

THE KIRBY CANON

A winning compendium
of student composition
reviewed by faculty and peers.

“Words—so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them.”

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

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ABOUT THE KIRBY CANON

This edition of *The Kirby Canon* is a collection of outstanding student essays from courses taught within the Wilkes University English Department during the 2008-2009 academic year. Essays were nominated by faculty or self-nominated. All essay submissions were evaluated by a group consisting of Wilkes English faculty and student reviewers. So as to avoid bias, faculty reviewers did not evaluate essays submitted by students from their own courses.

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Faculty Editors: Drs. Chad Stanley and Helen Davis
Copy Editor and Layout: Stefanie M. McHugh

A Fray-ed Life

Michael Martinelli

The song “How to Save a Life” by The Fray has been an extremely inspirational song, to say the least. However, the meaning of its lyrics may not be as evident at first. Initially, a person’s first assumption would be that the song is about a break-up between a man and a woman. Much to many listeners’ surprise, the song is about something totally different. While both meanings deal with the destruction of a “life,” the “life” we are talking about has different meanings. This conflict plays the role of mystifying the listener by initially implying a different meaning than the one intended (Berger 15). This paper will dissect the song and its lyrics and explain the actual meaning of the song “How to Save a Life.”

As stated, it seems as though the song is about a break-up between a man and a woman. A key observation regarding the first verse is that the singer uses the third-person, and it can be assumed that the “you” he talks about is a woman:

Step one you say we need to talk /
He walks you say sit down it’s just a talk /
He smiles politely back at you /
You stare politely right on through /
Some sort of window to your right /
As he goes left and you stay right /
Between the lines of fear and blame /
And you begin to wonder why you came. (How to Save a Life)

This use of the third-person may indicate that the song is not about him but two other people, or it can mean that he does not want to make it evident to the audience that it really is him and that he will be revealing a personal event in his life. Much more can be said about the chorus and it is here that the third person used in the first verse fades away:

Where did I go wrong, I lost a friend /
 Somewhere along in the bitterness /
 And would I have stayed up with you all night /
 Had I known how to save a life. (How to Save a Life)

Here, the singer begins to use the term “I,” indicating that the song actually involves him in some way. The last piece of information taken from this chorus is in the final line. This “life” he talks about may not be a “life” at all, but could be a relationship. This is taken from the idea that when two people become part of each other’s lives, those lives now become one and eventually over time form “a life.”

Eventually, his use of the third-person comes back and is especially clear in the second verse of the song. This is where the song seems to signify a fight or the actual break-up. In the first line he says, “As he begins to raise his voice” (How to Save a Life). Towards the end of the verse, there might be the most valuable quotes. In lines five, six and seven, it seems as though maybe the woman was unfaithful to the man and that can be why they are on the verge of breaking-up:

As he begins to raise his voice /
 You lower yours and grant him one last choice /
 Drive until you lose the road /
 Or break with the ones you’ve followed /
 He will do one of two things /
 You will admit to everything /
 Or he’ll say he’s just not the same /
 And you’ll begin to wonder why you came. (How to Save a Life)

Ultimately, at first glance this song may represent a break-up between a man and woman due to the woman's unfaithfulness. The song also makes clear of the fact that the woman regrets what she has done, that not only has she lost a friend but she has lost a "life." A key element of the song is the way the song sounds. The tune of the song is played in minor key. Minor key songs sound somber and give the listener a sense of sadness. This is the seemingly evident meaning of the song, but this somewhat distorted reading mystifies the true meaning (Berger 15).

In fact, the song has nothing to do with a relationship debacle and the true meaning may be much of a surprise to many. The real meaning was revealed in an article printed by *USA Today* when they interviewed the band. Isaac Slade, the band's lead singer actually intended the song to be about a boy he mentored at a camp for troubled teens (Gardner). The teen was addicted to crack and was sent to this camp by his parents. They told him to get help or they would never speak to him again. Slade ends up stepping in at the camp in order to help the boy straighten out his life (Burns). The song describes a hypothetical intervention between Slade and the boy. Slade gives the boy an ultimatum: either accept the help he is trying to give or end up losing all the people around him that care for him (Burns).

The song almost plays the role of mystifying the listener. A person may have their initial reaction and thoughts on a song; however, once they learn of its real meaning, they may become confused and realize their initial interpretation mystified the actual meaning. They will probably begin to wonder how the meaning fits in with its lyrics. The song's meaning becomes more obvious once we can understand the situation and its lyrics begin to make more sense. Ultimately, the actual interpretation de-mystifies the song. Rereading the song, the actual meaning almost instantly becomes apparent in the first verse:

Step one you say we need to talk /

He walks you say sit down it's just a talk /

He smiles politely back at you /

You stare politely right on through /

Some sort of window to your right /

As he goes left and you stay right /

Between the lines of fear and blame /

And you begin to wonder why you came. (How to Save a Life)

He starts by saying “Step one,” which represents the multitude of steps needed to fix this troubled boy’s problem. As the song continues, we as the audience build a picture of the boy not wanting anything to do with Slade, which is a common response to someone in that position. The last two lines of the verse are very powerful. The “lines of fear and blame” may represent the “fear” and uncertainty associated with actually helping the boy achieve abstinence from the drugs, and the “blame” that can be associated with the guilt and finger-pointing Slade will receive if he cannot help him. The last line portrays Slade feelings towards the situation as he reflects how hard the task at hand is going to be.

The chorus of the song does not deal with Slade talking to the boy; it is Slade talking to himself and reminiscing on the situation:

Where did I go wrong, I lost a friend /

Somewhere along in the bitterness /

And would I have stayed up with you all night /

Had I known how to save a life. (How to Save a Life)

The last two lines represent how Slade is thrown into a position where he is not sure what to do or how to help the boy. In a sense, we are almost under the impression that in the end Slade

failed in the intervention and the boy did not become better. He talks about how if he knew what to do then he would have done it. After the situation is over, Slade has matured and now understands what was needed for the boy to become better.

The second verse starts to deal with the faith aspects of the song as Slade begins to refer to God:

Let him know that you know best /
Cause after all you do know best /
Try to slip past his defense /
Without granting innocence /
Lay down a list of what is wrong /
The things you've told him all along /
And I pray to God he hears you /
And I pray to God he hears you. (How to Save a Life)

Slade talks about establishing dominance over the boy by saying he "knows best." He also lets the boy know what is "best" and what is "wrong." However, in the end all he can do is pray to God to help him because no matter how hard he tries to give advice and help the boy, only God can really help someone from their problems. In many situations, regardless a person's faith, they tend to turn to God in their time of need and look for guidance.

The last verse seems to end their hypothetical conversation as Slade presents the boy an ultimatum:

As he begins to raise his voice /
You lower yours and grant him one last choice /
Drive until you lose the road /

Or break with the ones you've followed /
He will do one of two things /
You will admit to everything /
Or he'll say he's just not the same /
And you'll begin to wonder why you came. (How to Save a Life)

Slade understands that he must approach the boy with love and that he cannot yell or be mean towards him. In most cases when a child is yelled at and told what not to do they tend to rebel and find themselves in more trouble. In the song, Slade understands this concept and says, "As he begins to raise his voice, you lower yours and grant him one last choice" (How to Save a Life). I believe this is a very important concept in not only rehabilitation but also coaching and even parenting. The more you associate with a child as a friend, the more relaxed they will feel talking to you. The last few lines deal with the ultimatum Slade gives to the boy; he basically tells him to accept the help we are giving you or else.

The song has been an influence to many, to say the least. It has been used in a number of T.V shows and movies. The song is a representation of a song in minor key. Minor key songs are usually sad or somber songs, much like "How to Save a Life." Both meanings deal with the metaphorical loss of a "life." In my interpretation, the "life" was the life force formed between a man and woman uniting. In the actual interpretation, the "life" is strictly dealing with the troubled boy. A main idea taken from the song is how the initial assumption, for most people, is incorrect. When a person hears a song in minor key they may think of a relationship on the verge of a break-up. In this song, it is not the case, and the listener may become de-mystified until they learn of the song's true meaning. This song is the perfect example of how we as society interpret songs. I initially viewed the song as being about a man and woman because it

is our instincts to put somber songs in the category of a relationship meltdown. Ultimately, our initial interpretations of songs are usually misinterpretations of the lyrics. Thus, we end up mystifying the song in our own minds and we then must read and understand lyrical interpretations to de-mystify them.

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Simple Truth

Brittany Bradford

In Margaret Edson's "Wit," the main character and narrator, Vivian Bearing, is so distracted by her study of mortality in John Donne's complex poetry that she misses her own life. It is not until she is diagnosed with stage-four metastatic ovarian cancer that she begins to reconsider her priorities. She has spent her adult life hiding behind wit, just as a student accuses Donne of doing. She does not consciously hide behind wit; it is her automatic response to dealing with life. Wit is mental sharpness, it is pointed. She uses its specificity as an unconscious way of avoiding things that confuse her. When she loses her health she see the truth in simplicity, and the simplicity of truth. As her health deteriorates, she does not yearn for intellectual conversation and properly punctuated poetry; she simply wants kindness, and a Popsicle.

Bearing is a scholar of Donne, and Donne is an expert at using wit. Throughout the play, Bearing reveals herself to be an expert of wit, and not of Donne. When explaining the different affect wit has on the "common reader" versus its affect on a "scholar", Vivian says, "To the common reader... wit provides a flash of comprehension." "To the scholar... Donne's wit is... a way to see how good you really are" (Edson 1507). In her description the novice attains insight, if only for a moment, while the scholar is merely tested. This is one of the earliest moments that the viewer can sympathize with the seemingly unsympathetic character. Bearing's life work is the study of Donne, but she does not get happiness from Donne, she gets a sense of accomplishment from passing the test. She goes on to proclaim that "After 20 years, I can say with confidence, no one is quite as good as I." This is ironic because although Bearing has studied Donne extensively, she is missing something important. She is so interested with how he says things that she does not fully understand what he is saying. Bearing's statement gives a new meaning to the term metaphysical conceit.

