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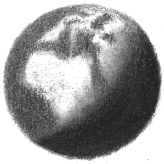
The Humanities Review



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The Humanities Review

A Student Journal

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The Humanities Review is a peer reviewed, student-run journal sponsored by the Bucknell University Press and Bucknell Humanities Center. The journal provides an opportunity for students worldwide working historically, critically and theoretically across the arts, humanities and humanistically oriented social sciences to publish professional quality academic work. There are no restrictions as to topic or methodology; interdisciplinary work that establishes clear humanistic links with the sciences, engineering, technology and law is permissible; as are essays in languages other than English. Submissions should engage with the relevant scholarship, be formatted according to the standards of the Chicago Manual of Style, and be no longer than 5000 words.

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Editorial

In the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2016 a group of students in different disciplines in the humanities at Bucknell University, working with the Bucknell University Press, decided to get together to create a journal to feature and publish serious academic and scholarly writing by students. Between 2008 and 2010, students in the Comparative Humanities Program at Bucknell had published a journal entitled *The Comparative Humanities Review*. We wanted our journal to benefit from the example set by our predecessors and to provide some continuity with what had been done before.

However, we also wanted our journal to be separate and different from *The Comparative Humanities Review* and other venues for current student writing at Bucknell. The Humanities Review thus addresses the interests and needs of students working in any and all of the humanities disciplines and the humanistically oriented social sciences (such as religion, history, economics, psychology, and anthropology).

Our remit, displayed on the inside front matter of this journal, will, we hope, be inclusive and encouraging. *The Humanities Review* aims to be a peer reviewed journal publishing one or two issues annually of student work of the highest caliber. All Bucknell students are welcome to submit work for consideration. Given the constant influx of new students, the board of editors will invariably see change from year to year; but as a board, the editors aim to seek, encourage and sustain serious academic work, regardless of point of view. In due course, we also seek to attract submissions from students at other American and Canadian universities and colleges, and, indeed, from students worldwide. While we expect most submissions to be in the English language, the editors are also willing to consider and publish work of suitable quality in languages other than English.

While the critical and scholarly goals of *The Humanities Review* will be uppermost, those editing the journal will also have opportunities of working closely with the staff of Bucknell University Press in learning about academic publishing. The editors thank the Bucknell Humanities Center for their incredible support and guidance in this important and exciting academic undertaking.

Arbitrary Love: A Dialogue

Shishir Budha

This is a dialogue between two old friends June and May who are in their early thirties. June is a freelance writer and May is a graduate student. May went with June to see June's romantic partner, Summer, in Strasbourg. Now the friends are on a plane flying back to New York. Endnotes in this dialogue are used for philosophical exposition.

June: I miss Summer already.

May: I know.

June: Ever since I met her I've always wondered, "Why her? Why not someone else?"

May: You mean about why you miss *her* and not someone else?

June: Yes.

May: Then perhaps you need to answer why you *love* her first.

June: She's just wonderful.

May: You're saying you love her because *she* is "wonderful"? Or because you think of *her* as being wonderful?

June: Both.

May: But wouldn't everyone in the world love her if she were wonderful *in herself*?

June: Yes.

May: Do you think everybody in the world loves her?

June: Obviously, no.

May: So wouldn't it be better if you say that *you think* that she is wonderful?

June: Yeah, but when you put it that way it seems like my thinking about her might not be true—she might not *really* be wonderful only that *I think* she is. You know what I mean?

May: You mean that if it was the case that *only you* thought that she is wonderful and others didn't, you might be delusional or something?

June: Yeah kinda.

May: But that's fine though. I'm not suggesting that you should feel that way. You would be talking about how she appears to you and how you make her appear to yourself, but not about how she is in herself.[1] We cannot know anything-in-itself.

June: I'm not disagreeing. I cannot claim to know things from within or things in *themselves*. I think I remember in college when we read Kant, right?

May: Oh yeah, he talked about the implausibility of thing in itself, the *noumenal* world, and that we can only experience it *phenomenally* as the thing appears to us.[2]

June: I remember! But (*pause*) how does this relate to why I love Summer and not someone else?

May: Yeah, okay. Do you think other people out there *are* wonderful too?

June: I guess. I don't know.

May: Would you say that not everybody has appeared to you as 'wonderful' as she because if so, you would love everybody who is *like* her in terms of manners, pursuits, and hobbies?

June: But everybody is not like her.

May: And she's not like everybody else.

June: Yes.

May: But you don't know everybody the way you know her.

June: Yes.

May: Why do you think that's the case?

June: Because I haven't *met* everybody.

May: But you met her.

June: Yes.

May: Where did you meet her again?

June: Glasgow.

May: Oh right. Could it have been had you met someone else, you would have loved them instead?

June: I guess but that's the talk about a different reality and I don't find that very consoling.

May: Do you think the fact that you love her and not someone else is *arbitrary*?

June: No.

May: Why?

June: I can't just go start loving everybody according to my will.

May: Exactly.

June: What do you mean 'exactly'? Doesn't that undermine what you

said?

May: What I meant by arbitrary was not that you can simply decide to love anybody, but precisely that you can't.[3]

June: I'm having a hard time following you.

May: I'm sorry. Do you remember Ferdinand de Saussure?

June: I don't think so.

May: He was a linguist. He was the one to say: "the linguistic sign is arbitrary."[4]

June: What does that mean?

May: The sign is the whole of the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the *sound-image* like "cat" and the signified is the *concept* of a cat.

June: Okay … So it's like the name "cat" means a cat?

May: Not really. The sign is not the whole of the "name" and the "thing."[5] It is the whole of a "sound-image" and a "concept." The sign doesn't stand for what is outside ourselves.

June: So you're saying it's all in our heads?

May: Haha. Pretty much.

June: But that's kinda "crazy talk" to me. Don't you think it's quite outlandish to say that?

May: You're not wrong. But remember when we were talking about Kant on how we can't say much about things-in-themselves?

June: Yeah …

May: Saussure is saying something similar. The sign only links "thoughts" and "sounds," not "names" and "things."[6]

June: Okay, alright. So when I say "cat," there is no cat *out there* but only my thought of a cat and the sound of my voice.

May: Right. And there the most important thing is that the link between the thought and the sound is arbitrary. The thought of a cat and what one *calls* that thought is arbitrary.

June: I understand. But why did you bring this up? I mean what does linguistics have to do with love?

May: I can't help but think that love can be informed in terms of Saussure's understanding of language. Remember when you said that you can't simply start loving everybody when I asked you if your love for her was arbitrary?

June: But according to Saussure the signifier is replaceable, right?

May: Yes.

June: But she is not replaceable.

May: Yes, and you can't simply make yourself love anyone else because love is an affective state and it is not subject to voluntary willing. Do you agree?

June: Say more.

May: Would you say love is an affective state?[7]

June: Okay, yeah.

May: If there is a conflict in the affective state, would you still comfortably say that you love her?

June: No.

May: But if there is a harmony in your affective state, you would comfortably say that you love her?

June: Yes.

May: In that case, would you say that the agencies that are acting within your affective state are in harmony?

June: I guess so.

May: Saussure thought that the linguistic agents need to be in agreement or in harmony within the linguistic community to establish or retain a "sign."[8] What the sign signifies is not subject to individual volition. You can't simply decide to say "bat" and expect others to understand that you meant "cat."

