The Oswald Review of Undergraduate Research and Criticism In the Discipline of English: Volume 22, 2020

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The Oswald Review
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Of Undergraduate Research and Criticism
In the Discipline of English

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Leading the Soul: Use of Rhetoric in Horace’s *Odes*

Kelly Freestone

“Unc est bibendum,” “carpe diem,” “dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.” Found on t-shirts and shot glasses and quoted in poetry and movies, these phrases have become so embedded in popular culture that it is easy to forget they were first penned by a Roman poet over 2,000 years ago. The son of a freedman and a friend of Virgil, Quintus Horatius Flaccus spent his 30-year career publishing poetry under the patronage of Maecenas, an advisor of Caesar Augustus. Horace’s writings include collections of Satires, Epistles, and a publicly-performed hymn commissioned by Augustus, but his most famous works, and the works from which his most quotable phrases are purloined, are his *Odes*.

A collection of 103 lyric poems divided into four books, the *Odes* are Horace’s greatest technical achievement. Imitating masters of Greek lyric poetry such as Archilochus, Alcaeus, and Sappho, Horace successfully transferred the meters of Greek lyric into the Latin language. His *Odes* are commonly divided into four types—convivial, erotic, hymnal, and political—and cover a range of topics: love and wine, the Muses and the countryside, and the politics of the Augustan age, all against a backdrop of Stoic and Epicurean maxims and moralizing (Nisbet and Hubbard xv-xxii). But the technical virtuosity and philosophical foundation of the poems do not account for their enduring success. Bland next to the fiery verses of his con-
temporary Catullus and insubstantial compared to the scope of Virgil’s epic masterpiece, it is not the content but the style of Horace’s poetry that has ensured his immortality.

Hallmarks of Horatian style include a detached and moderate tone, the inclusion of moralizing statements or commonplaces, and frequent, unexpected transitions from topic to topic within a single ode, as well as Horace’s famously pithy and prosaic diction. Many of these characteristics of the *Odes*, however, are not completely original to Horace; rather they, like his meters, trace back to Horace’s Greek predecessors. Horace identifies himself with Alcaeus throughout the *Odes*, claiming to be the creator of a new Latin lyre, but his poems are perhaps most often compared to the works of Pindar, the famous composer of victory odes and the greatest lyric poet of ancient Greece.¹ Conte claims that Pindar shaped Horace’s “pursuit of the sublime” and informed his use of serious moral gnomes or proverbs (306). Nisbet and Hubbard trace Horace’s method of including “roundabout introductions…heroic speeches…portentous maxims…abrupt admonitions…wide sweep and veering transitions, [and] even…naive digressions” to comparable elements in Pindar (xiii). Similarly, they credit Horace’s “structural complexity” to the influence of Pindar’s lyric odes; Davis points out that the “grave charge of impulsive meandering” frequently made against Horace has also been levelled against Pindar’s works (Nisbet

¹ While comparing himself to Alcaeus in odes 1.26 and 1.32, in 4.2 Horace acknowledges the folly and futility of attempting to imitate Pindar, writing that “anyone who strives to compete with Pindar relies on wings that have been waxed with Daedalus’s skill…and is destined to give his name to a glassy sea.” Horace compares Pindar to a swan who “soars in to the lofty regions of the clouds,” himself to a bee, working “with incessant toil” to “fashion in a small way [his] painstaking songs”—a fitting image of the difference between the two poets’ works.
and Hubbard xiii; Davis 10). Perhaps most importantly, Hubbard suggests that Pindar “set Horace a standard” of “how a poet of conscious power had been able to talk to the world” (23)—a standard Horace himself certainly achieved.

But although he was influenced by Pindar and other Greek lyricists, Horace has his own undeniably unique style. Horace is most praised not for his structure or profundity, but for his language. Unlike the works of Pindar, Horace’s Odes are not famous because they express lofty thoughts in a high style; rather, as the cultural appropriation of Horatian tag-lines suggest, Horace took common thoughts and maxims and expressed them more elegantly and memorably than any other writer before or since. Critics and commenters describe his unique “perfection” of style (Conte 311), or his exquisite “felicities of expression” (Shorey xxvii). Nietzsche, a philologist before a philosopher, writes “No other poet has given me the same artistic delight that a Horatian ode gave me from the first” (206). What accounts for this excellence of expression, this “artistic delight” that Nietzsche and others describe? Interestingly, the most commonly discussed aspect of Horace’s style is his adherence to the techniques of classical rhetoric. According to commentator Paul Shorey, “the charm, the curious felicity, of Horace results from his skillful use of rhetoric” (xxviii). Given his legacy as the consummate stylist, the use and effects of classical rhetoric in Horace’s poetry is worth examining.