In the first of the play's flashbacks, the audience sees Bearing miss the point, even when it is plainly stated for her. Professor Ashford explains that Bearing has used a poorly punctuated text. Ashford does this because the punctuation changes the meaning of the poem. Bearing hears the explanation and declares, "I see... It's wit!" (Edson 1505). Ashford plainly states, "It is not wit, Miss Bearing. It is truth. The paper is not the point" (Edson 1505). Bearing cannot comprehend the idea that the paper is not the point. She focuses on the different punctuation rather than the meaning behind the punctuation. She heads outside and passes students "talking about nothing, laughing" (Edson 1505). She tries to think about how "simple human truth" and "uncompromising scholarly standards" could be connected. Instead of reaching a conclusion, she heads to the library to work on her paper. Bearing values scholarly standards and is weary of simplicity. Instead of trying to connect what are for her two disparate ideas, she retreats to a place of safety and comfort.

Every year there is a student in Bearing's class who asks why Donne made his poetry so complicated (Edson 1522). In one of these instances, a student says, "If it's really something he's sure of, he can say it more simple-simply." Bearing replies, "Perhaps he is suspicious of simplicity." "Perhaps, but that's pretty stupid" (Edson 1522). Bearing herself is suspicious of simplicity. She values intellect above all else. Simple ideas can be understood by people of low intelligence, even children. Even in her adult life, she does not understand how truth can be simple. She makes an aside to the audience, saying that if she would press the student he would either reach "great insight," or "undergraduate banality" (Edson 1522). The student continues, saying, "if [Donne's] trying to figure out God, and the meaning of life, and big stuff like that, why does he keep running away?" (Edson 1522). This question could be applied to the young Bearing, retreating to the library instead of enjoying time with friends. The student gave one

possible answer for Donne's and Bearing's love of complexity; "maybe he's scared" (Edson 1522). Bearing's asides to the audience reveal that even in the present she lacks the insight her student has reached. Bearing has the student continue with his idea until he can no longer articulate his thoughts. She says to the audience and the student, "Lost it" (Edson 1523). With those two words she negates the previous insights the student had into Donne's complexity because he could not continue the idea. The fact that the present day Bearing feels the need to share the memory shows that she has a vague idea that it is important. In her asides she shows no more understanding than her earlier self. She still cannot conceive that her student, a "common reader" may have greater insight into Donne than herself.

There are various aspects of the play that act as a mirror for Vivian, reflecting features of her personality. One of these mirrors is the character Jason Posner, one of Vivian's former students who is now one of her doctors. Posner and Vivian are very similar in their professional lives, despite the fact that one is a doctor and one is a literary scholar. The first thing the audience learns about Jason is that he is Dr. Kelekian's fellow (Edson 1507). This introduction comes soon after Bearing informs the audience of her own fellowship. From the moment the audience meets Jason, similarities between him and Vivian are drawn. During Grand Rounds, Dr. Kelekian comments on Jason's "Excellent command of details," and Vivian comments to herself and the audience, "I taught him, you know" (Edson 1514). Bearing makes this comment during Grand Rounds, which she notes are not so grand when one is the patient. Although she seems the comment sounds as if she is proud that a former student would have "excellent command of details," she is also hoping for something more from her doctor. The remark is not said loudly for the doctors to hear. It is said reflectively, to herself. At some level, Vivian seems to understand that details are not enough. As a patient, she wants more than details. As a

teacher, she should have taught more than details.

When Grand Rounds are over, Vivian remembers why she first knew words would be her life. It was her fifth birthday, and she remarks, “I liked that one best.” The pathos loaded into that simple comment is immense. A fifty-year old woman had her best birthday at age five. Five year old Vivian learns a new word and sees its meaning depicted, as if it was “magic” (Edson 1516). It was a simple definition in a children’s story that made Vivian love words. Complex literature, such as Donne’s Holy Sonnets, may reveal more complex insights than children’s books, but it also gives the reader greater opportunity to focus on the complexities rather than the meaning. Jason talks about what he learned in Bearing’s class, and he explains that in Donne’s poetry “the puzzle takes over. You’re not even trying to solve it anymore” (Edson 1528). Vivian’s students do not get to see Donne’s words as young Vivian saw the soporific bunnies. There is a crucial connection missing, and they get lost in the puzzle. Vivian was also lost in the puzzle until she lost her health to cancer treatment and began to appreciate simplicity.

Posner’s view of cancer research is like Vivian’s view of Donne’s Holy Sonnets. Posner sees his fellowship, along with bedside manner in general, and a “Colossal waste of time for researchers” (Edson 1520). What he really wants is his own lab, so he can focus on cancer research. His fellowship, “The part with the human beings,” as Vivian puts it, is just a hoop that Jason accepts he must jump through to reach his goal of becoming a researcher. Jason does not recognize that the reason *anyone* is researching a cure for cancer is to help people. He is missing the fact that people are whom he will be researching for. Likewise, Vivian is so interested in Donne’s wit that she forgets he is using it to “figure out...big stuff” (Edson 1522). Vivian does realize, after talking to Jason, that they are very much alike, and that it is not a

good thing. "So, the young doctor, like the senior scholar prefers research to humanity" (Edson 1521). The problem with this is that the "young doctor" as well the "senior scholar" are doing research for and about the humanity they avoid.

Another mirror for Vivian is a lecture she gives on Donne's Holy Sonnet Five. Her first words about the poem provide an outline for Vivian throughout the play; "Aggressive intellect. Pious melodrama. And a final, fearful point" (Edson 1518). Vivian's aggressive intellect is shown from the beginning of the drama. She quickly makes it known to the audience that the casual greeting she gives them in the beginning is not her usual. She also shares that she is a English professor and discusses the literary techniques found in her own play (Edson 1500-1501). It takes Vivian the majority of the play to get to the second stage, pious melodrama. She does not go through the whole first part of the play as aggressively intellectual. Instead, she slowly opens up until she reaches the point that she is so far from aggressively intellectual that she can be considered piously melodramatic. The turning point is her "last coherent lines" (Edson 1527). She recites the two lines from a Donne poem that E.M. Ashford had long ago used to teach her the importance of punctuation. However, Vivian does not recite the scholarly version. Instead, she recites the version Ashford describes as having "hysterical punctuation" (Edson 1504). "Hysterical punctuation" is combined with the omitting of a comma, *the* comma that separates life and death, to become the beginning of Vivian's "Pious melodrama stage." The "final, fearful point" is Vivian's death. It is Vivian's final point in this life before life everlasting. The fearful part is not Vivian's fear, but rather the fear those who are still living have of death. Specifically, it is Jason's fear, shown in his last lines and the last lines of the play, "Oh, God" (Edson 1532). Although the "Oh, God" is ambiguous, when considered as the "final, fearful point" one can see Jason realizing that Vivian was more than "just

research” (Edson 1530).

The Vivian introduced to the audience is not the same Vivian who reaches for the light at the end of the drama. She begins as a woman who values intellect to the exclusion of all else. The audience learns how she became that woman through her memories, and they see that woman stripped down to her core. Vivian hid behind complexity and feared simplicity until cancer took away all the complexities. She is forced to want nothing but the most simple and basic human needs. Only in her more simple form and can she understand the simplicity of truth. The last text read in the play is not a Donne poem who’s meaning is finally revealed. Instead, it is a children’s story about bunnies, like the first story that made her love words. The little bunny cannot run and hide from his mother no matter what he becomes. Vivian the scholar and teacher cannot hide either. At the end of her life she is in a simple state, ready for the simple comma between life and life everlasting.

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To understand the principles of literary Formalism, most notably the group of American critics known as the New Critics, a working model of form must be presented. *The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines “form” as “1. The visible shape or arrangement of something 2. A particular way in which a thing exists” (“Form” 354). From a literary perspective, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* cites form as “the structure of a particular work” (Murfin 174). According to *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, form “involves the arrangement of component parts, such as the sequence of events, parallelism, or some other organizational principle” (Murfin 174). Formalism, in essence, embraces the theory that the text is the ultimate outlet for meaning in poetry, demeaning the importance of the author’s background or cultural implications that historical or social criticism would embrace. J.N. Patnaik, author of *The Aesthetics of New Criticism*, cites The New Critics viewed form at once as “inseparable from meaning or ‘content’,” yet the new American band of critics also asserted “form to be in itself valuable and requiring no external references for its realization” (Patnaik 5). The theoretical discourse John Crowe Ransom introduced in *The New Criticism*, along with contributions from American modernist poets T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, shaped literary criticism for half a decade in America. In designing the model for what has come to be known as the New Critical approach, Ransom reveals the poem as a self-contained object; that is, using Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* as an example of dramatic poetry, it offers nothing more than the words on the page.

John Crowe Ransom’s 1941 book *The New Criticism* grounded a theoretical approach to what American poets T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were previously practicing in the 1920’s and 30’s. The title of Ransom’s work, and the subsequent naming of the theoretical discourse as a whole, is appropriately labeled “new” not for the revolutionary theories involved but because

the three critics Ransom discusses in *The New Criticism* are also new to the field of literary criticism. Ransom describes the rationale for the discourse's naming, using emerging critic R. P. Blackmur as an example, as well as comments on the current state of literary criticism in saying:

Critical writing like this is done in our time. In depth and precision at once it is beyond all earlier criticism in our language. It is a new criticism, and it has already some unity of method, so that its present practitioners, like Mr. Blackmur, seem eclectic with respect to their immediate predecessors. (Ransom x)

It should be made clear that the initial purpose of *The New Criticism* was not to introduce a new school of thought or critical discourse, but rather, as Ransom explains, to "to present a good picture of the kinds of criticism and the kinds of critical theory that have been offered by the four writers under discussion" (Ransom x). In outlining the works of four emerging critics - I. A. Richards, William Empson, T. S. Eliot, and Yvor Winters – Ransom aims to facilitate the creation of a purely American literary stance.