June: Hmm. So even though it is arbitrary, the sign is governed by harmonizing agencies.

May: Right. Saussure also said that the sign is "arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified."[9]

June: I love my mother because I have a natural connection to her.

May: But if you were raised and cared for by someone else, other than your biological mother since birth, you would still *feel* that you have a 'natural connection' with that person, right?

June: I get it. Now, I can't just decide that I want to feel about your mother the same way I feel about my mother. The arbitrariness of my situation is that it is contingent, that I grew up with my mother and not yours.

May: Yes, it is contingent. It's the same way with language. We are always already in language. We are always already hurled upon this

world.

June: Yeah.

May: Yeah.

June: I agree with you and all, but all this talk about arbitrariness and contingency feels very disorienting and uncomfortable. I wonder if this way of thinking diminishes any value of love or any process of signifying.

May: Yeah, let's talk about that. Do you think you could ever stop loving Summer?

June: I hope I don't, but I can't speak for the future.

May: If it were out of 'necessity,' wouldn't you always love her?

June: Of course.

May: But one cannot be so sure, right? I think language and love are such that we can never them in our grasp. Never master them. Because to master would be to necessitate the process of signifying.[10] What if we lived in a world where it was *necessary* to have one particular name and to love one particular person or a thing?

June: I wouldn't want to live in that world.

May: Me neither. So I don't think the arbitrariness and contingency diminish anything. I think they free us. They let us play.[11]

June: That's wonderful. How about I put it this way: in language and in love we are simply passengers in a *vessel* of contingency.[12]

May: Nicely put. Haha.

June: Haha. You know… I need some fresh air.

May: (*laughs*) June, we're on a plane. Wait until it lands.[13]

Notes

1. Cf. Kant's comments in Part II: "Transcendental Logic" in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), 508. Kant talks about how we can only report the truth "in-itself" as *appearances* but not know the "truth" as *in itself*. Our experience of the appearances makes us *phenomenal* beings.

2. Ibid., 508-9.

3. As Ferdinand de Saussure notes, "the word arbitrary means not that individual speakers can just make language up, but precisely that they can't; the sign is a convention that has to be learned and is not subject to individual will," in "From *Course in General Linguistics*," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 958.

4. Ibid., 964. Since June doesn't already know who "Saussure" is supposed to signify, May could have told her that it *signified* a lady in Venice or a scholar from Mongolia. This shows how the link between the signif*ier* and the signif*ied* is *arbitrary* and that the only reason one understands of Saussure as a linguist is a purely contingent.

5. Ibid., 963. Saussure notes, "the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image."

6. Ibid., 967. Saussure thinks that "... the role of language with respect to thought is not to create a material phonic means for expressing ideas but to serve as a *link* between thought and sound."

7. The *affective* state, which has concerned with the Subject's "emotions/feelings," is to be distinguished from the *cognitive* state that involves process of thought concerned with knowledge.

8. Saussure, 965.

9. Saussure thinks that the signifying process of linking the signifier and the signified has no intrinsic necessity. Therefore, there is no natural connection between them. But one might not say the same about symbols because they are more like metaphors and metaphors (as signifiers) seem to bear semblance with the signified. One can think of the balancing scales as the *symbol* for justice. But the "symbol" of peace as a dove with an olive branch is primarily a sign, not a symbol. How signs become symbols would be an interesting discussion but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

10. If one seeks to *necessitate* the processes that are suposed to be formed naturally, the language becomes dictatorial and demands conformity to it without the willingness of the rest of the *Kultur*.

11. Kant talked about the "aesthetic experience" as a *free play* of the "imagination and understanding" which does not happen because of *necessity* but of *contingency* in *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 62. In an aesthetic experience while looking at works of art the Subject's imagination and understanding engage in a free play by *attending* to the form and temporality of object and finding "purposiveness," but not "purpose," within that experience. We have aesthetic experiences not because of necessity that implies "purpose" but because of contingency that implies "purposiveness" (64). The *play* in language and love is similar to that of aesthetic experiences.

12. One can think of the vessel as metaphor of a confined space in which the "task of reading" remains always "*protected*" and never "*opened*," as Jacques Derrida famously stated: "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" in *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 158. In the reading of a text we are confined by the signifiers and yet are able to find countless *significations* within it. One should not think of the text, or the language and love in context of my writing, as limited; it should be freeing.

13. There is no 'fresh air' inside a plane. Trying to get a fresh air outside the plane will prove fatal. This is metaphorical of how language might limit our experience of the world. Mallarmé described language by using the metaphor of a rain streaked window to convey that language can only *allude* to our impressions of the world but cannot *grasp* the world itself in *Mallarmé: The Poet and His Circle*. (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 227-34. He was critical of the dominant theories of the nineteenth century like realism and Romanticism.

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An Interview with Professor Emily Wilson

Grayson Kennedy

Professor Emily Wilson, author of the first known English translation by a woman of Homer's The Odyssey, visited Bucknell University on Friday, September 7, 2018 to present "Translating The Odyssey Again: Why and How." I had the privilege to interview her for The Humanities Review after she presented a talk for undergraduate Classics majors in the Bucknell Humanities Center.

Kennedy: Why did you translate The Odyssey?

Wilson: I was asked to do it. I decided to do it after looking more closely at other translations, because I wanted to do something authentic with the original that was different than other translations. I realized that the majority of contemporary translations are in free verse, and I wanted instead to use a pentameter because I thought the rhythm, the meter, of the original was so important. I wanted to do more to maintain the pace of the original, so I chose to translate it in the same length as the original in terms of lines. I found many other translations to be stilted or archaizing. There is a tendency in translations to make the original work more pompous that it really is, and more one voiced, only focusing on one character's perspective.

Kennedy: How long did it take you to translate the whole text?

Wilson: Five years.

Kennedy: Did you ever get sick of it?

Wilson: I got stuck a few times

Kennedy: I'm sure!

Wilson: Yeah, I didn't get sick of it, but I certainly got stuck, particularly in the beginning. There where many times were I'd get to a passage and I'd think, "Ok. This is very easy Greek, I know what it means—but I have no idea how to convey this in the same mood or style as the original."

Kennedy: What did you personally gain from translating The Odyssey?

Wilson: It was a lot of fun and very, very interesting because I didn't do it primarily for me [*pause*] it's really for people who haven't read the original. I think that reading translated literature is a necessity for the world. I feel grateful to translate languages I don't know because it broadens my horizons. So I see it as a necessity in terms of global communica-

tions.

Kennedy: Are you aiming primarily toward writing for scholars, or really anyone who wants to read or learn about The Odyssey?

Wilson: I think really for anybody, especially because there's already an existing market for at least American and British high school students who are being "forced" to read it, or for college classes. I hoped I would manage to create a translation that would feel enjoyable enough that students, as well as anyone wanting to read *The Odyssey* for pleasure, could be engaged.

Kennedy: Is translation, in fact, the quintessential poetic mode?

Wilson: I'm not sure if I would say poetic. I would say that translation makes you focus on writing as a craft. In a translation you're making up the words. The thing the text says is already there, and your job is to make up completely different words. So there's a focus on the craft of writing, the craft of creating passages, sentences and lines and phrases in a very different way.