The combination of rhetoric and poetry seems an odd one to the modern mind. Rhetoric, with its public, oratorical function and purpose of persuasion, seems far from the Romantic conception of poetry as the
private and introspective musings of the poet. But the distinction between the two disciplines was far from sharp in the ancient mind. Rhetoric and poetry were long considered “sister disciplines,” with significant overlap in the advice given regarding the style and technique of each (Grant and Fiske 4). Horace’s own *Ars Poetica*, considered the “most significant statement of literary criticism in Latin,” is full of “Aristotelian and Ciceronian rhetorical precepts” (Williams 382), confirming Nisbet and Hubbard’s observation that “by the Augustan period the rhetorical theorists not only drew on the poets but also influenced them” (xv).

The close connection and shared techniques between the disciplines partially results from their similar goals. Aristotle defines rhetoric as the “power to observe the persuasiveness of which any particular matter admits”—that is, the study of the best means of persuasion for any given occasion (1355b). But, as Cullen argues, poetry too is “language that aims to be powerfully persuasive” through its judicial use of “abundant figures of speech” (69). The poet does not write in a vacuum, solely for his own sake; rather he, like an orator, writes to move his audience. Plato similarly claims in *Gorgias* that poetry stripped of its meter is nothing more than a type of speech spoken to an audience; therefore “poetry is a kind of public address” in which poets often “make use of rhetoric” to appeal to their hearers (502c). Whether this rhetorical appeal will be used to gratify the pleasures of an audience or to “make their souls” as “excellent as may be” by speaking the truth, Plato considers equally doubtful in the case of both poet and
orator (502c-503a).\(^2\) Regardless of ultimate motives, however, “the poet and the orator, both in their subject matter and in their style, seek to make an emotional appeal to their audience” (Fiske and Grant 15). The shared goal of persuasion can explain the use of shared techniques in both disciplines.

This conception of poetry as a type of persuasion is particularly pertinent for a study of Horace’s *Odes*, for no genre is as overtly rhetorical as lyric. Defined by John Stuart Mill as “utterance overheard,” Cul len describes lyric as the genre in which “the poet…turns his back on his listeners…and ‘pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else’” (73). Because of this quality, Barcheisi explains that “Lyric is the poetry that says ‘O,’ apostrophe defines lyric as a genre” (8). Horace’s *Odes* abound with such apostrophe; indeed, only 6 out of the 103 odes are not addressed to a listener in the second person (Heinze 12). This form of direct address is not unique to Horace or to ancient poetry—it is evident in lyricists from Donne to Keats to Thomas—but there are important differences in the ancient and modern use of apostrophe. In his seminal essay on Horatian lyric, Richard Heinze argues that the dialogic nature of lyric poetry is much stronger in ancient than modern lyric, and, more importantly, its purpose is different. In ancient lyric “the purpose of the address is never mere communication: the interlocutor is not meant to learn something about the poet or serve

\(^2\) Horace himself does not seem to share Plato’s qualms about the poet’s motivation to gratify his audience; even his famous stricture in the *Ars Poetica* that poetry should instruct as well as delight stems from the premise that only the poet who combines both pleases his entire audience. The old men, Horace explains, “chase from the stage what is profitless,” while the youth “disdain poems devoid of charm” (341-2). To satisfy both, the poet must “[blend] profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader” (343-4). Pleasing the audience seems to remain the primary goal for Horace.
as a vessel into which he may pour his feelings, sufferings, and joys…The poet wishes to prevail on the other’s volition” (21). As opposed to later lyric poetry or other genres of Roman poetry contemporary with Horace, such as elegy, Horace’s primary concern is “not to portray his own psychological state, but to affect his hearers” (24).

This partially explains Horace’s emotional aloofness compared to the impassioned poetry of Catullus or Keats. But it also justifies Heinze’s direct parallel between the roles of the ancient lyric poet and the orator: “He whose first task is to affect others with his song has no reason to plunge into the depths of his heart; he is rather like the orator, who would also sweep away, convince, inflame” (25). In other words, Horace the poet is in fact acting as an orator to his audience. His Odes resemble miniature rhetorical speeches. Whether he is praying to the gods to bless his musical endeavors or thanking them for saving his life, urging the Romans to rejoice in the downfall of Cleopatra or bemoaning the moral corruption of Rome, beseeching a friend to “drown life’s sadness and trouble with mellow wine” (1.8) or to “avoid asking what will happen tomorrow” (1.10), Horace is overtly seeking to persuade his listener.