To Ransom, literature exists independent from personal experience. The form of literature acts as the meaning; the appearance of the text surmounts the importance of the text's relation to the reader or author's personal objections. I. A. Richard's mimetic view of poetry, as Ransom cites, "has no rating as a way of knowing the world. Its service is not cognitive but psychological" (Ransom 8). Under the formal pretenses that Ransom operates, Richard's literary interpretations are reductive and lack meaning themselves. The text's true meaning, according to Richard's model, is lost in the translation from direct cognitive inference to personal symbolism. The implications of the word are wrought in its inherent emotions, which

may be relative to the proposed reader but do not extend past the point of textual significance.

Using *The Tempest* as a textual model to compare and contrast the views of Richards and Ransom, a scene such as act one, scene one could be read either as a gateway to the psychological implications of the characters or pose as a canvas for symbolic diction, respectively. The boatswain's cries of "you do assist the storm!" and "what cares these roarers for the name of the king?," offers a glimpse of the boatswain's character that can be comparable to our own human experiences and that is reductive to Shakespeare's play as text (Shakespeare 4). Under Formalist influence, act one, scene one of *The Tempest* conveys meaning through the use of metaphor-rich passages, for example the grave connotation instilled in the pairing of the two words "assist" and "storm" hold cognitive meaning within themselves, and operate on a plain independent from the reader's psyche (Shakespeare 4). "The gist of this," argues Ransom, "is that Richards confines meaning in the strict sense to valid objective reference and denies it to the mere emotion that words may cause" (Ransom 7). The new critical approach to Richard's discourse informs that "when we analyse poetry in cognitive terms we allow, incidentally, for all appropriate emotions and attitudes; that is, for all that can find their excuse, or their chance, in the text" (Ransom 25). Through cognitive recognition, the text is isolated in the mind of the reader and not influenced by personal experiences.

The preservation of the written word that Ransom calls for and the mimetic significance of the text which Richard's argues for are exemplified by Elizabeth Fowler in her essay concerning the social structure within *The Tempest*, "The Ship Adrift." Fowler takes a formal stance in her treatment of the play's image of the ship, arguing that "analysis of the rhetorical function of the ungoverned ship produces a more precise description for that prized quality of the play," which she asserts is the play's quality of "openness" (Fowler 40). The ship,

to Fowler, acts as a "ship of state," and "when it founders the cries are of the severing of social bonds" (Fowler 37). Fowler treats the ship as a dynamic character and interprets the textual references to the ship as psychosocial context, as she points out the cast addressing the ship as such in the text:

A confused noise within.

"Mercy on us!" – "We split, we split" – "Farewell,

my wife and children!" – "Farewell, brother!"

- "We split! we split! we split!"

Antonio: Let's all sink wi' th' King.

Sebastian: Let's take leave of him. (Shakespeare 6)

Fowler's reading of the ship in *The Tempest* satisfies Formalist and New Critical conventions in that it treats the text and its product, the "central image" of the ship, as self-contained within Shakespeare's diction (Fowler 37). While Fowler's analysis took the path of psychological criticism, she retained the text's cognitive values by drawing her meaning from the text's implications rather than basing it on references to comparable experiences.

The author in relation to literature is an irrelevant concept to John Crowe Ransom. The text is a product of itself; it is an inconceivable idea that an author's intended meaning can prevail over the meaning inherent in the text. Ransom coins the alias "the historical critic" in reference to Eliot's "classicist" generalization of the formal elements of poetry (Ransom 135). To Eliot, "what is not suggested to the poet is that he might use his own head and make an aesthetic judgment of the new thing he is doing" (Ransom 149). In his critical response to Eliot's traditional approach to poetic analysis, Ransom calls for the revival of form through the expansion of the author's idea of aesthetic structure. The historical context of poetry is not

indicative of the poem's textual meaning, Ransom argues, "the texture of a poem is the heterogeneous character of its detail, which either fills in the logical outline very densely or else overflows it a little" (Ransom 163). Northrop Frye offers an example of the historical approach Eliot assumes in his introduction to the 1959 publication of *The Tempest*. "It is not difficult to see," argues Frye, "why so many students of Shakespeare, rightly or wrongly, have felt that *The Tempest* is in a peculiar sense, Shakespeare's play, and that there is something in it of Shakespeare's farewell to art" (Frye 65). When viewing the play as "Shakespeare's own," as Frye claims, the text is reduced to a product of the author's experience rather than art on the page. The new critical approach to meaning, conversely to what Frye and Eliot present, assumes that the psychological and formal message that was previously thought to be instilled in the author's own experiences is wrought in the formal aspects of the text.

T. S. Eliot's 1933 contribution to American formalist discourse, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, mirrored many of the ideas adopted by Ransom in his development of *The New Criticism* nearly a decade later. Most notably, Eliot's work introduced the new critical notion that poetry's inherent ambiguity lies in its form and subsequent meaning. In correlation to the theoretical framework of a discourse, Eliot argues that the indefinable nature of poetry represents the essence of what Ransom coins "the new criticism":

I assume that criticism is that department of thought which either seeks to find out what poetry is, what its use is, what desires it satisfies, why it is written and why read, or recited; or which, making some conscious or unconscious assumption that we do know these things, assesses actual poetry. We may find that good criticism has other designs than these; but these are the ones which it is allowed to profess. Criticism, of course, never does find out what poetry is, in

the sense of arriving at an adequate definition. (Eliot 16)

The uncertainty with which Eliot speaks in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* are reminiscent of Ransom's description of modern criticism in the preface to *The New Criticism*, and indicate that Eliot's passage may have directly influenced Ransom. "Criticism," cites Ransom, "is an extraordinarily difficult thing to get right, and this is a new criticism. What is new is unsure, inconsistent, perhaps raw; even this new criticism" (Ransom x). The brash honesty of Eliot's critical approach, which Ransom calls "fastidious" and Eliot calls "classicist," although not directly seen, as *The New Criticism* is meant to act as constructive criticism rather than support, is implemented in Ransom's treatment of text as a unpredictable and sometimes abrasive (Ransom 137).

A. Lynne Magnusson offers a contemporary model of traditional formalist criticism in her essay, "Interruption in *The Tempest*." As the New Critical approach to criticism embraces the text as the ultimate source for meaning, Magnusson's argument proves to rarely stray from the written text. "Interruption is a pattern not only of plot but also of language in *The Tempest*," cites Magnusson, grounding her commitment to the "verbal occurrences of interruption" in the play (Magnusson 52). The extent of Magnusson's formal engagement with *The Tempest* is seen in her interpretation of act two, scene one in which Sebastian and Antonio interject their humor into a discussion between Gonzalo and Adrian. In this scene, Magnusson argues, Sebastian "anticipates the syntactic direction of Adrian's sentence" and responds in his own whimsical rhetoric (Magnusson 53). Moreover, the diction used in Sebastian's response "also undermines the rhetorical method implicit in the syntax," claims Magnusson (Magnusson 53). By treating the play as a syntactical map of diction and rhetoric, Magnusson retains the stance introduced by John Crowe Ransom.

In his 1931 book titled *How to Read*, Ezra Pound presents the argument that the study of literature is misconceived as an uneven equation to scientific discourse, similar to confusion between discourses that John Crowe Ransom comments on in his discussion of the ontological critic appearing at the end of *The New Criticism*. “People regard literature as something vastly more flabby and floating and complicated and indefinite than, let us say, mathematics. Its subject-matter, the human consciousness, is more complicated than are number and space,” argues Pound in attempt to draw the reader towards a formal appreciation of literature by contrasting it with scientific jargon (Pound 12). “To avoid confusion,” instructs Pound, the reader of poetry must first remove themselves from “those allegedly scientific methods which approach literature as if it were something *not literature*, or with scientists’ attempts to subdivide the elements in literature according to some non-literary categoric division” (Pound 13). As Pound’s ideas concerning the relation between science and literary studies in *How to Read* are concurrent with Ransom’s own theories on the ontological critic in *The New Criticism*, Pound’s work may have influenced the development of Ransom’s new critical approach to literature.

John Crowe Ransom believed literature is an art form, and that its reception as such is being clouded by attempts to correlate it to scientific studies. The form of scientific study, that is the organization and structure of the discourse, is far different from that of literature. In the fourth section of *The New Criticism*, Ransom calls for the ontological critic to bridge the gaps between scientific discourse and the emerging trends in literary criticism. The syntactical devices used in the “art,” or literary world as Ransom explains, are not interchangeable with the devices used in scientific research, as “science deals exclusively in pure symbols, but art deals essentially, though not exclusively, in iconic signs” (Ransom 287). Ransom considers the

divergence between science and art a "philosophical distinction" for the inconclusive nature of signs (Ransom 287). The new critical approach to art as a self-containing entity is wrought in Ransom's description of the divergence between scientific signs and artistic icons, as he argues "the world of predictability," or that of signs:

is the restricted world of scientific discourse. Its restrictive rule is: one value at a time. The world of art is the actual world which does not bear restriction; or at least is sufficiently defiant of the restrictiveness of science, and offers enough fullness of content, to give the sense of the actual object. A qualitative density, or value-density, such as is unknown to scientific understanding, marks the world of the actual objects. The discourse which tries systematically to record this world as art. (Ransom 293)

"The icon is a particular. A particular is definable; that is, it exceeds definition," argues Ransom in attempts to explain the distinctions that surface when literature is viewed as art (Ransom 291). The confusion between the aesthetic qualities of art and the imagery implied by text describe the conundrum presented when viewing literature as artistic expression.

