to bring the education garnered by the participants to the viewer as well. In this way, *Frontier House* promises to deliver a groundbreaking understanding of the truth of 1883 beyond that which is "fictional" or "mythological."

Yet the "reality" format, which seems designed to bring us closer to the experience, ultimately undermines our ability to learn the truths about the past. What we have is an overwhelming impression not that we ourselves have become part of 1883, but that we are the captive audience of people in costume who are learning about themselves when thrust into a foreign world. Techniques such as the informal interview, video diaries, and even the program's post-project follow-up segment actually work against any attempt to offer the audience an understanding of the historical period because they overwhelmingly emphasize how the participants relate the experience to their own lives. They shift the program's focus from insight into *historical* character and the conditions of its formation to insight into *contemporary* characters and their ability to handle a challenge and make it meaningful in the context of their own lives. We as an audience are left with an appreciation for what the particular exercise can accomplish for its participants in terms of self-understanding but without an equivalent appreciation for the actual history being reenacted. The result is likely engaging to viewers who enjoy the reality genre, but it fails the implicit educational promise of the show—the delivery of the "historical truth"—revealing the hybrid genre it represents as a failed experiment.

To understand the specific types of truth which *Frontier House* ultimately delivers to its audience, we must first consider the construction of the project. *Frontier House* is, first and foremost, a rejection of standard documentary history in favor of the values of historical reenactment. As such, the show never tries to generate the illusion that we are actually directly watching *history*: it makes its artifice—the fact that the homestead environment, no matter how thoroughly researched, is fabricated—clear and conscious. And even though *Frontier House* wants to reveal to us an authentic, unromanticized understanding of the real frontier, no one is pretending that the twenty-first century won't be an influence: quite the opposite. As cultural anthropologists Richard Handler and William Saxton note of reenactment generally in their essay "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in 'Living History,'" success implicitly depends not just on "token isomorphism" (the recreation of a set of objective historical material conditions) but on a particular subjective experience that participants achieve *through* those recreated conditions, namely that of being able to imagine what they themselves would have felt or been had they actually been there (242). In other words, *Frontier House*'s model of historical authenticity demands of its participants that they simultaneously "feel themselves to be in touch both with a 'real' world and with their 'real' selves" (243), the "real" world being the perfectly recreated conditions of the past, and the "real" selves being twenty-first century individuals. Viewers, by extension, should witness the experience of the participants inhabiting these simultaneous realities.

Consistent with these values of reenactment, in which parties paradoxically agree that true history, although it will never live again, can be recreated, *Frontier House* makes the presence of historical consultants highly visible in the show's first episode, when the three families descend on the settlement for a week-long training session. Specialists in farming, herding, carpentry, and domestic arts each coach participants in all the skills they will need to live on the settlement from summer until fall. Three months later, the consultants return to appraise the preparations participants have made for the approaching winter, and they compile reports for each family on whether they have prepared well enough to survive

the bad weather. Down to every costume and cooking utensil, the immense research which has gone into the project is obvious. The participants build corrals and schoolhouses, send and receive mail, even celebrate a wedding, in the manners appropriate to 1883. When the participants have no to-do list or challenges to complete besides their winter stockpiling, their job is to immerse themselves in the lived experience of 1883 and to execute its details as accurately and faithfully as possible. If they are meant to discover something more about the "meaning of family values," the *Frontier House* project intends for it to come as just one discernable reality from living life on the frontier. For us as audience, watching this recreation that modern families undergo helps *us* discern these frontier realities as well, all parts of a grand history lesson which *Frontier House* tries to provide. As the show's first episode ends, cued to evocative western music, with the homesteaders riding onto their new home, the show decrees its challenge: "Can three modern families carve a community of homesteads out of the Montana wilderness, learning to live without twenty-first century distractions?" Even if it is a challenge addressed to modern people, it is one that appears designed to add to our understanding of the past. *Frontier House* wants to simulate the hum and schedule of life as it occurred on the frontier in 1883, to elucidate perhaps a more human truth about that past and what living then may have meant. For all these reasons, while *Frontier House* concedes that its insights will be couched in modern reference points, the program's purpose remains grounded firmly in revealing truths of an historical nature.