Kennedy: Do you think it is necessary to translate works in the language of every new century? For example, an eighteenth century translation of the Odyssey wouldn't work for twenty first century students

Wilson: It depends on the reader. I personally don't see the point of translating, let's say Shakespeare, if you're a native english speaker.

Kennedy: I remember, when I first read Shakespeare in sixth grade, the text came with lines translated in modern english phrases. Do you think that is necessary?

Wilson: No, I think that it's counterproductive. I think the point of reading old prose is to have the ability to read fluently in the original language. I think not all old texts necessarily need a translator. I think that being a translator is a writerly craft, not just about understanding the language.

Kennedy: As a translator, did you ever feel invisible, or did you feel empowered by your work?

Wilson: There's a lot of discussion in translation theory about whether or not it's a translator's duty to hide themselves. I agree that there's a neglect towards translation … but I don't think that totally foreignizing texts is the solution. People tend to assume that ancient history is unreadable, and if this is reinforced by the translation, it doesn't actually teach your anything about why, for example, everyone in antiquity liked Homer. I've had a range of different feelings about empowerment and not-empowerment.

Kennedy: Professor Wilson, thank you so much for your time.

Wilson: Thanks for having me.

Notes

1. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017).
2. Emily Wilson, interview with the author, September 7, 2018, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA.

Blanchot's "Reading" and my Reading of *Disgrace*

Kathryn Nicolai

It's summertime and I spend fifty minutes every morning on the Metro North. I take the window seat, even though I know it is less preferable to the common passenger and what my dad would call an "amateur commuter move." But I sit there anyways because it allows me to see the quiet suburban world as the train rushes past towards an uproarious city. The blurred images detach me from the somber suits, earbuds, and coffee mugs surrounding me. I can pretend I am not yet touched by the daily haul to work, by the lack of meaning a cubicle embodies. Today I've brought J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. A book I ordered for a class titled "Human Rights Literature" that was unexpectedly cancelled. On the cover blares a gold emblem that says the novel won the Nobel prize in literature. It is esteemed, so I take it off my bookshelf and acknowledge it has value in being read. I have no background on the book other than it likely ties in to the subject matter of Human Rights. As the train sputters forward I start to read—a process and experience Maurice Blanchot analyzes in the essay "Reading" in his book *The Space of Literature*.

According to Blanchot, my years of schooling and my English major do not give me any edge over another reader. Blanchot introduces the act of reading stating, "reading requires no gifts at all and shows this appeal to a natural distinction for what it is. No one is gifted, be [s]he author or reader, and whoever feels that [s]he is feels primarily that [s]he is not—feels infinitely ill equipped absent from the power attributed to [her]."[1] It is *Disgrace* that holds the power. My sole meaning is in my embodiment of the reader. I am a passenger of both the Metro North and the words on the page in front of me. It is my ability as a reader not to know, but to feel and experience the trees fly past me in the window I sit next to and the words singing on the page in front of me. It is the experience and the uncertainty that carries me.

Perhaps I am already doing Blanchot a disservice, choosing *Disgrace* for its printed golden emblem, its Nobel prize. I am judging it by its cover, which deems it "good" and "canonical." But the cover and the merit of *Disgrace* cannot embody the experience of reading, as Blanchot states, "reading gives to the book the abrupt existence which the statue 'seems'

to get from the chisel alone... Somehow the book needs the reader to become a statue."[2] Statues unfold to us visually—that in its spatial perception we affirm its existence. But a book can only unfold or exist for us as we read, as we graze over the text. But for reading, the experience is different. Books unfold themselves to us as we read. Looking at a statue would be the same as just looking at the front cover of a book such as *Disgrace* and deeming it 'good' because of its gold emblem announcing its Nobel prize. Reading allows the text to continue to show itself to us beyond the cover. Not until I am dancing along *Disgrace*'s words can I be engulfed with the experience the novel offers. Critics, such as those who decide the winner of the Nobel prize in literature, determine the good or bad in the book, which attempts to objectify or master it and mark it with or without a badge of merit on the front cover. *Disgrace* would fall in to this canon of good work as a Nobel prize winner bringing people like me to read it for its reputation. This mark of merit on the front cover minimizes *Disgrace* to an esteemed award. Blanchot's thinking opposes the use of critics. In Blanchot's writing reading is not about mastery or total comprehension, but the experience of unfolding that occurs when you read.

Although I am encountering the novel with knowledge of its scholarly praise, I have no working knowledge of its author J.M. Coetzee. To know the details about Coetzee's life or his previous works would have tainted my experience with *Disgrace* further, according to Blanchot. The anonymity of the author is praised by Blanchot when he states, "every reading where consideration of the writer seems to play so great a role is an attack which annihilates [her] in order to give the work back to itself: back to its anonymous presence, to the violent, impersonal affirmation that it is."[3] Without knowing the circumstance of Coetzee I am free of assumptions. I allow my mind not to make judgements about the work or on how Coetzee would be attempting to portray certain storylines that connect to his life and history. I allow my heart to understand and feel solely the words and not the context in which they were written. I am not making specific conclusions based on what the text will mean because Coetzee wrote it, such as knowing that he is a South African writer who has experienced the apartheid and its impact. Instead, I'm pondering the meanings of the words, how it makes me feel and how it confuses me.

Blanchot further discusses the relationship the author has with the reader when he states, "the writer can never read [her] work for the very same reason which gives [her] the illusion that [s]he does. It has to escape from the one who makes it, complete itself by putting [her] at a distance, culminate in this 'distancing' which dispossesses [her] conclusively, this distancing which then, precisely, takes the form of the reading (and in which the reading takes form)."[4] When an author is in the middle of her writing process, they read their own work and try to embody the role of the reader, but they cannot truly imitate the reader because the writer is too personally connected to the work. They know the author as themselves in a way that does not allow them to read without a fogged lens of pride or personal interpretation. It is this "distancing" that Blanchot discusses which allows the work to exist by itself and comes to fruition when read by the reader, not the author.

When I read I am not myself. I am not Kathryn Nicolai riding the Metro North working as an unpaid intern. I am not a twenty-year-old white female from a New York suburb. Instead I am empathetic. I am the characters the novel presents me. I walk in someone else's shoes. I live a life that I know nothing about and start to have an idea about what this other life could mean as I flip the pages. Blanchot discusses the necessity of depersonalization, stating, "what most threatens reading is this: the reader's reality, [her] personality, [her] immodesty, [her] stubborn insistence upon remaining [herself] in the face of what [s]he reads—a [wo]man who knows in general how to read."[5] If I were me when I read, I would not be able to feel the paralysis of experiencing rape that Lucy feels in *Disgrace*, nor the disconnect that occurs between Lucy and her father David after, nor David's love and yearning to connect with Lucy despite his inability to comprehend how she might feel.

I could not even get a hint of the experience of these emotions if I were myself. It is only through the embodiment of these characters, not myself and my own thoughts about the world, that I am fully engulfed in the text and its world. It is through this depersonalization that I am altered, taking a piece of these characters with me when I get off the train and walk south towards Union Square. It is through Lucy and David that I understand the MeToo movement in a new way. I empathize with the survivor's paralysis, the numerous reasons that keep survivors from pressing

charges and speaking out, and a male's inability to comprehend rape and its full effects. I hear David's concern on Lucy's apathy on staying slim and dressing nicely; I am not preaching feminist ideology on the male gaze and the limitation of women. I am listening. I am understanding and feeling as David. I undergo the same transition as David who slowly changes his values on animal rights and enjoys the companionship of animals by the end. Never before had I thought about or understood animal rights in the ways discussed in novel. It is through the empathy of reading that I am changed. I am no longer me when I read and I am different because I have read.