Literary icons are inconsistent and assume individual identities to particular readers though, for example, John Crowe Ransom cites: "In the play, the icon is our image of Prince Hamlet, and it is never twice the same, so that the rule of consistent definitive reference is abrogated with each reappearance" (Ransom 291). Elizabeth Fowler, in her essay "The Ship Adrift," treated the ship as an iconic image in *The Tempest* by isolating its contextual references in order to find the meaning inherent in the icon. The ship as an icon, to Fowler and Ransom, is at once an aesthetic entity of the page, yet it also holds cognitive significance to the reader through its presentation in the text. In defense of the individuality of the icon in literature,

Ransom argues that: “In aesthetic discourse, however, we replace symbols with icons; and the peculiarity of an icon is that it refers to the whole or concrete object and cannot be limited” (Fowler 291). Fowler’s icon is only relative to her argument then, as the ship can assume an iconic image to a separate critic writing a different essay that veers completely from Fowler’s image. The meaning of literature cannot be explained by scientific discourse, argues Ransom, nor can aspects of scientific discourse be applied to the study of literature.

During the conception of *The New Criticism*, John Crowe Ransom viewed literary criticism as a formal entity, reflecting a visible shape and organized structure. The names associated with what was considered “modern criticism” to Ransom and their respective critical stances were the aesthetics of critical theory at the time. An examination of modern critical theory, as Ransom employed in *The New Criticism*, is a formal reading of the current state of literary discourse in 1961. The New Critics, a title coined by Ransom for the emerging voices of literary study, not only introduced a revolutionary formal approach to the aesthetics of text, they also skewed the field of criticism as it was previously known. Ransom attacked critics for their reduction of literature to a study of critics rather than the text: “Most critical writing is done in the light of ‘critical theory,’ which unfortunately is something less than aesthetics” (Ransom 3). The aesthetics Ransom aims to preserve are what makes literature art; they color the page with the meaning inherent in the text. Formalist critic and modernist poet Ezra Pound states in *How to Read*, “Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree” (Pound 21). *The New Criticism* acts merely to organize, define, and provide a formal structure to the study of aesthetics in literature. As Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* offers nothing more to the reader than words organized together to create the impression of a dramatic play, literature is a self-contained object.

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The Symbiosis of Marginality and Canonicity in Native American Texts

Lauren Mannion

The concept of canon is considered to be the defining structure by which all literature is understood and to which all literature is compared. If literature is within the canon, it has been found to hold lasting thematic and aesthetic merit considered to contribute to the corpus of stylistic principles and intellectual values; however, if literature exists outside of the canon, its worth is measured only by comparison with the literature that has achieved canonical status. Therefore, marginality is not in itself measurable and is rather judged and appointed based on its relation to the realm of the canon.

The construction of a marginal identity is not only endorsed and created by the regulation of the canon, but the form of the marginal identity itself actively and inherently resists conformity to canonicity. Topics that fuel literary marginality can develop in various forms, such as gender, sexual orientation, and experimental style; however, one form of marginality particularly relevant to its impact on the perception of cultural identity is ethnic marginality. Three texts from the body of American literature that are identifiably informed by their ethnic marginalities are the *Ghost Dance Songs*, Charles Alexander Eastman's "The Soul of the Indian," and Sherman Alexie's "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star Spangled Banner' at Woodstock." On the surface, these texts aim to recapitulate the paradigm of marginal resistance. For example, the *Ghost Dance Songs* achieve an incantatory moment which calls on members of the ethnically marginal Native American community to resist white assimilation and hope for the destruction of white culture. Eastman's and Alexie's material also work through their respective forms of treatise and short story to support that nonconforming structure of marginality that is emblematic of individuality; however, despite the apparent marginalization indicated by the coupling of a rejection of white culture and an acceptance of the non-canon, marginality is immeasurable

without the paradigm of canonicity. Therefore, it is an interdependent relationship that allows marginality and canonicity to be defined in relation to one another. This relationship constructs a symbiosis of cultural identities that at once both work against and for each other, producing a tension and cohesion between the canon, such as T.S. Eliot's "The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and the marginal, such as *Ghost Dance Songs*. In these authors' works we see how the symbiosis of marginality and canonicity reflects how American cultural identities must negotiate the surfaces of cultural marginality to define each other through inclusion and exclusion and to produce common values, such as individuality and meritocracy, despite being classified as marginal or canon.

The earliest text of the three genre examples is the poetic composition, *Ghost Dance Songs*. In the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, Andrew Wiget notes that the text originated somewhere near the year 1871 after Congress "terminated the U.S. policy of making treaties with Native American tribes as sovereign nations, thus making the tribes subject to the will of Congress and the administrative rulings of the president" (Wiget 214). As the preface essay to the text notes, one must consider that "[t]he pace of Anglo-American expansion and expropriation of Indian lands quickened, culminating within a decade in the destruction of the vast buffalo herds and the forcible confinement of many tribes to unproductive reservation land, where starvation threatened their lives and acculturation threatened their traditional cultures and extinction" (Wiget 214). Thus, the contemporary Native American lifestyles were inextricably linked to the land on which they resided; the soil itself embodied their agrarian cultural identities as they were reflected in the resourceful materials of the people, as well as in the dependence upon fertility of the land to produce sustenance for the community. The expropriation of their land or, more simply, the surrender of their claim to exclusive property, is

relative to the devaluation and deconstruction of the Native American identity. Its devaluation was predicated upon the increased conditions of white assimilation expected of the Native American community, while its deconstruction depended on the symbiotic nature of ethnic marginality working with and against the inherent power held by the establishers of the canonical.

This text inherently resists the ethnic canonicity of white Americana during its time period. *Ghost Dance Songs* was constructed, through poetic form, to create an incantatory moment that realized its power to inspire community identity. The self-realization of power in this text is reflected upon in Dean Rader's essay, "Word as Weapon: Visual Culture and Contemporary American Indian Poetry." Rader writes that, in respect to the Ghost Dance, "[n]ative communities have invested in language the ability to control identity and destiny. As scholar John Bierhost argues, the 'belief that words in themselves have the power to make things happen... is one of the distinguishing features of native American thought'" (Rader 147). The community identity evoked from the incantatory moment is the foundation of this power. The style and structure of the text reflects the content of the communal bond of power. More aptly, the style of the text can be regarded as a chant, a song-like form in which each line expects a repeated response in the succeeding line. As the *Heath* editors point out in a footnote to the text, the songs of the *Ghost Dance Songs* are "sung as dialogue, with the Sun ("Our Father") addressing the Indians ("my children")" (*Ghost Dance Songs* 215). With this textual resonance in mind, one can examine the construction of communal power as it aligns with the structure of the text. In the first section, the audience, composed specifically of Native Americans, is addressed as "my children" by the persona referred to as the "Sun" (*Ghost Dance Songs* 1). The chant begins, "[m]y children, when at first I liked the whites" (*Ghost Dance*

Songs 1). This first line is immediately followed in the second line by the same words.

Similarly, this occurs throughout the chant. A closer analysis of the chant reveals the separation of prompts and responses into eight parts. While the first lines of the first part are introduced with "[m]y children," the successive parts through part four are introduced with the addresses of "[f]ather," "[m]y son," "[m]y children," respectively. Thus, the first half of the introductory segments address immediate relationships between the nuclear family. As the chant progresses, it extends the connection between the self to "[t]he whole world" and "[t]he spirit host" in parts five and six. The community bond is forged through the aesthetics of repetition and audience awareness. The chant's final segments pit the established Native American community against white cultural domination. The *Songs* follow, "[t]he yellow-hide, the white skin/ I have now put him aside—/ [...] I have no more sympathy with him" (*Ghost Dance Songs* 48) and "we have rendered them desolate" (*Ghost Dance Songs* 57). The chant concludes with phonemes uttered in unison response as the audience is absorbed into the collective empowered identity of the community. As this community voice forms, it does so at the excision of the other, or rather, the excluded identity embodied by who they, the members of the collective community, are not.

The concept of the microcosmic self as it is absorbed by the macrocosmic community is realized for the culturally white opponent, as well. Originally, this opposing force is depicted as individualistic, referred to as "him" in line 50. It develops into a community identity of opposition in line 57, expressed in the word "them." The transformation from the nuclear identity to the community identity is not only significantly representative of the empowered bond that is forged within the Native American community, but it is suggestive of the alienating marginalization of the "other," or rather, the opposing white culture. In a more visceral sense, the *Songs* target the figure of the white man himself, using human-related concepts and

pronouns like “the white skin” (*Ghost Dance Songs* 49) and “him” (*Ghost Dance Songs* 50), respectively. Therefore, while the *Ghost Dance Songs* may have achieved a level of subliminal community identity for the Native Americans, the *Songs* did not expressly condemn the act of white assimilation, but rather focused on the human catalysts of that assimilation process. Furthermore, this segregation of the two communities recapitulates the dynamic of marginality and canonicity. While the *Ghost Dance Songs* are not thematically or aesthetically marginal, their ethnic identity constructs their marginality. Because the chant embraces this ethnic identity, the marginalization from the core of canon grows deeper. Ironically, while the *Ghost Dance Songs* are published within a selective modern anthology, it was not published at all until 1893, several years after the Congress decision to terminate United States treaties with Native American tribes (Lauter 214). The date of the text’s publication is not irrelevant. Kenneth Roemer notes in his essay, “Contemporary American Indian Literature: The Centrality of Canons on the Margins,” that the selection of anthologized text is an implicit condition that assists to determine the affect of a text’s marginalization of canonization. Barbara Mujica also argues that anthologies imply selection: “the very format of an anthology prompts canon formation” (Mujica 203). Mujica also suggests that whether the material falls within the realm of margin or center is less significant than the impression of authority assumed from the decision to read it; however, one might also consider that the placement of a text within an anthology does not inherently preclude canonization as we accept or commonly understand it.

Jonathan Crewe examines canon from the view that it is an arbitrary application of value. Indeed, there are canons within canons; for example, while Faulkner might be classified as canon, there are Faulkner works within his corpus that represent the “canon” of his collection. Crewe notes, “the margin {is} the center” because the displacement of the central by the

marginal defeats the purpose of respatializing margins and centers; ultimately, the margins then assume the authority of the centers (Crewe 122). Although this argument makes logical sense, Crewe ignores the concept of what canonization means in general to a work and to those who perceive it as canonical or marginal.