Following the logic that if the participants learn about history from all of the 1883 tasks they undertake, we as viewers might appreciate the truth of frontier life better by learning directly from them, the show offers a second promise. Our education will exceed simply watching the time-travelers at work and play, and listening to the show's narrator who provides educational notes; we will have a front row seat to the frontier, and learn everything the time-travelers are learning. We will move beyond passive observation, to become part of the historical experience ourselves. For us as audience, learning history means going inside participants' thoughts, emotions, and reactions, a sort of historical-reenactment-once-removed. So *Frontier House* offers a history lesson on a doubly ambitious scale; rather than teaching us history by watching others simulate it and hearing commentary—in effect, a history already processed—it invites us into the historical experience, to discern directly from the participants what "frontier reality" means and evokes.

But what is it exactly that the reenacted frontier reality evokes in participants? Handler and Saxton suggest of reenactment that participants have two fundamental sets of goals that are frequently in unacknowledged conflict with each other: one is the "replicating [of] the experiences of others in order to understand those *others*" and the other "focuses on the authentic experiences that one achieves or 'has' for *oneself*" (247, emphasis added). We see these mixed goals as we are introduced to the individuals in *Frontier House*. All of the shows' participants voice excitement in varying capacities for the historical experience of "living history" (Adrienne, as an immigrant, wants to understand the American Dream; Gordon wants to evaluate society's progress by locating his ancestors in the continuum; Karen is curious about what "the modern woman is hiding today," if her role in the home has changed so dramatically with time). But it is clear that our characters have come to *Frontier House* not out of dry, historical curiosity, but rather in search of a degree of self-realization: some aspect of themselves that they hope to have clarified, or magnified, by their historical experience. Gordon Clune, an entrepreneur from California, sees *Frontier House* as an opportunity to strengthen family values and cement his family unit. Karen Glenn, who has brought her family from Tennessee, sees homesteading as a way to test her own mettle. She says, in relation to the experience she anticipates: "Having adventures complements my nature. Never accept defeat—that's a big part of who I am." Her husband Mark views the project in even more personal tones. He says, "I want a sense of who I am. People need to reevaluate who they are and where they're going." And finally, Nate Brooks says that he looks forward to the opportunity to work with people and to experience the "survival

Michael Short, *View to the North*, Andrew Efraimson Homestead, Jefferson County, Montana, 1982.
National Parks Service, Historic American Building Survey,
Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, HABS 22-1-3.

mentality the frontier would have proposed." As we see these contemporary lives open up in front of us, despite our continuing conviction that we are going to learn history, we start to have legitimate doubts and questions as an audience about just what we're getting from *Frontier House*. Can we actually trust the "front row seat" interpretive framework *Frontier House* offers us as a way to see the historical "others," those folks who belonged to the real frontier, or are we mainly tracking participants' subjective experiences as they face challenges which are important mainly as *personal* challenges, and need not have been historical at all?

Some of the techniques used in *Frontier House* do serve a historical purpose. These fit firmly in the "expository" tradition, the traditional documentary mode marked by an engagement of filmmaker with subject, but not by an interactivity between audience and subject. As documentary theorist Bill Nichols outlines in his book *Representing Reality*, the "expository text" uses commentary and editing to sustain rhetorical continuity (35). To serve its historical goals, *Frontier House* employs a "voice of God" narrator (in place of a simple cinema verité style) who provides historical context for the homesteaders' experiences and clarifies the issues they are wrestling

with. The expository mode also manifests itself in the formal interviews taken with the homesteaders, where the discussion between producer and subject always revolves around some discovery of historical curiosity or concern. In one case, Gordon Clune argues in his defense for sleeping illicitly on a modern mattress. The "frontier truth" in his argument emerges as an understanding of pioneers' requisite self-interest and self-protection. Nate Brooks talks about the "art of neighboring," a quality of community he thinks has disappeared since 1883. And in another example, Nate, who is black, and his wife Kristen, who is white, discuss with a producer what they think it would be like as an interracial couple in 1883; their interview illustrates just one more dimension of frontier reality for the audience to consider. These expository techniques come across as instructive and didactic, and while they often uncover and give voice to the human concerns of the participants, they establish an interpretive framework for the viewer attempting to grapple with historical "truths."