I did not read *Disgrace* for class nor did I write an essay on it trying to interpret its meaning. I did not master it or comprehend it. When I finished it I was confused. Nothing is resolved. The characters still have so much to cope with throughout the rest of their lives. There is a racial context to the novel I cannot seem to pin down. I sit in a puddle of confusion and without the instruction or analysis of a professor, I sit alone pondering what it all means. I close the pages of *Disgrace* from the window seat of the Metro North that allows me to experience and feel the world flashing before my eyes in a new perspective. In the same way, I see and feel life in a new way when I read in the way Blanchot describes. I will return to *Disgrace* not to master it, but to experience it again, allowing it to unfold itself to me in a new way, allowing myself to become someone I do not yet know.

Notes

1. Maurice Blanchot, The Space of Literature, Trans. by Ann Smock. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 190-1.
2. Ibid., 192-3.
3. Ibid., 192.
4. Ibid., 199.
5. Ibid., 197.

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Queer Poetry: Comparing the "Barbaric Yawp" to the "Howl"

Lauren Ziolkowski

Poets Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, though having inhabited different literary and social eras, are intangibly connected through a number of commonalities in their writings, stylistically and culturally (in addition, according to Ginsberg, to their indirect genital contact). Stylistically, both writers frequently use long lines—suspending subject, verb, or end-punctuation for sometimes page-long stanzas in order to allow the reader to meander through the work. Both writers also use catalogs as means of encouraging the reader to empathize with a diverse array of perspectives outside of her own. While these stylistic similarities are worth noting, it is their connection to the values of their respective time periods that stands as central to their relatedness as poet. Both poets include themes of sexuality within their works—typically detailing sexual encounters between lovers, as well as directly celebrating the naked human body. Among the more prominent similarities between the works of these two poets is the inclusion of homoerotic themes. This paper seeks to explore the representation of romantic attraction between two men in the works of Whitman and Ginsberg in order to demonstrate that Whitman writes of his alleged attraction to men in a much less overt—and much more emotional—manner than does Ginsberg.

Before dissecting the texts of these writers, however, one should note that Whitman himself never openly identified as gay. Although intellectual debate persists as to whether or not he truly was a member of the queer community, much of the biographical and literary research done has affirmed his alleged attraction to men. The poet likely did not grapple with his queer sexuality until some point in the 1850s, according to American poet Galway Kinnell, primarily because he was "subject to the same inhibitions as the whole period was."[1] That is, Whitman was just as likely to suppress his queer identity as was the majority of LGTBQ+ society in the nineteenth century as a result of rampant homophobia. In fact, as noted in the footnote to Calamus in the 2002 Norton Critical Edition of *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, when his sexuality was eagerly questioned by English poet John Addington Symonds, Whitman aggressively protested, asserting that he was not only heterosexual, but had

apparently fathered six children with various women.[2] According to psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's phenomenon of over-resistance, Whitman's stern refusal in response to being questioned about his sexuality ultimately suggests his queer sexual identity. He overcompensates for this repressed identity by not only denying it, but fervently attempting to prove his heterosexuality.[3]

Many long-time readers of Whitman are able to recognize the surfacing of this repression in Calamus—most notably in the poem "Here the Frailest Leaves of Me", in which Whitman admits to the revealing, and simultaneously concealing, nature of his writings. In this poem, he claims, "Here I shade and hide my thoughts—I myself do not expose them, / And yet they expose me more than all my other poems."[4] Here, Whitman expresses that his authentic thoughts are unconsciously revealed in his poetry. He, himself, may not outwardly announce his gay identity, but this identity is woven throughout in his works. Between his defensive use of resistance, lack of evidence tracing any children back to his seed, and vulnerability suggested by "Here the Frailest Leaves of Me," it is possible that Whitman made these extravagant claims about fathering six children in an anxious attempt to mask his true sexuality.

The queer tropes that appear in Whitman's poetry within the context of this personal background greater illustrate the poet's emotional attraction to men. Of course, this is not to say that Whitman never did experience sexual attraction to men, as such a claim is likely untrue. However, sexual relations between men in the nineteenth century were considered far more taboo than were emotional relationships. In fact, emotional companionships between two members of the same sex—often termed "homosocial" relationships—were considered both acceptable and normal during the period. The prominence of state sodomy laws in the United States at this time, however, served as a strong indication of America's disapproval of same-sex sexual relationships – specifically between men. Thus, the sexual attraction Whitman experienced toward other men, as a result of societal condemnation, is made much more discrete in his poetry than is his emotional attraction. Take, for example, the following erotic scene chronicled in Section 5 of *Song of Myself*:

I mind once how we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-stript heart,
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.[5]

With some of the aforementioned information in mind, we read this oral sex scene as though it were between Whitman and another male lover. However, whether or not Whitman truly is alluding to a scenario between himself and another male, he anticipates our assumptions and disguises this erotic scene potentially between two men as literally being between the body and soul. Thus, if Whitman were accused of alluding to gay oral sex in this section of *Song of Myself*, he could simply deny this accusation, claiming that the aforementioned erotic scene is between body and soul—not man and man.

A similar disguise is seen again in Section 11 of *Song of Myself* in which Whitman describes a masturbation scene between a female voyeur and twenty-eight swimming men upon whom she gazes. He descriptively notes, "The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from their long hair, / Little streams pass'd all over their bodies."[6] These two lines sexualize the bodies of the male swimmers, putting them in a position of spectacle. The female voyeur, however, is not sexualized to the same degree as the men upon whom she gazes. Because it is the men, rather than the female voyeur, whom Whitman describes as sexually desirable, he feels an obligation to disguise his own implicit sexual attraction to the bathers as that of the female voyeur—placing himself in her body. In this way, Whitman cannot be outwardly accused of exhibiting sexual desire for men, because he masks his own desire within the fabricated narrative of his poem. He, himself, is the body receiving fellatio from the soul in Section 5. He, himself, is the woman viewing the male swimmers here. He simply substitutes some other subject in the poem for himself in order to protect his queer identity from homophobic disdain.

Ginsberg, on the other hand, was much more overt about his sexual attraction to men, likely, in part, due to influence from the oncoming Sexual Liberation Movement of the 1960s. Featured in the "Walt Whitman" episode of the Voices and Visions series, Ginsberg confidently asserts,

"[Whitman] loved his fellows. He loved his young fellows…whether it was genital is another matter. Likely it was, as I know I've slept with Neal Cassady, who slept with Gavin Arthur, who slept with Edward Carpenter, who described sleeping with Whitman to Gavin Arthur."[7]

Unlike Whitman, Ginsberg was not fearful of using his own, first-person voice when referencing sexually explicit, and often non-fictitious, scenes in his queer poetry. Consider some of the more straightforward lines in his poem "Sphincter" from *Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems 1986-1992* which read, "I hope my good old asshole holds out / … active, eager, receptive to phallus / coke bottle, candle, carrot /banana & fingers." He then goes on to note his sphincter's "rubbery muscular" texture and beckons any "orgasmic friend" to come enter him, "unashamed wide open for joy."[8] In his poem, Ginsberg makes clear that his specific sphincter is the one being addressed—that his sphincter welcomes the phallus and whatever else may come. With the removal of those sodomy laws that thwarted Whitman's ability to be outward about his sexual relations with men, in addition to the socio-political influence of the Sexual Liberation Movement that contributed to the normalization of queer relationships and deconstruction of traditional gender roles, Ginsberg feels less of a necessity to hide his sexual desires from his audience. The societal constraints that inhibited Whitman were in the process of degradation by the mid-twentieth century.