Despite the comprehensive factors of aesthetic and intellectual prominence that influence a text's canonical value, texts become canon because they are made canon. Therefore, as Roemer argues, it is not only the explicit factors of introductory exposition that determine a text's canonical worth, but rather, it is also the "implicit" selection of texts that determines canonicity (Roemer 586). Similarly, while anthologies offer an authoritative example of canonicity, not everyone accepts anthologized selections as conceptually canonical. In particular, the high school American education system generally values the exploitative and allusive, such as Mark Twain and Ezra Pound, or Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. These conceptually canonical authors may not be any better than several Native American writers, but Twain, Faulkner, Pound and Hemingway have been embraced by the canon. Essentially, these authors have been embraced more readily by the general audience due to the metatextual construction of ethnic awareness within their texts. In particular, the acceptable construction of ethnic awareness lies within their promoted sense of racial whiteness that, on the surface, appears to be lacking from marginally ethnic material such as *Ghost Dance Songs*. Even in the *Ghost Dance Songs*, it is evident that the incantatory Native American community identity opposes itself to white culture. The final line of the chant ends with "[t]he whites are crazy" (*Ghost Dance Songs* 59). Thus, while *Ghost Dance Songs* has been canonized in terms of its literary worth in the *Heath Anthology*, a structure that promotes and assumes canonicity, *Ghost Dance Songs* and other Native American text lingers on the perceptual fringes of the

canon, mingling with the marginal.

This outer-boundary canonical confusion is ironic because the meritocratic worth promoted in *Ghost Dance Songs* are recapitulative of most, if not all, American literature. Essentially, the chant attempts to convince its audience that if the people work hard enough as a group, they can overcome white oppression and earn their own identities. As Roemer notes, “[t]he importance of orality and oral cultures, of complex perceptions of sense of place, of multiethnicity, and of women’s perspectives [as they are represented in Native American literature] are not marginal or minority issues in late twentieth-century American literature” (Roemer 586). Arguably, the values promoted in *Ghost Dance Songs* are not marginal, either. Ironically, then, this negates the text’s example of marginality as it prioritizes individual expression, a key form of ideology in American culture. Also, when the incantatory persona calls upon the community to coalesce and overcome the struggle of oppression, this desire for freedom represents a key American value reflected in literature, art, and politics, tracing back to as early as our revolutionary date of patriotic independence; thus, the tension produced between the marginal and the canonical can be metaphorically compared to any sense of opposition, such as the forces of American identity and British sovereignty. Without both forces working against each other, the resulted outcome of American independence would not have occurred. Similarly, because these opposing forces work against each other, they work with each other symbiotically in the sense that their opposition produces an outcome. While the tension between the collective voice of the Native American community and the mass of white oppression did not result in immediate victory of self-liberation for the Native Americans, the tension did produce an ephemeral sense of self-empowerment and a lasting impression of Native American identity.

The texts by Charles Alexander Eastman and Sherman Alexie, "Soul of the Indian" and "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star Spangled Banner' at Woodstock," respectively, also work within the realms of canonical and marginal symbiosis. Interestingly, Eastman's experience of having dual ethnic identities is comparable to his text's label of pending marginality or canonicity. In the *Heath Anthology* introduction to Eastman's work, Douglas C. Sackman notes that Eastman held many names throughout his life in both his Native American and white communities. In particular, Sackman notes the names "Hakadah ('Pitiful Last') and "Ohiyesa ('The Winner') (Sackman 542). Eastman was introduced to the "white world" through his father, a reformed Christian (Sackman 542). Sackman adds, however, that "[a]lthough Eastman had adopted much of what the white world offered, the sight of so many brutalized bodies shattered the idea that white society represented only light and progress" (Sackman 542). Sackman also notes that "[w]hile the missionaries believed that Christianity would civilize the 'savage,' Eastman held that Indians could educate white Americans on how to become truly civilized and spiritual. His motto could have been 'Save the Indian and save the American'" (Sackman 542). Thus, this motto embodies the blend of identities that occurred in not only Eastman's life but also in the developing concept of American identity. The symbiosis of identities was so crucial in the development of Eastman's life that he "had to negotiate between two cultures in order to create a synthesis that was somehow true to both sides" (Sackman 542). This negotiation is evident in his text, "The Soul of the Indian"—an examination of collective Native American values as they blend with Eastman's self-reflection.

"The Soul of the Indian" straightforwardly criticizes the hypocrisy of Christian people against Native American practices. Eastman writes with a bitter tone, "[t]hey forget, perhaps,

that his religion forbade the accumulation of wealth and the enjoyment of luxury” (Eastman 544). Eastman does not preface this statement with any clear definition of who “they” represents. Just like the opposition of cultural identities found in *Ghost Dance Songs*, Eastman employs the sense of otherness to define what and who the self are and what and who the other are not. This can also be seen in the way that Eastman refers to himself as part of the Native American community, writing, “[w]e believed that the spirit pervades all creation and that every creature possesses a soul in some degree, though not necessarily a soul conscious of itself” (Eastman 546). One might note, however, that while Eastman aligns himself with this Native American identity, he does so in the past tense, affirmed by “believed.” The structure of his syntax alone points to the confusing negotiation of dual identities as they are laid out in the text. Ironically, Eastman distances himself from the concept of the “Indian,” constructing his syntax in such a way that promotes the “Indian’s” stereotypical negativity. Eastman writes in one passage, “[i]t is simple truth that the Indian did not, so long as his native philosophy held sway over his mind, either envy or desire to imitate the splendid achievements of the white man” (Eastman 542). Although Eastman argues for the Christian reconsideration of Native American values, his text perpetuates and affirms the social constructs of opposition. The repeated objectifications of “the Indian” and “the Christian” treat both halves of his dual identity as tangible entities available for reform. Furthermore, while the symbiosis of ethnic tensions is reflected in the aesthetics of the text, one must also consider that Eastman wrote the text during the post-bellum period—a time of American history which witnessed the divisions of a country, of families, and of personal identities and values struggle to reunite.

Despite Eastman’s possible attempt to reunite his dual identities to function as a whole person fully conscious of socially constructed values, Eastman, like the voice in *Ghost Dance*

Songs, ends the text with an acceptance of cultural opposition; however, this cultural opposition is compromised by Eastman's final clause. Eastman writes, "[i]t is my personal belief, after thirty-five years' experience of it, that there is no such thing as 'Christian civilization.' I believe that Christianity and modern civilization are opposed and irreconcilable, and that the spirit of Christianity and of our ancient religion is essentially the same" (Eastman 547). Thus, Eastman writes to unite his personal identities, as well as to unite the segregated identities formed for all those opposed to either Christianity or Native Americanism.

For Sherman Alexie, this blend of identities in postmodern America is readily achieved. Through the personal reflections of a character, Alexie's short story "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star Spangled Banner' at Woodstock" examines Native American identity from the perspective of one alienated by the impersonal realms of fiction, media, and stereotypes. Furthermore, Alexie's short story style lends itself to the thematic interpretation of marginality. Alexie's work is indeed more alienated than that of Eastman or the communal voice of *Ghost Dance Songs*. Alexie's short story was published approximately 80 years after the publication of "The Soul of the Indian," and is highly representative of the America that we understand today—an image like a façade, always nostalgic about past experiences, and almost always looking to the past for meaning. The regard for the past and past experiences is expressed in the narrator's father's obsession with Jimi Hendrix. The narrator's father is, in fact, so obsessed with Hendrix and the ideals promoted through his music that it eventually takes over his life, convincing him to leave the narrator and the narrator's mother while the narrator is just a child. Through the socially isolated experience of listening to Hendrix, the narrator's father shares a moment of intercommunicative clarity. As the narrator recalls his father say, "I figured Jimi must have known I was there in the crowd to

play something like that. It was exactly how I felt” (Alexie 3081). It is not only ironic that the song he refers to is the “Star-Spangled Banner,” but it is fitting that the version he so deeply connects to is one which has been recognized since for its artistic and somewhat anarchic interpretation. Furthermore, the narrator’s father’s experience was probably heightened by the fact that he made a metaphorical Mecca to see Hendrix; for him, this is a nearly spiritual experience. Despite the father’s reverberating awareness of Hendrix’s impact on his life, he always recalls the experience as one defined in relation to his Native American alienation within the crowd of concert-goers. The narrator’s father says, “I was there [...] You got to remember this was near the end and there weren’t as many people as before. Not nearly as many. But I waited it out. I waited for Jimi” (Alexie 3084). The father’s personal regard for Jimi, especially in reference to the musician’s first name, is striking, as he mentioned his son’s name only once, and the narrator himself experiences no nominal self-recognition. The author’s absence of self-awareness combats against the assumable self-awareness that his father attains while listening to Hendrix. Thus, Hendrix’s rendition of the American anthem alienates father and son from understanding each other in terms of its accessibility to the father and inaccessibility to the son; however, the narrator notes that the “ceremony” of listening to Hendrix with his drunken father is a vibrant childhood memory (Alexie 3082). This memory and others like it are possibly, as the narrator hints at his inherent generational distance from his father, the narrator’s only links to the canonical value of the song understood by the father.

The perceptions of the song’s meaning and worth vary in accordance with the statuses of father and son. This perceptual variance reflects a tension produced by the concepts of the canonical and the marginal. Furthermore, the variance displays how the concept of canon is flexible. Since the father grew up in a period of social unrest, circa the Vietnam War, the

canonical value of Hendrix's politically exclamatory version of the national anthem holds more meaning as it represents his connection to the Native American community and their fight for civil justice. Even the narrator is conscious of his generation's alienation from the politically affective, and says, "my generation of Indian boys ain't ever had no real war to fight. The first Indians had Custer to fight. My great-grandfather had World War I, my grandfather had World War II, you had Vietnam. All I have is video games" (Alexie 3083). Not only is the narrator alienated from the post-war experience felt by his father, he is reduced to the impersonal mediums of plastic video games and, more relative, the recorded version of Hendrix's performance.