Yet while some of the techniques aid in the historical thread, those that privilege the point of view of the participants and let them speak directly to the viewer actually distance the audience from the history to be learned by focusing instead on the social situations of the participants. The advantage of such techniques—well-established from the reality TV genre—is the direct and unmediated manner in which they capture the participants' voices, putting the viewer in the position to witness every stray thought and burst of emotion from the participants and thus, ideally, to feel deeply engaged in their situations. These techniques would seem to have obvious value in furthering the goals of historical reenactment—namely, they promise to involve viewers so deeply with participants that they will begin to construct their own historical interpretations. But somewhere in our newfound closeness to the participants, as we are exposed to the self-reflection that living on the frontier has inspired in them, as we hear again and again their personal meditations about their social situations, our frame of reference changes: we confront them as twenty-first, rather than nineteenth-century people. We have sacrificed any understanding of the *historical* others to an intimate familiar with *contemporary* others and all their decidedly non-historical preoccupations.

A favorite reality technique of the show is the informal interview, in which participants speak to off-camera producers of their own volition, unprompted, in the middle of living 1883. The interviews capture the participants in the middle of the lived experience and jarringly seek insight from the participants at moments when they are inside the reenactment process. It is blatantly anachronistic to see, in the course of a minute, immersion in history turn into analysis from the reenactor himself. In one instance, we watch Adrienne admonish her children to milk the cows quickly and to stay away from the snow-heavy trees. In this segment, she appears wholly and undoubtedly a frontier mother; this footage, untouched by reality technique, gives us a measure of historical insight by simply allowing us to witness Adrienne inhabit her historical role. Yet as soon as Adrienne is pulled into the informal interview, the scene's emphasis shifts to become an inquiry into her personal issues as a contemporary individual. Adrienne tells a producer how guilty she feels about being unable to provide properly for her children, and how she feels inadequate as a mother. The situation immediately loses its historical context; the insight is no longer about what it means to be a frontier wife and mother, but rather about how Adrienne evaluates herself as a modern mother now that she has been thrust backwards in time. The informal interview has captured the thoughts and feelings of a participant, which would otherwise go unexamined in the midst of the reenactment. Again and again these informal interviews center on the same theme: how participants conceive of themselves as they live another life in costume. Entering into a close dialogue with the participants changes the type of insight we actually receive from *Frontier House*: historical revelations seem less the point than the subjective truths about themselves that participants have gained from the reenactment.

The video diary is another reality technique which, by presenting the participants' innermost thoughts and reactions to their environment, distills truths about human emotion and personal discovery.

We as an audience have been aware since the first episode of *Frontier House* that the participants have personal goals which they hope to address via their experiences on the frontier. The video diaries are what give these goals the most sustained consideration, with participants deconstructing the experiment itself not so much for historical discovery as for understanding how acting their roles makes them feel. Karen reveals to her diary how unhappy she is with her plain appearance, and how she dreams of being a "beauty queen." Adrienne admits to the depression she has felt, while her niece Tracy talks about her newfound confidence and her desire, when she returns to 2001, to express ideas and opinions of her own. Nate talks about being grateful for the time he is spending with his aging father Rudy. Mark laments how he has been governed by competition and how he yearns for neighborliness and community in his life. The preponderance of material of this reality format, as with the informal interviews, consists of participants discussing the reenactment as a *personal* experience—a strange and powerful one stirring up personal feelings that need to be expressed to the camera. This does have the effect of drawing us as viewers into the participants' world on the frontier—but not into the *historical* world that their world is meant to reenact. The accumulation of informal interview and video diary footage dealing with social situations far eclipses the time devoted to formal interview and expository mode, which deal in rigorously-considered historical truths. This means a de-emphasis on the history lesson to be had, and a distancing from the educational goals of *Frontier House*.