Even in his better-known works, Ginsberg does not shy away from detailing his sexual experiences with other men. Consider his 1955 poem "Howl (For Carl Solomon)," which honors those members of society who are generally met with resentment, such as the impoverished, queer, or radical socio-political activists. Ginsberg, unapologetically using provocative language, celebrates those men "who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy," and those "who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailor, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love."[9] This line is especially significant in that it explicitly refers to gay oral sex between two men—directly contrasting Whitman's masked allusion in Section 5 of *Song of Myself* and effectively indicating the continued degradation of stigma surrounding sexual encounters between men in the twentieth century.

While not as explicit about his sexual encounters as Ginsberg, Whit-

man is rather direct about the emotional attraction he has experienced with members of the same sex. In fact, even Ginsberg himself recognized these differences between his own writing and that of Whitman's. During a brief segment on Whitman's sexuality in Voices and Visions, Ginsberg asserts, "[Whitman] never was overt in the sense of the 'love that dare not speak its name.' On the other hand, his descriptions of his feelings were overt."[10]

Indeed, Whitman displays a much greater comfortability expressing emotional attraction to men in his poetry than he does expressing sexual attraction. Perhaps the most widely-cited lines that suggest this emotional connection appear in "When I Heard at the Close of the Day." Reveling in the memories of being united with his male lover, Whitman describes, "… the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in cool night, / In the stillness in the autumn moonbeams his face was inclined toward me, / And his arm lay lightly around my breast – and that night I was happy."[11] Notice that the two men are merely sleeping, the lover's "arm [laying] lightly around [Whitman's] breast." This tender scene between two male lovers makes no reference to a sexual experience (such as fellatio or masturbation). However, Whitman paints the image of two men embracing one another, united under a mutual sense of emotional security. Most notably, unlike his use of homoeroticism in *Song of Myself*, Whitman recounts his emotional experiences with men in the first-person point of view. He uses I-statements such as "… the one I love …" and "… that night I was happy."[12] By doing so, the poet not only confirms that he, himself, had these emotional experiences with another man, but that he feels comfortable letting others know about them.

This emotional attachment is suggested again in another Calamus poem titled "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances," in which Whitman claims that the love shared between he and his male lovers secures his sense of reality. Of his doubts about reality, he notes, "To me these and the like of these are curiously answer'd by my lovers, my dear friends, / When he whom I love travels with me or sits a long while holding me by the hand."[13] Again, there is no reference to a particular sexual experience as there is in *Song of Myself*; rather, there is only the emotional—in this case, almost spiritual—bond that unites male lovers. It is not the sex or physical attachment that secures Whitman's sense of reality, but it is the

emotional reliance on a man that solidifies his doubt. Similar to his use of language in "When I Heard at the Close of Day," the poet recounts his emotional desires in the first-person point of view in "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances." Just as it does in the latter poem, the use of first-person insinuates that Whitman feels no obligation to mask his emotional attraction to men as he does his sexual attraction.

Whitman spent much of his time in the mid-to-late 1850s exploring this emotional attraction to men in Pfaff's Cellar—a restaurant and literary paradise for aspiring writers in bohemian Manhattan. An organized group of men seeking romantic companionship with other men—of which Whitman was included—known as the Fred Gray Association frequented Pfaff's Cellar.[14] It was among the Fred Gray Association that the poet met his alleged male lover Fred Vaughn, with whom he often shared letters. However strong their romance was, historical evidence suggests that it was Peter Doyle who ultimately stole Whitman's heart (so much so that Doyle allegedly inspired the writing of Drum-Taps) in the late 1960s.[15]

Despite his membership in the organization (and the relationships that are rumored to have ensued), Whitman was confined to expressing romantic and sexual desire in secrecy—under the societally approved guise of homosocial friendship. Professor of English at Université de Montréal Robert Martin claims that, although being openly gay was decriminalized in a number of Western nations by the late-1800s, men were still being repeatedly attacked—even killed—for same-sex relationships in England and the United States well through the nineteenth century.[16] Because Ginsberg was not subject to the same intensity of homophobia in the mid-to-late twentieth century as was Whitman in the nineteenth century, he had much more freedom to express his sexualized identity in his poetry.

Rebellion against WASP America's orthodox views regarding sexuality strengthened in the mid-twentieth century as rock 'n' roll music, second wave feminism, and other major influences gained the attention of America's youth and degraded those traditional value systems encouraged by its parents. By the 1960s, the Sexual Revolution in the United States was well underway, granting Ginsberg greater leeway to express his gayness openly without constant fear of personal harm.

Whitman, however, lived in an America that was far from accepting

of total sexual liberation. For this reason, he felt a societal pressure to disguise his sexual desire for men in his poetry. Rather than outwardly expressing his sexual experiences with other men, he alludes only to emotional experiences, as comradery between men was much more accepted as a social norm. Nonetheless, small scraps of his sexual desire for men are littered, perhaps without deliberation, throughout his poetry—noticeable only to those willing to find them. As Ginsberg points out in "A Supermarket in California," "I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator andeyeing the grocery boys."[17] We, too, see you, Whitman—receiving fellatio, watching those twenty-eight men wet and naked, gazing upon the grocery boys. You may not have been as outward about your queer identity as was Ginsberg, but we recognize the signs you left us among your leaves.

Notes

1. *Voices and Visions: Walt Whitman*, video, 1987, 56 mins 41 secs.

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4. Walt Whitman, "Here the Frailest Leaves of Me," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 2-3.

5. Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 87-90.

6. Ibid., 210-211.

7. *Voices and Visions: Walt Whitman*, video, 56:41, 1987, http://www.learner.org/catalog/extras/vvspot/Whitman.html.

8. Allen Ginsberg, "Sphincter," in *Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems, 1986-1992* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 1-15.

9. Allen Ginsberg, "Howl (For Carl Solomon)," in *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956), 36-37.

10. *Voices and Visions: Walt Whitman*, video, 56:41, 1987. http://www.learner.org/catalog/extras/vvspot/Whitman.html.