Not only is the narrator alienated from his father's experience, but so is the narrator's mother. At one point, the narrator recalls a trip with his parents to see Hendrix's grave. His father stares reverently at Hendrix's tomb, while his mother calls attention to the less-than-fantastic way Jimi Hendrix died: by choking on his own vomit. The narrator's father asks the mother, "[w]hy you talking about my hero that way?" (Alexie 3084). The mother responds, "Shit, [...] Old Jesse WildShoe choked to death on his own vomit and he ain't nobody's hero" (Alexie 3084). One might assume that the persona of Jesse WildShoe refers to either a local character or some person in held in local lore. The mother considers Hendrix's identity to be nothing more significant than the marginal identity of a person on the local reservation, while the father understands Hendrix as a canon embodiment of his core values; however, the father's understanding of Hendrix's symbolism as a beacon of philosophical light is ironic because he fails to acknowledge that there were other Native Americans present. As the narrator writes, "[b]ut as much as I dreamt about it, I don't have any clue about what it meant for my father to be the only Indian who saw Jimi Hendrix play at Woodstock. And maybe he wasn't

the only Indian there. Most likely, there were hundreds but my father thought he was the only one” (Alexie 3084). Despite the fact that Jimi Hendrix was a black person playing for a predominantly white audience, and despite the fact that the father feels as though he was the only Native American present, it is possibly the symbiotic result of the collective group and personal moment that is reached at the performance that so deeply affects the father. The presence of others at Woodstock created a shared experience, but the memory of Hendrix’s performance is acutely personal for the father. The tension of these opposing forces reflects the marginal and canonical negotiation that embodies American fiction. This is particularly evident in the way that this opposition structures a sense of American identity forged from the cacophony of Hendrix’s rendition of the American national anthem and the feeling of oneness within a crowd.

The crowd-experience that the father likely felt is similar to the one created by the incantatory moment of the *Ghost Dance Songs*. Similarly, both of these texts create a cohesion and tension between marginal and canonical identities. The exclusion of the whites from the group moment achieved in the *Ghost Dance Songs* is similar to the otherness expressed from the view of the father in Alexie’s story as he recounts the synthetically singular and collective group experience of Hendrix’s Woodstock performance, alienating himself from his wife and his son. This sense of otherness is achieved most interestingly by Eastman, whose dual identity is inherently reflected in the aesthetically objectified structure of his work (i.e. “the Christian” and “the Indian”). Eastman’s sense of otherness is similar to Alexie’s and that of the *Ghost Dance Songs* in terms of its ethnic marginality; however, Eastman captures the radical idea that this otherness resides most prominently within ourselves, reflected through multiple identities ignorant of ethnic excision and rather performed according to the roles expected by social

constructs. "The Soul of the Indian" also points out that, though the two halves of the self are irreconcilably different, it is the balance of these differences which produces a manifestation of critical self-consciousness that makes it possible to look beyond the boundaries of the marginal and canonical to understand work as simultaneously and symbiotically representative of the collective voice of its community along with the internal mechanisms of its individual.

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Reader Beware: Don't be a Fool for Love

MeLisa Bracone

“Truth and illusion. Who knows the difference, eh, toots?” (Albee 85). In Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, illusion versus reality is a common theme. This theme is similar to many of the themes throughout American Drama plays, especially in Sam Shepard’s *Fool for Love*. According to Matthew C. Roudané, author of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf: Necessary Fictions, Terrifying Realities*, “Distinctions between truth and illusion become blurred, not by the continual drinking, but by an overwhelming psychotic reliance on fiction as truth” (Roudané 36). Due to the hostility that George and Martha have towards each other, they invent a child in order to provide themselves with a solitary comfort in their marriage. For instance, the creation of George and Martha’s “son” provides the reader with the knowledge that these characters are living in a fantasy world. According to “Reality and Illusion: Continuity of a Theme in Albee” by Lawrence Kingsley, “George and Martha have evaded the ugliness of their marriage by taking refuge in illusion. Martha points out: ‘Truth and illusion, George; you don’t know the difference.’ And George replies: ‘No; but we must carry on as though we did’” (Albee 74). This conversation between George and Martha illustrates the same ideas and themes as Eddie and May portray in *Fool for Love*. For example, Eddie and May create illusions and stories in order to suppress the memory of their incestuous relationship. May even attempts to make herself believe that Eddie is idiotic and there was never a history of their past.

The audience and even the characters of Sam Shepard’s *Fool for Love*, may have a difficult time distinguishing fiction from reality. Throughout the play, May and Eddie experience a series of arguments and re-create conflicts from their past. The taboo of incest is a major theme which drives the plot’s numerous stories of past relations between the characters. It is unclear whether or not the audience can decipher if the stories of May and Eddie’s

relationship are true or false as there are multiple, conflicting stories. However, the fact that May and Eddie are in some way blood-related is the one accurate aspect which the audience can derive from *Fool for Love*. Although the audience may recognize this fact, it is difficult to distinguish why the characters create such implausible tales. Furthermore, May and Eddie's painful history is a catalyst for the stories they tell in order to justify their incestuous relationship. However, the reader is left questioning each of the characters by the end of the play. How is the audience expected to believe the stories of May and Eddie's past if the characters tell different versions of the same story? Furthermore, even the characters within the play experience a difficult time distinguishing illusion and reality in their own stories.

Throughout *Fool for Love*, the taboo of incest seems to be a driving force in regards to the differing versions of how each character understands and addresses their pasts. The different versions of this "love" story illustrate the hidden truth behind May and Eddie's affair. Furthermore, the conflicting versions of the story may aid the audience in interpreting the lives of each character as well as distinguishing the truth from fiction. One idea, that could be represented based on the varying accounts of the characters pasts, might be that May and Eddie could be attempting to justify their knowledge of the incest by inventing fanciful stories to alleviate the pain. Furthermore, the audience may also be able to infer that their affair should not exist because of their parentage, and may observe that they utilize these dramatic stories as a method to suppress their painful memories. The love that May and Eddie have for each other is both suppressed and expressed throughout *Fool for Love* and is genuinely real; however, their love is tainted by the knowledge of their incest. For example, when May and Eddie argue about his recurring cycle of abandonment, they hint at a deeper meaning behind their actions:

EDDIE: You know we're connected, May. We'll always be connected. That

was decided a long time ago.

MAY: Nothing was decided! You made all that up.

EDDIE: You know what happened.

MAY: You promised me that was finished. You can't start that up all over again. You promised me.

EDDIE: A promise can't stop something like that. It happened.

MAY: Nothing happened! Nothing ever happened! (Shepard 34)

This dialogue between Eddie and May exemplifies May's apparent shame about her past, and even her future relationship with Eddie. However, the reader cannot fully believe the accounts of May, Eddie, and the Old Man even if their stories are somewhat true. For instance, when a story is told multiple times over a long period, the story becomes over-exaggerated and loses its validity. Even more, the three different accounts of the stories do not agree with each other, and therefore, the stories eventually become muddled when they intersect at an attempt to compile a complete and full history. For example, the Old Man exclaims "She never blew her brains out. Nobody ever told me that. Where the hell did that come from?...Tell her the way it happened" (Shepard 73). At this point, each of the main characters have had their input regarding the past; yet the Old Man seems to not understand why May and Eddie added the part about Eddie's mother's suicide. Each of these instances demonstrates that not only the reader, but the characters as well, cannot distinguish the truth from fiction.

Editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Sam Shepard*, Matthew Charles Roudané illustrates various themes throughout the works of Sam Shepard. When focusing on *Fool for Love*, Roudané discusses the family ties, struggles, and issues regarding May, Eddie, and the Old Man. According to Roudané, "In Sam Shepard's entropic world, the primal family unit –

whose members seem to be on some grand cosmic disconnect – is trapped within its own lies of the mind” (Roudané, *Companion 2*). This statement portrays the problematic issue of fiction versus reality within the play. One of the main issues and controlling aspects of the play is the appearance of the Old Man. For example, the stage directions at the beginning of the play explain that “He exists only in the minds of May and Eddie, even though they might talk to him directly and acknowledge his physical presence. The Old Man treats them as though they all existed in the same time and place” (Shepard 15). Even though the Old Man plays a minor role in the play, he plays a major role in the lives of Eddie and May. The father of both characters, the Old Man is the main reason for Eddie and May’s issues. Although he is not incorporated in the action, he is a third voice and story-teller in *Fool for Love*. For instance, near the end of the play, the Old Man urges Eddie to “Speak to her [May]. Bring her around to our side. You gotta’ make her see this thing in a clear light” (Shepard 74). It is apparent here that the Old Man is only a voice, because his words do not change any of the action in the story. Toby Silverman Zinman, author of “Visual Histrionics: Shepard’s Theatre of the First Wall,” discusses the end of *Fool for Love* with Eddie and May leaving while the Old Man is still present on stage. The stage directions state that the Old Man “looks stage left at his rocking chair then a little above it, in blank space.” He then “points into space, forcing the audience to see what is not there: ‘Ya’ see that picture over there? Ya’ see that? Ya’ know who that is? That’s the woman of my dreams. That’s who that is. And she’s mine. She’s all mine. Forever’” (Zinman 518). Here, the use of stage directions demonstrates the significance of an illusionary sequence. Perhaps the picture is really there; however the Old Man does indeed point into space which signifies the distinguishing characteristics regarding the inability to decipher truth from fiction.