The follow-up episode of the show, which greets the time-travelers several months after the project's conclusion, reinforces the diversion of focus to participants' reflection on their contemporary personhood. The producers go to visit the Glenn family in Nashville, the Clunes in Malibu, and the Brooks on their post-frontier honeymoon in Mexico. Each family reads a report that has been compiled about how they would have fared on the frontier come winter. But the topic, which might have been expected to provoke reflection about the difficulties of frontier life historically, leads in nearly every case to a consideration of how the experience affected family and relationships in participants' modern lives. Adrienne talks about feeling lonely without her children being near, and Gordon says that he realizes now just how much—perhaps too much—he works. Karen is dismayed by how quickly her children have re-adopted modern entertainment, though she herself now spends more time with her church community. Nate and Kristen shrug off the results of the report altogether, decreeing "Hard tellin,' not knowin,'" and then extol their current free and nomadic lifestyle as a couple. Of course, ideas of family and community have all been legitimate historical truths explored on *Frontier House*; but the follow-up segment here doesn't contextualize those experiences in the parameters of the Montana experiment. Hence, as we listen to the families speak one last time, not only are we and they removed from the setting of historical reenactment, we find that yet again the focus is on personal awareness and discovery: not historical truths discovered, but the assimilation into their ongoing lives about self-knowledge gained during a challenging TV shoot. *Frontier House,* then, offers as its conclusion revelations which revolve around twentieth-century life, rather than about what it meant be on the frontier in 1883.

It is the clash between the program's promise that we, the viewers, are going to learn about history and its invitation—through techniques familiar from reality TV—to become intimately involved in the lives of the characters that hinders its ultimate goal to educate. But is this clash strictly necessary? There is perhaps no reason why a different configuration of *Frontier House* shouldn't teach us about history *and* about the people engaging in its reenactment. In fact, examination of the hybrid techniques suggests a better model: a show that sustains its historical reenactment *continuously*, giving an expository narrator, historical experts, and formal guided interviews with participants the bulk of the screen time so as to immerse the viewer in the experience as the producers intend it to be seen. Each episode of such a show could easily be followed by a brief "behind the scenes" feature allowing the reenactors to give voice to their own personalities and struggles and letting them emerge as contemporary characters. We are used to such features and find them entertaining—and, of course, the success of reality TV

itself shows how easy it is to engage us voyeuristically in the dramas of our contemporaries. The hard part is to do what *Frontier House* initially seems to promise, but at which it ultimately fails: to engage us in the struggles and personalities of our historical forebears, those others whose actions and values created our world, and yet whose persons we barely succeed in imagining.

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Total Vision: Remedios Varo as Woman Artist and Heir to Surrealism

Judith Huang

Judith initially chose Susanna Ryan's Expository Writing course, "Art and the Unconscious" as "a perfect match for my nearly five-year obsession with Salvador Dalí." When she encountered the paintings of Remedios Varo, however, they seemed to propose a different kind of Surrealism than the destructive, nightmarish, contorted images so familiar in other artists; Varo's Surrealism was luminous with peace and mystery. "One of the great joys in working on this essay," Judith writes, "was going into the fine arts library and digging up all the obscure catalogues, many of them in Spanish, and gawking at the photo reproductions of Varo's paintings." When she saw Varo's Still Life Reviving *she realized that by comparing it to Dali's* Animated Still Life *she could meaningfully contrast her "old favorite and fantastic new discovery." This mirrored what Judith learned in Expos—that an essay should start somewhere in an existing interest, but reach new ground. Revision, too, means "coming away from the essay with a new lead, and not being afraid of taking your thesis in new and even more daring directions although you may not know where you may end up." Judith's concentration is in History and Literature, and her home is in Singapore.*

In 1937, a young, bright-eyed Remedios Varo accompanied Benjamin Péret, the eminent Surrealist poet, as his female companion to Paris, and so came into the orbit of the core group of Surrealists. Despite being so near the seat of power of the movement—Péret was a close friend of André Breton and was known among his peers as "the Grand Inquisitor" for his zealotry at weeding out errant Surrealists (of which there were many) —Varo has remained obscure, describing herself in these years as a "timid and humble… listener" to the great Surrealist debates (qtd. in Kaplan 55). This is hardly a unique fate for a woman artist associated with the Surrealists, and it has become a common feminist project, exemplified in the work of Gloria Orenstein, Gwen Raaberg, and Whitney Chadwick, to rescue these women artists from a neglect that has its origins in the men's-club mentality of the dominant Surrealists and subsequently their critics. For instance, in "The Problematics of Women and Surrealism," Raaberg contends that the Surrealists' famously misogynistic vocabulary of creativity, which prescribed love and sexual union with a woman as a way for the (presumably male) artist to "reactivate the libido and enlist it in the passionate overthrow of repressive and oppressive bourgeois existence," came into "direct conflict with the individual woman's subjective need for self-definition and free artistic expression" (1,3).