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From Prometheus to Zombies: The Cultural Phenomenon of the Living Dead

Katie Kooiman

Mary Shelley's famous Gothic novel *Frankenstein* is also known by its longer title of *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*.[1] As the extended title suggests, Shelley's inspiration for the novel came from the story of Prometheus in Greek mythology. According to the myth, Prometheus is the god of fire and is known as a master craftsman because of his connection to fire and to the creation of mortals.[2] The legend of Prometheus developed throughout the Greek writings of Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Ovid. However, their interpretations of the Prometheus myth have been combined and changed through history—in the writings of Shaftsbury in the eighteenth century, by Byron in his play *Prometheus*, and in the poem by Mary Shelley's husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, titled *Prometheus Unbound*.[3]

Although these other writers were influential in Shelley's formation of *The Modern Prometheus*, they all differ from the Creature found in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in that they do not show the fragmenting and devastating effects that language can have in the life of a newly created being. The Creature within Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is vulnerable not only because he is experiencing life for the first time alone, but also because he finds himself to be the "Other" within a society that quickly rejects him based on his appearances and language. Throughout the novel, *Frankenstein* does not use language to love and guide his Creation; rather, *Frankenstein* uses a limited amount of hurtful language to reject his Creature. *Frankenstein*'s absence in Creature's life as his maker is reflected in Creature's lack of knowledge in language or even symbols. The negative and fragmented influence of language within Creature's life is what causes him to never see the meaning of his life.

Despite the differences in Shelley's *Frankenstein* in comparison to the other forms of the Prometheus myth, it important for readers of *Frankenstein* to know the elements of the original story to observe how the Greek myth has changed based on culture. Within the play Prometheus Bound by the Greek dramatist Aeschylus, one finds a representation of Prometheus that would have been close to the way that the ancient Greeks

viewed this myth. As "one of the greatest tragic playwrights of his generation," Aeschylus is known as the "Father of Greek Tragedy" as he was writing before both Sophocles and Euripides.[4] Aeschylus, with his strong influence on Greek drama and tragedy, brought his own interpretation to his *Prometheus Bound*, as he rejected traditional Greek religion and showed Zeus as a tyrant. Conversely, in Hesiod's poem about Prometheus, Zeus is written as a "god of justice."[5]

There are many ways that characters within the Prometheus myth have been portrayed, however in Aeschylus' influential tragedy, Prometheus' tragic flaw is his love of humanity. Prometheus steals fire from Zeus because of this love, but Zeus punishes him by commanding him to be chained and have his liver plucked by an eagle every night.[6] Even though Prometheus' fate is tragic, he is shown to suffer on behalf of his creation. Already in this beginning scene, Aeschylus' Prometheus is different from Mary Shelley's Prometheus because in Mary Shelley's narrative, Frankenstein does not love his creation. Instead of helping his Creature, Frankenstein is at once ashamed of what he has done; in fact, he is filled with "breathless horror and disgust."[7] Ironically, Frankenstein feels the most guilt about himself as he sees reflections of his own imperfection in his Creature.

Additionally, the Greek tragedy portrays a different version of the gods in *Prometheus Bound* because in both Zeus and Prometheus the reader sees a higher being who is actively involved in the lives of humanity, though that engagement is often displayed through anger. Nonetheless, Shelley displays a different view of Creator and God in that Frankenstein leaves his own Creation. Creature is left on his own as the "Other" in society without anyone to care for him because Frankenstein has rejected him. Shelley's detached Creator demonstrates both a verbal and physical absence in his Creature's life—an indication of her culture's impact on the Prometheus myth. Shelley's text is written in an era in which the idea of a God-guided Creation ceded to a widespread belief in the power of scientific progress.

Responding to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, Percy Shelley wrote his four-act poem, *Prometheus Unbound*. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* starts similarly to *Prometheus Bound* in that Prometheus is chained to the Caucasus Mountain. However, as the title suggests, Percy Shelley's poem differs

from Aeschylus' play in that it describes Prometheus' journey to freedom rather than bondage. What is important in this study of Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is the way that he incorporates science into this Greek myth. As shown in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the modern society rejected the traditional beliefs of faith as truth. Instead, science and objectivity were idealized because they could be proven. The influence of science is shown in *Prometheus Unbound* in that Percy Shelley "associated electricity with love, light, and life."[8] Both Mary and Percy Shelley viewed electricity as something that is life-bringing, a view that could be linked to the scientific discoveries during the time when they were writing. Yet, Mary Shelley does not explain how Frankenstein brings his Creature to life; in referencing the creation of life she writes, "I see by your eagerness and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be; listen patiently until the end of the story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject."[9] Although Mary Shelley's narrator does not share how life is formed from death, readers suspect that Mary Shelley's inspiration came from the scientific discoveries of her time.

According to Cartwright and Baker, a scientist named Giovanni Aldini "created a sensation when he showed that the limbs of all manner of dead animals jolted when electrified."[10] In addition, there was another account from one of Aldini's experiments that describe the movements of a dead corpse: "the jaw began to quiver…and the left eye actually opened."[11] Throughout both of their writings based on *Prometheus*, Mary and Percy Shelley show life that is caused and created by science rather than a divine God. After Mary and Percy developed the idea of the living dead within their stories, many other aspects of culture such as film and television shows expanded on this idea of a deformed monster or "Other" living within society.

In postmodern society, the idea of the living dead is represented most predominantly in popular culture through depiction of zombies. Even though representations of vampires have also had a great amount of influence in popular culture over the past fifty years, the images of the zombies are more meaningful because they represent "what it means to be a human in a postmodern world."[12] Because of the rejection of objectivity of truth by the postmodern movement, people are invited to view all

of life as a carnival; individuals can "play" the daily game of reinventing themselves. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism is related to the postmodern cultural phenomenon of zombies because as "parodies of human beings, zombies reveal the most base and terrifying aspects of humanity, yet they also expose the human body as ridiculous and absurd."[13] People within postmodern culture identify with the way that the zombie presents the human body because, like the carnivalesque view of life as a carnival, the absurdity of the zombies justifies humanity's continual reinvention of the self.

As a reflection of the obsession with zombies and the living dead, many television shows about these monsters have developed and gained popularity. One of these television shows is called *The Walking Dead*. This American television series, created in 2010, follows the life of the lead character named Rick Grimes. Rick awakens from many months of being in a coma to find that he is in a post-apocalyptic world that has been overtaken by zombies. Although Rick's main battle in this television series is to protect himself and his family from the zombies, he also seeks shelter from the dangerous humans throughout the show as well. The popularity of *The Walking Dead* reveals society's fascination with zombies. However, the creator of the show, Robert Kirkman, states that it is "about us" and "about how we respond to crisis."[14] Viewers of *The Walking Dead* may be attracted to the ways that people in a post-apocalyptic world might respond to crises and learn how to rebuild society after the removal of all social structures

While all structure is taken away in post-apocalyptic worlds like that of *The Walking Dead*, the characters are left begging for the existence of a God who can bring order to the disorder of the world. In a similar way, Creature's greatest desire is that his master, Frankenstein, would accept him and bring order into his meaningless life. Frankenstein's search to understand the meaning of life is represented in his search for meaning within language. However, the language that Creature learns does not bring him acceptance. Rather, through language, Creature learns why he is rejected by humanity, an insight that leads him to reject the meaning of life.

Borrowing inspiration from the Greek mythology of Prometheus, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* began the cultural phenomenon of the living

dead. The idea of the living dead is found within zombies, but it is also found in any person or being that finds itself to be the outside or "Other" within a society. Although the myth of Prometheus influenced Mary Shelley's story about Frankenstein's creation, her monster of Creature is unique in that he is shaped by his language as well as Frankenstein's lack of accepting language. Throughout *Frankenstein*, people do not accept Creature because they are frightened by his appearance—not because he acts in the way of a monster. Rather than being afraid of Creature, the characters within the story should be afraid of Frankenstein because Creature is only a reflection of his fallen creator. However, it is for this reason that Frankenstein cannot accept Creature; he sees the "Other" that he has rejected within himself. The way that humans learn to accept the "Other" within society is by facing their own brokenness first and discovering that all people—the living dead included—continue to reach towards a creator who will save them.