Identity is also an issue in *Fool for Love*. Matthew Roudané offers insight as to why and how the characters are disconnected and reconnected within the work. He expresses the significance of identity and the exploration of the self within *Fool for Love*, and how it affects the theme of illusion versus reality (Roudané, *Companion* 24). For example, “Shepard’s heroes find themselves caught within a terrible binary of hope and hopelessness, struggling with their own distorted versions of objective reality” (Roudané, *Companion* 2). Roudané also focuses on the aspect of familial struggles as being minor compared to that of the internal struggle of each character. For instance, audiences are responding to the encounters and “battles” between characters in a way that is “not simply within the family or between the paired individuals who so often constitute his dramatic unit, but within a self which is inherently divided along fault lines which separate opposing sensibilities” (Roudané, *Companion* 22). The identity of each character in the play portrays this type of the divided self. May portrays the prime example of identity confusion which inherently leads to her inability to distinguish the truth from fiction. For example, at the beginning of the play, May cannot decide whether or not she wants Eddie to stay at her room. She begs him to stay in the very first scene, and the next minute she is kicking him out of the door. This continuous cycle illuminates May’s identity confusion. For instance, there is no possible way for May to even distinguish the truth of their relationship because she cannot make up her mind about wanting Eddie in her life; hence, her identity is divided which leaves her incapable of assessing complete understanding of reality. Thus being stated, it is clearly evident that May, Eddie, and the Old Man share a common struggle in their lives attempting to decipher their pasts and relations while also endeavoring to justify their own actions.

The ability to determine fiction from reality in *Fool for Love* is unattainable for the

characters let alone for the play's reader and theatrical audience. David J. DeRose utilizes a review of a theatrical performance in order to establish the different aspects of the ways the audience/reader reacts to the play. Throughout his review, DeRose states "*Fool for Love* is a return to the more self-consciously theatrical and dreamlike stage imagery of Shepard's earlier work. Realism is mixed with ritual in a tightly-knit plot where past and present, truth and illusion, clash with irresistible force" (DeRose 100). DeRose continues to illustrate that appearances in the play are misleading because of the use of stage realism to lead the audience into a false sense of security so that the drama and revelation of illusion and reality will be more effective at the conclusion. For example, the Old Man "pointing into space" at the end of the play is significant to the entire illusion of the characters' stories. Furthermore, DeRose suggests that the Old Man plays a significant role as a confusing figure of either reality or fantasy that the audience cannot distinguish. For example, DeRose testifies that "the old man's presence turns a realistic confrontation between incestuous siblings into a disturbing, nightmarish stage image that totters the line between reality and fantasy" (DeRose 101). When the audience learns that both Eddie and May were born of the same father but different mothers, it is apparent that their love is one that should not exist. According to Eddie, his father "had two separate lives...He'd live with me and my mother for a while and then he'd disappear and go live with her and her mother for a while" (Shepard 63). At the same time, Eddie also claims that he and May did not know they were siblings until it was too late: meaning that they had already "fooled around" (Shepard 62). By the end of the play, the audience is left wondering which character is telling the true story if there even is truth to any of the characters' dialogues.

Throughout the play, May, Eddie, and the Old Man argue over which person is telling the true story. Even the smallest details of the story are questioned, which helps establish that

the various histories of May, Eddie, and the Old Man are debatable. For example, when Eddie tells Martin about the times he remembers his father returning home in a Studebaker, the Old Man interjects and states “That was no Studebaker, that was a Plymouth. I never owned a goddamn Studebaker” (Shepard 64). The small difference in which car the Old Man used to drive establishes that the versions of the stories are becoming distorted. Furthermore, as Eddie continues to relate his story to Martin, May furiously exclaims that “He’s had this weird, sick idea for years now and it’s totally made up. He’s nuts...He’s told me that story a thousand times and it always changes” (Shepard 67). After the completion of May’s interpretation of the story, and the addition of Eddie’s mother’s possible suicide, the Old Man becomes frustrated and claims that “This story doesn’t hold water...That’s the dumbest version I ever heard in my whole life” (Shepard 73). Ultimately, all three characters have a different view on what had occurred in the past, but have trouble distinguishing fiction from reality. These instances not only illustrate that the stories are distorted, but it also shows how far the characters go to exaggerate and to attempt to recreate an imagined and/or exaggerated past. Furthermore, the reader is left questioning each of the character’s stories. Since there is no definitive answer, the audience must assume through stage directions and dialogue what has occurred in the pasts of these characters. In William G. McCollom’s “Illusion in Poetic Drama,” the notion of illusion in the theatrical drama is described as being a source of the audience’s willingness to actively participate in the storyline. McCollom explains that “Illusion is thus something more than a willing suspension of disbelief: it is what German writers have called a conscious self-deception and a “feeding on dreams” (McCollom 184). This statement is a direct summarization of American dramas such as *Fool for Love* and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Throughout the article, McCollom illustrates the importance of illusion in theatrical drama in order to involve

the audience into the storyline and plot of the play. For example, the Old Man breaks the fourth wall of the play by sitting outside of the action and facing the audience. The significance of the characters of any dramatic play must perform with illusionary aspects in order to convey a more fascinating story in hopes of creating a more emotional and intrigued audience (McCollom 187). The addition of the Old Man as an outside character is extremely important in the play and dramatic theater. For instance, a live-audience would probably not understand why the Old Man is outside of the action. They also may wonder if he is even real or acknowledged by the other characters. Opposed to reading the play, watching the play does not give the audience a background story or stage directions. This aspect alone allows the audience to become intrigued by the characters and the plot. Utilizing illusionary practices in theater is especially significant as a means to grasp the attention and interest of the live-audience as well as the reader.

Throughout Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love*, it is unclear whether the reader can believe the dramatic past of May, Eddie, and the Old Man. Not only does the reader struggle in distinguishing the truth from fiction, but it is apparent that by the end of the play, the characters as well have a difficult time recognizing their own pasts. Recognizing the truth versus fiction in this play is indiscernible and leaves the audience to question the validity of the stories told about the characters' lives. Throughout the play, it is difficult to distinguish why the characters create such implausible tales. How is the reader expected to believe the stories of May, Eddie, and the Old Man's past if the characters tell different versions of the same story? In order to fully understand the plot of the play, the reader must attempt to decipher each of the character's tales. Also, the use of visual scenery, identity confusion, and theatrical performance, play important roles in discerning the truth from fiction. The theme of illusion versus reality is

prevalent throughout the entirety of *Fool for Love*, and after a close reading, it is evident that the characters create a dramatic and fanciful story, which incorporates different “versions,” in order to justify their own relationships with one another.

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America's Televised Identity: The Bus Stops Here

Todd Ankiewicz

In *Bus Stop*, William Inge disrupts the preconceived notions that modern Americans have of the post-war society, gender roles, and social standards of acceptable behavior by designing characters that challenge these constructed identities that have been created by the media's portrayal and projection of idealized American lifestyles. The representation and censorship in television created a false portrayal of American life. Modern Americans construct notions of 1950's-60's by analysis of the cultural portrayal of gender roles/male-female relations, projected morals and values, and a national sense of patriotism. To gain an appreciation for the lasting impacts of social realism in *Bus Stop*, the characters and settings must be compared to programming of 1950's through 1980's that reflectively defined a generation of Americans, especially women to prescribed identities as those found in shows like *Donna Reed* and *Leave it to Beaver*. While in the 1960's tremendous social and political advancements were occurring, television continued to repress social realism and project the morals and decency of an idealized post-war generation. The Greatest Generation became idealized and the basis for a non-realistic moral center that inaccurately represented society at large. It is not until the 1970's that social realism begins to peek its 'ugly head' into the airwaves. Just as television programming begins to scratch the surface of naturally existing social conditions, the 1980's neo-conservative, Reaganites force a movement back to the post-war ideals that thwarted accurate representation in the first place.

A child of the 80's constructs views of the 1950's through the advent of Nickelodeon's *Nick at Night*, which would later become *TV Land* and the revival of 'classic television.' 1950's television is more effective as a reflectively defining tool that inscribed a hyper-moral sense of past to a generation that discovered themselves through television rather than inherited or taught social values. In a 2002 article entitled, "Values and Morals in American Society," Morgane Le

Marchand claims that, "television shows are teachers now" and their messages, values, moral portrayal of situations have had a steady decline since the 1950's era (Le Marchand 1).

Prior to the advent and then commonplace of the household television, "family was the main vessel through which morals and values are passed down. In the 1950's family dinners were an occasion to sit down with family members, enjoy a home-cooked meal, and discuss family life (Le Marchand 1). Morality was based on experience and beliefs and the personal exchange of these beliefs emphasized the importance of their effect on character and society. Le Marchand closely examines the family's role as the moral center from which children gained and learned to practice moral decency. Core values that were once passed down through conversations at family meals were interrupted by the seemingly moral television programs that became commonplace in the 1950's especially with the advent of the TV dinner, a compact individual meal meant to be consumed while absorbing broadcast frequencies. Modern technology disrupts these routines and a focus shifts the shared, interpersonal experience of conversation to the new, glowing screen of the television. The majority of early programming took place between the afternoon and evening hours in the heart of these family meals, which later develops into a cultural shift where the television is just another seat at the table. Early characters and settings in programming such as *I Love Lucy* and *The Donna Reed Show* project for the 1950's and reflectively define for subsequent decades an inaccurate portrayal of 1950's life different from the realism portrayed in Inge's *Bus Stop*. To gain an accurate understanding of the importance of William Inge and *Bus Stop*, the work must be viewed in comparison to varying decade of television's portrayal of 1950's American life and society beginning with a comparison of *Bus Stop* the programming of the 1950's, then moving on through the progression of the 1960's and 1970's, and culminating with the 1980's. It is essential to

examine Inge's use of thematic setting, characters, and how they serve to project and reflect American society/ideals of America.