A gifted artist whose work is breathtaking in terms of both technique and imaginative vision, Varo certainly deserves the kind of rescue Raaberg goes on to propose. Yet more is at stake than the reputation of one artist. Although feminist critics have emphasized how the misogyny of the movement held these women back, surprisingly little has been said about how it may have undermined the Surrealist project itself. Surrealism claimed above all to break down dichotomies; in the words of Franklin Rosemont, co-founder of the Surrealist Movement in the United States, Surrealism aimed to "reduce, and ultimately to resolve, the contradictions between sleeping and waking, dream and action, reason and madness, the conscious and the unconscious, the individual and society, the subjective and the objective" (1). This tendency manifestly did not apply to the dichotomy of gender, which came to be an important tenet in the male Surrealists' ideology: the active, conscious artist was always gendered as male, while the passive "unconscious" he wished to tap into was gendered female. In this spirit, the Surrealists built up an imagistic vocabulary which overwhelmingly relegated women to what art historian Rudolf Kuenzli calls the role of "servants, helpers in the forms of child muse, virgin, femme-enfant, angel,

celestial creature who is their salvation, or erotic object, model, doll" (19). But this vocabulary also placed the male Surrealists at a disadvantage, always once removed from the unconscious they wished to utilize. The result was a creative ethos that emphasized sexualized violence and disharmony, often in the form of female bodies mutilated, as in Raoul Ubac's *Battle of the Amazons* (1939), or monstrously mutated, as in Dalí's *Invention of Monsters* (1937). The process of artistic creation, and so the identity of the artist himself, was brutally sexualized, establishing gender conflict at the very heart of Surrealist creation. Instead of "reducing" gender difference, in other words, the male Surrealists tore at it, heightening rather than "resolving" it, as a good Surrealist presumably ought to have wished to do.

Remedios Varo found a way to overcome the binary opposition of gender through the resolution of opposites, in what I will call her "total vision." At stake in her painting, then, was the fulfillment of a higher plane of Surrealism itself, which is obscured when we neglect Varo's works in the Surrealist canon. Raaberg notes that "many of the women writers and artists were younger than their male counterparts and often produced their most mature work after their relationships with the male Surrealists and the movement had ended" and so "belong more properly to *a second generation of Surrealists*" (2). With this in mind, I would like to posit that Varo and her contemporaries were not merely outcasts or victims of Surrealism's sexism, as has been contended, but instead, a second generation that furthered and finally *realized* the goals of the Surrealist project.

What is most striking about Varo's canvases is their astonishingly peaceful and harmonious vision—a world away from the violent, often disturbing canvases of her male counterparts. Yet there is nothing less strange or surreal about her work – indeed, her scenes are some of the most fantastic worlds conceived under Surrealism. How did Varo, a woman, manage to overcome the overwhelming imagistic vocabulary built up by Surrealists around the female body, and so to free Surrealism from its own misogynistic shackles? By comparing her depictions of artistic creation to those in Salvador Dalí's work, we start to see what can be gained by examining how Varo resolved the final dichotomy of gender, and in resolving it, achieved not only (in Raaberg's words) "a more independent and integrated female subject position" (9) but also a more Surrealist Surrealism.

On the momentous occasion of his excommunication, Dalí, perhaps the best-known Surrealist, declared, "Surrealism is me." Indeed, Surrealism is arguably best personified by a dominating, egotistical man with a funny moustache who has been excommunicated from the Surrealist movement; certainly, his paintings give a good indication of the iconography and concerns typical of the Surrealists at the time. In 1937, the same year Varo arrived in Paris, Dalí painted the *Invention of Monsters,* particularly interesting for the glimpse it gives us into the creative process through the eyes of Mr. Surrealism himself. Although the painting has been read most commonly as a comment on man's horrific invention of War (Descharnes 114), in its imagistic vocabulary we see embodied Dalí's view of the inner workings of human creation generally.