Notes

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2. Mark Cartwright, "Prometheus," Ancient History Encyclopedia, April 20, 2013, https://www.ancient.eu/Prometheus/.

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12. Jasie Stokes, "Ghouls, Hell and Transcendence: The Zombie in Popular Culture from "Night of the Living Dead" to "Shaun of the Dead,"" *All Theses and Dissertations*, 2010, 3.

13. Ibid,. 26.

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Aesthetic Transgressions in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

Evan Dekens

In the current culture, Victor's creature from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is branded as a hulking green figure, stripped of all linguistic, intellectual, and physical capability, devoid of not only its original identity as a somewhat sympathetic, tragic intellectual figure, but of its individuality and personal autonomy. The character "Frankenstein" is now an archetype instead of a character, a symbol of the impure, the ramshackle and the misplaced. Bridging the disparity and tracking the path that lead to this branding starts with the original 1818 text and ends in the current era. Tracking this evolution highlights the ways that the creature has been increasingly stripped of its intellect, its empathetic nature, and its individuality in an effort to symbolize *Frankenstein*'s monster as representative of the suppression of the intellectual, cultural, racial, or aesthetic "other" in society.

As distinguished from its public persona, Frankenstein's monster originated as a complex, intellectual, sympathetic character. Within the original text, the linguistic and the visual often interact in problematic ways for the creature, with his offensive appearance often irreconcilable with his undeniable humanistic characteristics and intellectual worth. As Denise Gigante describes it, "both the uncanny and the ugly fall under the rubric of the fearful; the crucial distinction between them is that while something may be uncanny for one person and yet not so for another, the ugly is universally offensive."[1] The two competing identities within the creature can be identified by their role in the interior and exterior aspects of the creature's personal identity. The autodidactic nature of the creature's intellectual enlightenment does not exclude the visual entirely, but only addresses it in the ways that the creature perceives himself as opposed to the way he is perceived by others. In these instances, the creature is not totally blind to the grotesque symbol that his body represents, despite his persistent belief that his auditory and intellectual value might in some way compensate for physical appearances. Though the creature displays vice and virtue, as well as complex inner moral conflict, even the recognition of multiple, often competing aspects of identity within a singular individual, discounts validity of the "othering" later experienced

by the creature. After his somewhat civil and fruitful encounter with the blind man living in the hovel next to him, the visual silence the creature had before enjoyed with the inhabitants of the house is broken, and the creature is immediately demonized categorically.

Whereas relationships in the novel which are expressed primarily through the use of dialogue display the creature as an incredibly articulate, sympathetic, and unfairly persecuted figure, his appearance often discounts or undermines all internal characteristics. To the periphery characters, as well as Victor, the horror of the visual is thematized by its constant connection to the violent and horrific aspects of the narrative, illustrating not only the way that visual horror produces a more deceptively potent emotional response, but also acts as one of the primary motivators of moral and psychological prejudice. The use of dramatic irony in the case of the murder of William is especially significant in this respect, as the sharp incongruity between the substance of the events which occur, and the version of the events which the characters perceive and act upon in the novel highlight the problematic aspects which visually based conclusions and judgements pose. Nearly all the moral transgressions in the novel may be categorized in a similar way. Victor's scientific crimes are based in his failure to design his creature in the image of a natural human being. Whereas by all other standards, the creature is in every respect just as distinctly human as every other character in the novel, his separateness from society is founded on his corrupted image. The initial abandonment of the creature, his rejection from society and eventual deadly rampage, the framing of the murder of Henry Clerval, and Walton's final abdication of Victor's inherited moral crusade against the creature all come as a result of the incongruity between the visually perceived truths, and the linguistic/auditory elements of the narrative.

These incongruities within *Frankenstein* establish its moral message clearly: the subjugation of individuals based on appearance of any kind is inherently wrong. The complexity introduced by the novel's subversion of traditional antagonists and protagonist makes this message all the more prescient and contextualizes the horror of the creature as perceived in the novel as entirely diegetic. However, In the public sphere, the novel's visual characteristics were interpreted much differently, with most reviewers either focusing on the monstrosity of the descriptive prose, the then ideo-

logically taboo themes which the novel explored, and attacks on the credibility of the author based on her gender and age. At the same time, audiences were intrigued with the image of the monstrous as portrayed in the novel, and the ambiguity of the novel's depictions of corrupted nature. It's likely for these reasons that the public discontent with the novel laid the groundwork for the later iterations of the creature in culture, film, and representative media.

The first filmed adaptation of *Frankenstein* in 1910 marks a dramatic turn towards the starkly visual representations of *Frankenstein*'s monster seen today.[2] To adapt Shelley's dense novel into a short silent film, several elements of the narrative had to be stripped away in order to adapt the most essential elements of the narrative with as much efficiency as possible. The final product displays a conflict between a precocious scientist, and the demonic, immoral creature who torments him. Adapting the story of *Frankenstein* into a visual medium, Edison Studios stripped away all literary qualities of the work, leaving each character chained to their appearance and physical presence entirely. This establishes binary moral distinctions between the creature and Victor, showcasing Victor as a sympathetic intellectual, trying to preserve the sanctity of domestic on-screen space from a creature whose only agency throughout the film is rooted in either revenge or sexual deviance. The ending is especially significant in its message about class relations. Just as Victor's creature is about to physically dominate Victor in on-screen space, he glances his image in the reflection of a mirror and relents almost immediately.

Whereas in the novel, the monster's abrasive reaction to his own self-image spurns increased efforts to develop intellectually and linguistically in order to better compensate for his appearance, the creature in film adaptation is made subservient by it, rendered powerless by its own identity. The final shots, wherein the monster becomes the image he sees in the mirror, followed by Victor's appearance adjacent to the mirror in his place, and his eventual disappearance when Victor raises his hand and acknowledges the monster in the mirror, is representative of a deeply destructive process of spectatorship throughout the history of *Frankenstein*'s iconography. The establishment of a frame within a frame in the film establishes the method by which the characters perceive their own identity as a purely visual process. By removing the creature from physical space

and quarantining him to the image in the mirror, he becomes virtual as opposed to material, a symbol of aesthetic corruption stripped of all desires, thoughts, or individual agency. Furthermore, Victor's relationship with the image in the mirror suggests that the creature's transition to a symbol is the only way that he can truly be defeated. By denying the material existence of the creature, Victor is able to identify the creature as a manifestation of his own identity, and his subsequent control over it afterwards allows him to remove the creature from his mind and his life effortlessly.

Here the visual is used as a method of ideological control over the problematic aesthetic mismatch between the creature's monstrous appearance and its humanistic, culturally valuable interior. A recognition of these complex characteristics in such a famously monstrous character would be an endorsement of the value of women, the poor, or the racially persecuted, as the method by which those groups are subjugated, controlled, and persecuted is by the same symbolic manipulation present in the film. The creature's characterization as a protagonist supports a revolutionary theme in the novel. By giving the creature physical dominance over not only the characters within the novel, but of the events which propel the narrative, the creature wields more power than any other character within the book. Because the thematic implications of the original text posed a threat to the social, economic, racial, and moral hierarchies of European society, the character was stripped down to the one-dimensional qualities of its aesthetic existence so that the supremacy of the rich over the poor, the intellectual over the uneducated, and the microcosm of the societal "other" might be preserved.