None of Inge's characters in *Bus Stop* align with television's projected 1950's paradigm. Inge's characters do represent marginalized members of society that cling to a separate value system or disenfranchised individuals that fail to align with the new American ideal structure. Inge's characters are unwed, childless women, left over cowboys that refused to modernize and assimilate to the world of the industrial revolution, perverse, alcoholic intellectuals, naive school-girls, and hyper-masculine stereotype of the greatest generation who are as Charles Burgess defines in his article, "An American Experience: William Inge in St. Louis 1943-1949" as, "psychologically tortured, small towners" (Burgess 439). Inge's characters are based on his experiences in the Midwest. *Bus Stop* represents an "intriguing romance on a bus bound for Kansas City" while Inge was a teacher at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri (Burgess 433). Inge once reveals to a reporter that, "on the bus, a man was pursuing a woman... They were not together, nor was she giving him much encouragement. But the romance increased a little at each stop" and by the time "they reached Kansas City, they were together" (Burgess 443). While the premise for *Bus Stop* based on this experience is storybook in nature, Inge's representation in the dramatic work is gritty by the raw emotion of disenfranchised characters, far from television's projects of how events occur. Lonette Harrell describes television projects of situations in the 1950's in her article "Values and Morals in American Society: The 1950's vs Today":

Almost without exception, every show presented an ethical or moral challenge to one of the main characters. As they tried to work through their various dilemmas, we also learned valuable lessons along with them. Right and wrong

was clearly defined. The concept of "situational ethics" had never been imagined. As a child, I was not only entertained, but also learned character building concepts, that were embraced by most society at the time. (Harrell 1)

Harrell's quote that these values were, "embraced by most society at the time" is expressive of the marginal sector of society that Inge is representing. While television is projecting what situational ethics, Inge is reporting actual situations of the time. Inge's characters reject what modern Americans expect to be typical of time and place of the 1950s. These expectations are based on a false portrayal by the media to project a moral image and guidelines for the viewing audience. 1950's TV deliberately excludes certain aspects of society deemed immoral or inappropriate. Inge emphasizes these aspects of society by designing characters that deflect the social expectations of standards, morals, and gender roles. Inge brings the de-centered America to the forefront by the gathering a range of characters from forgotten pasts, rejected social statuses, abused women, and alcohol abusers. These disenfranchised characters are early versions of the newly developing counter culture. Only when the characters are fully excluded can they be considered a member of the counter culture.

Beginning with Inge's use of setting to depict a small Kansas town that is behind the times with its lack of modern conveniences and backwoods' mentality, Inge creates a place that conflicts with the typical, American expansion to the suburbs. Grace's Diner is a base to serve the non-conforming American identity that is either de-centered or disenfranchised from the newly forming collective identity. The restaurant's livelihood is based on a limited revolving customer base of locals, but mostly on bus patrons traveling through to alternate destinations. The notion that the town or restaurant are not a primary destination for any character riding on the bus serves to show that the setting is an impermanent and undesirable place in American

society. Carl the bus driver may be the exception to this logic, except that he does not have a choice to stop at the restaurant, as it is a predetermined stop on his route. Carl is the only implied repeating visitor to the restaurant. His goals or intentions with Grace are built upon previous visits to this limited developing space.

The restaurant is far cry from the reflective identity-forming Arnold's of *Happy Days* that Garry Marshal created in 1974 and ran for ten years (Happy Days). Arnold's is built upon the repeat business and congregating clential of teens that would build their identity around a space. Happy Days reflectively defined the 1950's teens as moral, naïve, blank slates that form individual identity around societal standards, through what Harrell defined as "situational ethics." The restaurant in *Bus Stop* is not a central place where letterman jackets and poodle skirts are found in abundance. Instead it is the gathering place for of derelicts disenfranchised from various aspects and places from society that create the unique identity of this space and time. The restaurant also differs from later depiction of diners in television.

Inge's *Bus Stop* more closely aligns with a condensed thematic setting from TV's 1976 *Alice*, which ran from the 1976 to 1985, based on the Martin Scorsese's 1974 homage to Inge's *Bus Stop*, film *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (Alice/ADLHA). In TV's *Alice*, Alice is the independent woman who is fighting circumstances of a male-dominated world. While Alice is an independent single mother of Tommy, she is still a second-class citizen. Alice is not as empowered as Grace, who is childless and who exists nearly twenty-five years earlier. Inge's world is that of implied male-dominance based on a newly forming post-war identity that is still in a state of flux and poorly defined for practical application.

Mel's diner, the primary setting for *Alice*, is a formally constructed, spatial representation of male-dominance or the regaining sustaining of male dominance. The diner has

Mel, the former Navy veteran to display physical projection of historical male-dominance in a workplace setting. Mel's gruff nature and constant condescending and degrading diction to all women, provides a realistic reflection of a post-war condition where men used their physical presence as power to dominate and control the emotional and physical aspects of women. Forgetting his physically dominating stature and his position of power as the owner/employer of Alice, Vera, and Flo, Mel's language alone could stand for the masculine/chauvinistic archetype of the male insecurity and need for control in society. This insecurity stems from a wartime model where women filled the vacant, traditional male positions in the workplace.

What often defined gender identity to this point were occupational roles, where the individual were defined and limited to the identity that their occupation prescribed. A male accountant had an obvious different male and social class identity than the pig farmer. What defined or made a man feel, '*like a man*' was the occupation that he choose. During World War II when women filled the vacancies of traditional male jobs, women also lessened the prescribed status of said jobs. Men were not as male as they previously were because a woman had been able to fill the qualifications for what was defining as male. Therefore what previously served to define a man as male would now define him as the lesser sex.

While the women in *Alice* are defined by the wittiest remarks and snappiest comebacks that they use, their language is tool of preservation and defense. Inge's women of the diner are less defensive in manner, diction, and tone and sustain in more of a gender neutral, non-woman as victim identity. Cherie is an external character, non-native to the setting who provides a different spectrum of women as victim to male influence and dominance, opposite of Grace the diner's strong female host(ess). Grace embodies the strength of the WWII woman that went into the factory to take on the masculine work identity. Grace as the single (while separated) women

is the proprietor of a business and has the sexual control and mentality that is expected of a man. She is free from emotion and sexual repression that is to be expected of a 1950's woman. She is liberated beyond her time and serves as a beacon for the modern women rather than aligning to a Donna Reed stereotype of the stay at home wife and mother dripping in pearls and built with moral fibers. While the women portrayed in the media and 1950's TV shows are predominantly those of Donna Reed and Ozzie and Harriet, Inge females subscribe to a different model of female identity (Winkel 252).

In her article, "Childless Women in the Plays of William Inge," Suzanne Macdonald Winkel presents many of the key arguments for the roles of women as deemed appropriate by society. She examines the social and cultural roles defined in a post-war era and looks at how television projects an American and almost universal ideal of how women should define themselves. Winkel uses Inge's characters with special attention to Grace in *Bus Stop*, to construct an identity of a woman that is unmarried and has not had children as maladjusted, psychologically unbalanced, and as a failure to prescribed roles. Winkel's analysis and identity constructs defined by traditional roles and the media have lasting effects that can still be seen currently.

"Inge embraced domestic realism at a time when domesticity itself was glorified--when Americans, perhaps in response to the Cold War threat, increasingly sought security through the home and family. Inge's major plays are especially revealing of the 1950s in that they emphasize the traditional role of mothers, as well as the power that mothers are capable of wielding within a family. Inge also devotes considerable attention in his plays to childless women--to wives who may have wanted to become mothers, but who for one reason or another have remained childless" (Winkel 252).

In order to understand Inge's dramas, one must appreciate the family-centered culture of the period in which they were written. During the 1950s American women were taught to find fulfillment almost exclusively through marriage and motherhood. No matter what their background or educational training, women were expected to become diligent housewives and devoted mothers. As David Halberstam notes, a new definition of femininity evolved after World War II. (Koprince 252)

"During the 1950's childless women were stereotyped not just as lonely and sexually frustrated, but even worse—as psychologically maladjusted" which is a stark contrast from television's portrayal of women in the 1950's through 1980's (Winkel 256). The characters in *Bus Stop* are removed from what we as readers would expect them to be and are clinging onto morals and ideals of a previous time and not accurately representing what television as defined as the 1950's.

Bo and Virgil represent a male dominant society of cowboys and frontier/pioneer American dreams. They are America's crusaders for manifest destiny of westward expansion, which would have expired as commonplace in the 1950's. Virgil's character is possibly the most complex as it informs gender roles. Virgil, while embodying everything of the masculine cowboy, serves as both the androgynous parental figure to Bo and a rational voice of reason like a conscious or good angel on his shoulder. Virgil's physical depiction fails to provide the stereotypical cowboy mentality that is associated of someone of his stature with his geographical cultural aspects.

While *Bus Stop* may lack a dimwitted deputy only allowed to carry one bullet, Inge's possibly only aligning character in *Bus Stop* to 1950's television is Will to Sheriff Andy

Griffith. Will may not be presiding over a quaint town such as Mayberry, but does preside over a moral and ethical code that is strongly humanistic. Will's physical presence and occupation as sheriff define him as innately good and male. Much like Andy Griffith he is fair, consistent, and rational with a traditional view of structured roles and standards, but is objective enough to not let prescribed ideals interfere with basic judgment. Andy's image is a projection of masculinity and rationale, while Will is more of a pragmatic, realistic representation of male characteristics and society.

While television may have lead the viewers to believe in a warm, fuzzy, morally sound decade, the reality is that it is a false projection of society that then became a historical representation of the 1950's. This false projection then influenced the generations to follow in the footsteps of a false paradigm based on a moral code and ethical behavior that was scripted. America is still facing the lasting effects the media and television played in shaping the collective identity of the country. The most startling and lasting effects of television's projected morality is demonstrated in how later generations reflectively define history and American identity through the inaccurate portrayal of life after World War II. This idealized construct fuels and pushes America in the 1980's towards a more conservative lifestyle in the Reagan years.

As television progress, the projected value structure of America is changing from the post-war utopian disillusionment to represent a more accurate America. Starting in the mid-1990's, we new another new shift in the way American perceive ourselves and construct identity both personal and collective with the advent of MTV's *The Real World*, which while by its very nature professes to be a 'realistic' depiction of life, serves to de-center and pervert reality into a hyperreality, that pushes the once valued moral center aside to break and subvert

societal standards that television historically projected.

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