The three tiers of activity in the painting, foreground, middle and background, support the Freudian reading of artistic creation in which Dalí himself believed. In the foreground, Dalí and his wife Gala, in a kind of merged double-portrait, seem caught up in their observation of the objects on a small table in the left-hand corner; they are echoed eerily by a ghostly version of themselves holding a butterfly and an hour glass, and again by the tiny sculptural version on the table. The artist, Dalí, is engaged in only a tiny fraction of what is going on in the painting. Meanwhile, in the background, sexualized forms, grotesque, faceless, voluptuous "monsters," emerge from a pool suggestive of Freudian and Surrealist ideas of the unconscious; most strikingly, a winged supplicant kneels at the altar of a monstrous woman, her breasts nubile and her neck and face bleached and mutilated, her hair white and wild and her hand skeletal—the typical erotic-horrific female muse of Surrealist iconography. The merged figure of Dalí and his wife also reflects the Surrealists' philosophy of woman as channel and muse for man: union with Gala unlocks Dalí's creativity.

The tone is that of delirious nightmare: the Gala-Dalí composite is eyeless and spectral, the furious

activity of the left side of the canvas unbalanced by the dark and arid plain on the right; the winged figure disturbingly defies physics by appearing to float above a hole, and the female figures are brutally mutilated, some centaur-like and quadruped, one merely a pair of buttocks on two thighs, all with their elbows bent at a contorted angle; even the muse figure is cut off below the breasts, either encased in the mysterious box or deformed. These nightmarish elements are made all the more unsettling by the obliviousness of the artist himself, who seems unnaturally preoccupied with a mundane loaf of bread (representing the tiny portion of the mind which his consciousness takes up). These unsettling elements suggest a world half-conceived and barely known. This is a picture of an artist out of control, inventing monsters through a monstrous female.

Twenty years later, Varo offers us an alternative vision of the artistic process in her *Creation of the Birds* (1958). Instead of Dalí's macabre, chaotic and visceral genesis, we have a strange owl-artist delicately poised amongst his/her apparatus, creating birds out of light, music from a viol and paint distilled from air in what appears to be an orderly, precise, scientific miracle. In place of imbalance, we have symmetry – in the sharply defined heart-shaped face, the neat feathers which end where sleeves or trousers would end on

Salvador Dalí, Spanish, 1904-1989, *Inventions of the Monters*, 1937. Oil on Canvas, 20 1/4" x 30 7/8". Joseph Winterbotham Collection. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.

Remedios Varo (Spain, 1908-Mexico, 1963), *Creation of the Birds* (1958).

each limb, the two egg-shaped vases which seem to distill paint from thin air, the octagonal desk of ingenious design, the two hanging vases which spontaneously interchange light or sand. Varo gives creation a scientific spin, conjuring a sense of a prevailing order which is alien but strangely comforting: the owl-artist has, ready to hand, the apparatuses necessary to the creative task. The hand-held prism refracts the image of a bird from the sky, where it appears as a mere dot, onto the page, where it emerges, a three-dimensional wonder, from both the light rays and the brush. The brush itself is connected to a viol which hangs like a stethoscope from the owl-artist's neck, suggesting that music informs the creation of the birds. Glass tubing seems to collect air from a round window, and funnel it through egg-shaped vases from which paints in three primary colors emerge. Although no less strange than Dalí's vision—for her science does not exclude miracle—Varo's version of creation is purposeful and orderly in a way that Dalí's is not, and this is best demonstrated by the products of her creation: she creates birds—real, living birds which nonchalantly peck at crumbs on the floor after being created—where Dalí unconsciously generates monsters which are mutilated women. Unlike Dalí, Varo could imagine a non-violent process of creation—a process best served by order and a cool, scientific disposition.

Significantly, where Dalí's *Invention* is overtly sexual, Varo's *Creation* is meticulously asexual. In the owl-artist, Varo presents us with a perfectly balanced androgyny making it possible to imagine an act of creation that does not depend on gender opposition. Although the feathers resemble trousers, the features are gently effeminate and resemble Varo's own; although the round head suggests baldness, feathers framing the face suggest long hair. This androgyny allows Varo, as a female and an artist, to speak about creation while shedding the loaded associations the female body conjures in male Surrealist vocabulary. What is more, by avoiding the use of the female muse figure, she liberates not only females—reclaiming for them the power of creation—but also males, from their self-imposed need for mediated creation. The male Surrealists, in casting the female form as the Other, created powerful paintings depicting the engagement of the unconscious as a violent, sexual process, but this ultimately denied them the deeper, direct mining of their unconscious. In *Invention*, the grotesque bodies in the pool symbolize Dalí's unconscious desires and their creative energies, but in giving them female form, Dalí traps himself in a position in which he is always once removed from the very unconscious he wishes to engage. The monsters of Dalí's imagination are female, and therefore not Dalí himself—although he may attempt to merge himself with Gala in the foreground in order to access them, he must be the supplicant, wearing the Janus double-mask to the altar of his muse to gain access to the vision. In the Varo, by contrast, the Gala-Dalí double portrait has reached a synthesis in the figure of the androgynous owl-artist. Instead of the vision of a boiling unconscious violently engendering monsters, Varo gives us an artist fully attuned to the unconscious, with no need of a mediator.