Since the film was created by and adapted for the screen by members of the upper class for an intended audience of the poor working class, the Edison film adaptation may serve as a projection of the upper class's perception of the lower class, as dirty, sexually deviant, and devoid of any and all intelligence, but the internal spectatorship within the film also captures the innate fascination with visual manipulation. In James A. Wefferman's view, "by forcing us to face the monster's physical repulsiveness, which he can never deny or escape and which aborts his every hope of gaining sympathy, film versions of Frankenstein prompt us to rethink his monstrosity in terms of visualization."[3] Such intentions emphasize the

1910 *Frankenstein*'s conformity to vaudeville tradition, and the cinema of attractions that encapsulated much of the film of that time period. By placing emphasis on the visual manipulation of natural forms, and their dominance over the creature's identity, the film undermines the themes of racially motivated social justice, political revolution and reform, and socioeconomic inequity in favor of presenting narratives wherein the lower-class viewers root against the success of creature and by extension, root against themselves.

Similar narrative approaches to this kind of aesthetic mismatch came later on in the 20th century. David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980) takes a much more nuanced approach in chronicling the aesthetic challenges met by real life historical figure Joseph Carrey Merrick as he tries to integrate himself into English society.[4] Merrick's character begins as a visual attraction, not unlike the creature from the original *Frankenstein* adaptation. His arc throughout the narrative succeeds in showcasing the aesthetic monstrosity of Merrick as a periphery characteristic to an otherwise autonomous and virtuous individual. In the dramatic peak of the film, Merrick is cornered at a train station dominated in the frame by a crowd of people who harass and abuse Merrick for his hideous form, unable to perceive him as a human being with human rights. When Merrick breaks the silence and declares his own humanity, the auditory identification of Merrick as a human being silences the crowd, and the violent mob quickly becomes docile and compassionate. The film concludes with Merrick as an idolized figure, a martyr and a symbol not of monstrosity, but of exemplifying virtue and optimism in spite of aesthetic monstrosity. This film marks a turn in the representation of the monstrous, and a return to the inner complexities of the original creature, as well as the strong moral message that Mary Shelley's original *Frankenstein* connotes.

The disproportionate value placed on appearance over substance in *Frankenstein* is not a problem which exists in singularity, but is representative of a complex relationship which affects the way that race, gender, and age function in the personal, cultural, and political relationships. The labelling of individuals for their aesthetic characters in film and literature is important, but the function of stories like *Elephant Man* and *Frankenstein* is to break down the process by which groups and individuals are labelled and controlled in order to emphasize their negative aspects and destruc-

tive nature.

Notes

1. Denise Gigante, "Facing the Ugly: The Case of 'Frankenstein,'" ELH, vol. 67, no. 2, 2000, p. 567, www.jstor.org/stable/30031925.

2. J. Searle, Dawley, director. *Frankenstein*, Edison Studios, 1910.

3. James A. W. Heffernan, "Looking at the Monster: 'Frankenstein' and Film." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1997, p. 136, www.jstor.org/stable/1344161.

4. David Lynch, director, *The Elephant Man*, 1980.

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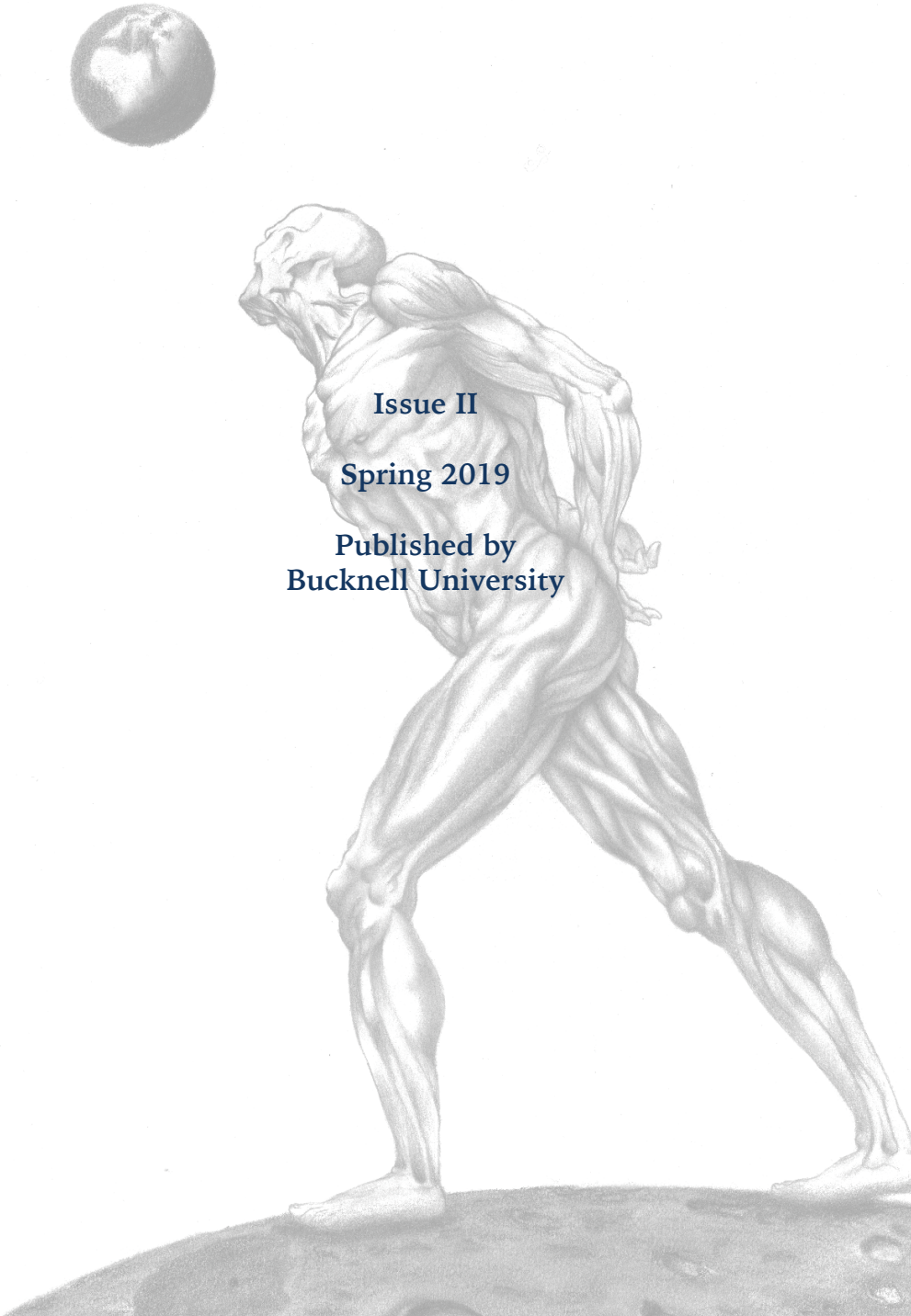

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