But in noting the contrast of these pieces, in claiming that Varo has reached a higher level of engagement with the unconscious that the Surrealists had only glimpsed, have we confirmed the male Surrealist idea (Kuenzli 19) that women (and Varo in particular) are "closer to the unconscious than men, because they have not entirely entered the symbolic order"? And have we confirmed as well, then, the role of female as necessary muse and sexual intermediary for the male? How else might we explain why Dalí (as a representative of the male Surrealists) illustrates only the fringes of the dream world which he cannot see behind him, whereas Varo's creation is a total vision—one completely steeped in a plausible and self-contained dream world? I would argue that Varo's own work gives us the answer precisely in its depictions of gender: that peaceably to inhabit the realm of creativity is a kind of rapture associated with the *feminine* but not the *female*; there is a quality of knowing that transcends gender dichotomies without denying their different tendencies.

Rapture, the quality associated in Varo's work with inhabitance of this total vision, seems to occur in a continuum that aligns closely with the range of gender in her myriad depictions of androgynous, cross-dressing, masculine and feminine personages. Her most masculine men are the least rapturous figures—lecherous, balding creatures whose only interest is to catch an

unwary girl with their sinuous facial hair, as in *Twisted Roads* (1958) and *Hairy Locomotion* (1960). The more effeminate males, scientists and engineers, have a touch of discovery about them—the owl-artist's rapture—but they also resemble the male Surrealists in that they are always on the fringes of discovery, perplexed by the magical phenomena because of their more conventional, often Newtonian views of the world. For example, the pale, delicately-featured clockmaker of *Revelation or the Clockmaker* (1955) has behind him several imposing clocks of his creation, depicting Newtonian time, but the revelation of the strangely revolving ball floating in the window forces him to grapple with a miraculous new conception of time—Einstein's theory of relativity. In *Harmony* (1956), a gaunt composer strings equations and seashells on a music staff with the help of muse-women who emerge from behind the wallpaper.

Remedios Varo (Spain,1908-Mexico, 1963), *Still Life Reviving* (1963).

From the feminized men we move to female figures who appropriate traditionally male roles, such as the explorer in a British trench coat in *Exploration of the Sources of the Orinoco River* (1959), or the female Pan figure with her two slight lutes in *Troubadour* (1959). And at the far end of the continuum, where they are at their most rapturous, Varo's characters are neither androgynous nor cross-dressers; they are decidedly female. In *The Call* (1961), the heroine is no longer a mere explorer, wearing a perplexed face and restrained by the strings on her own ingenious flotation device; she is Enlightenment herself, flaming orange and walking past sleeping men still stuck in the woodwork. In *To Be Reborn* (1960), at her most beautiful, she emerges nymph-like, with nubile breasts and a gentle, rapturous face, from a delicately vaginal opening in a secret shrine in the woods, a room so attuned to nature that its floor sprouts grass and its walls and ceilings roots. And she discovers the powerful moon—occult symbol of female power—reflected in a chalice of water.

Thus far, what we have seen in Varo correlates closely to what male Surrealists might posit about women, men, and the subconscious, with the signifi-

cant difference that while Freud posited women as a "dark continent," Varo shows that the view from the inside is not so troubled: the truly resourceful women of her canvases know the rules of their fantasy world in a way that the men do not, and exploit them to survive or escape. The convent girl of *Embroidering Earth's Mantle* (1961), trapped in a tower and made to embroider the world (in an action which reminds us both of the innate power in traditional female crafts and their imprisoning quality), knows the rules of how the thread turns into reality, and, seizing her powers of creation, weaves herself a lover with whom she escapes the tower. It is as though, in Varo, the more enlightened men are just discovering laws that her women have known and kept secret all along.

But it is when we look at the *relations* between the genders in her paintings that we see how Varo has managed to honor the differences between the genders without *dichotomizing* them. In the canvases with the hairy men, the threatened females are not the helpless corpses of the male Surrealists' landscapes, lying demurely decapitated or emerging unintelligent and headless from pools. They are fully in control, unfazed and even wry. The lady in *Unexpected Presence* (1959), whose chair somehow bursts with a lecherous man's face sticking out his tongue, narrows her eyes at the man, as though she has always expected this bizarre event and knows the procedure for getting rid of lecherous chair-spirits. The cunning heroine of *Unexpected Visit* (1958) is also no victim of the fantastic wheeled visitor who comes in the door; in fact, she must have some nefarious intentions of her own for her guest, since she hides a pit for him under the dining table. Somehow, in Varo, what in the Surrealists is a disruptive disconnection and battle in the subconscious between the genders becomes play that scarcely disturbs despite its contrasting agencies.

That for Varo the key thing is not to be *female* but to be open to the *feminine* is shown in the femaleness of her most frivolous and depressing characters. The morbidly dormant woman in *Mimesis* (1960) takes on the *fleur-de-lys* pattern and characteristics of her chair from sheer inactivity; the pointedly frivolous bird-like women on wheels in *To Women's Happiness* (1956) mindlessly and ludicrously appraise other more fashionable spare parts. For Varo, women are neither exclusively muses nor artists nor the legions of the mindless—they are all three, susceptible to both dullness and rapture. In refusing and frustrating dichotomy, Varo creates complexity as a good Surrealist should, collapsing the roles of male and female to achieve a synthesis in tune with reality. In this way, while she acknowledges the male tributes to femininity as more in touch with the unconscious, she avoids falling prey to their use of the female as mere channel, adding important caveats regarding the limitations of treating women, by virtue of gender alone, as nearer the unconscious.

To illustrate Varo's accomplishment with respect to earlier, male Surrealists, compare her *Still Life Reviving* (1963), in which gender is truly transcended, to Dalí's *Animated Still Life* (1956). Both feature typical "still life" objects like fruit and cutlery, suspended improbably over a table. Both were also executed in the last phases of the artists' careers, though nearly a decade apart. The Dalí is again dark on the right side of the canvas and light on the left, creating a sharp and unsettling contrast; the objects hover, apparently heading in different random directions—the swallow seems on course to collide with what may be a disintegrating trombone, a peach and a cherry are moving at such a high velocity that they create light streaks, and most threateningly of all, a knife dominates the center of the painting, casting a long shadow on the table and seemingly about to slice it. These elements suggest an untenable position. The painting freezes a moment which will end only in a disastrous collision, creating great anxiety in the viewer. Varo's hovering fruits, on the other hand, resemble planets in a solar system orbiting the candle on the table. The composition is firmly symmetrical, the candle taking center stage, and the fruit and dishes more or less evenly spaced out. The movement is coherently an orbit, with the folds of the table cloth suggesting that the candle stand is revolving as well; the other movement is the rupture of the fruits on the extreme orbit, which sends tiny red and white seeds to the ground where they take root and grow miraculously. The tone here is revelatory and sacred, the chapel-like architecture seeming to consecrate both candle and table. Instead of the violence, conflict and chaos in the Dalí, we

Salvador Dalí, *Nature Morte Vivante (Still Life Fast Moving)*, (1956). Oil on canvas, 49 1/4 x 63 inches.
Collection of The Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida.

have a resolution, a cosmic revolution, in the Varo. This is a new version of the balance achieved by the order and symmetry of *Creation*, or by the effective counterweighting, in Varo's more sinister paintings, of male threats with female wariness. *Still Life Reviving* is a vision without violence, where even the death of exploding fruit is simultaneously regeneration.

As this canvas amply demonstrates, the nature of Varo's breakthrough is not just a revision of the Surrealist treatment of gender, although Varo does accomplish this in multiple and complex ways; it is a step from the fringes of the unconscious into an alternate, interior universe of ingenious device. It is a fulfillment of the Surrealist fantasy, a total vision. *Still Life Reviving* is a world of "timeless interiority" (Kaplan 25)—indeed, the painting is of a timeless interior, a life beyond our world, in which the oppositions of gender are irrelevant. It does not prompt me to say that Surrealism is Remedios Varo, for as Varo shows, a woman cannot be Surrealism; she can only inherit and complete it.

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