Of course, this rhetorical appeal is working on multiple levels: as Horace presents the fiction of persuading his ostensible listeners, so he seeks to persuade his actual reader of the same point. In his illuminating book Polyhymnia: The Rhetoric of Horatian Lyric Discourse, Davis argues that each ode has an “intrinsic rhetorical goal”: Horace wishes to convince the “reader to accept a particular way of looking at the world” (3). In order to do so, the “composer of the Odes is primarily engaged…in conveying
ideas and philosophical insights in a manner that is rhetorically persuasive” (2). Because of the nature of lyric poetry as the genre of direct address, and because of Horace’s more subtle goal of convincing his reader, the Odes are more rhetorical in purpose and form than the modern reader might expect. Given this rhetorical nature, it is not surprising that all the elements of classical rhetoric are evident in the Odes. Horace’s use of the three appeals of invention, his choice of arrangement, and the figures of speech that characterize his style all serve to make his poetry persuasive for both the imagined interlocutor and for the reader. An examination of Horace’s incorporation of these rhetorical principles in his Odes shows how the techniques of poetry and rhetoric overlap and why the use of such techniques has made Horace’s poetry so effective.

Invention is the first canon of rhetoric, and all three of the appeals enumerated by Aristotle—logos, pathos, and ethos—are evident in Horace’s Odes. Margaret Hubbard’s description of the “formal and argumentative nature” of some verses in the Odes suggests Horace’s use of the appeal to logos (3); Nisbet and Hubbard further observe that some arguments are even “set in syllogist form, sometimes with suppressed premisses” (xxv). The statements of Epicurean moralising in particular are frequently expressed as enthymemes: Keep a level head and restrain from excessive joy, for you are sure to die (Horace Odes 2.3). Enjoy what you have while you can, for eventually you will die and all you possess will be given to your heirs (2.15). Cut short long-term hopes, and harvest the day, for soon we will die (1.11). The truth of stated premise—the inevitability of death—is undeniable, adding to the strength of his conclusion. Horace’s frequent use of mytho-
logical examples also constitutes an appeal to logos, but by induction rather than by deduction, as per Aristotle’s division of methods of proof in his *Art of Rhetoric*. When Horace tells Xanthias not to be ashamed of loving a slave woman, he initially backs up his exhortation not with logical arguments but with the examples of Achilles and Ajax, both heroes of the Trojan war who also fell in love with slave women: “In earlier days the slave girl Briseis with her snow-white skin roused the haughty Achilles; the beauty of the captive Tecmessa roused Ajax...though he was her master” (2.4). In 2.9 Horace uses examples from both nature and mythology to convince his friend Valgius to cease mourning for his lost love, writing that even Nestor “did not spend all his years grieving for his dear Antilochus, nor did his Phrygian parents and sisters mourn young Troilus forever.” Such examples are meant to be inductively persuasive, convincing Horace’s reader to accept the rationality of his advice.

In other situations, examples from mythology may also be considered an appeal to pathos, as such examples provide not only logical inference but also serve as a clue to what emotional reaction the reader is supposed to have. The names of Daedalus, Achilles, or Penelope invoke the skill, ferocity, or faithfulness of each character, and also recall their full stories to the reader’s mind; such mentions of well-known characters, or famous mythological events such as the gigantomachy or the Trojan war, thus carry layers of connotation that lie behind the point Horace is trying to make. But Horace utilizes more obvious appeals to pathos as well. Ode 3.10 is an amusing, hyperbolic example in which the poet pleads with a woman (whom, he insists, was not meant to “be a Penelope, spurning all her suitors”) to accept
his advances by presenting a pitiful picture of himself stretched out on her doorstep in the cold: “You would still have too much pity to expose me…
to the North winds…do you not hear not how the door rattles, how the trees…howl in the gale, while Jupiter is freezing the fallen snow?” In 1.14, the urgency of Horace’s wording (“O ship! New waves are about to carry you out to sea. O, what are you doing? One final effort now, and make port before it is too late!”) constitutes a pathetical appeal for his reader to feel the same urgency.

Perhaps the most interesting use of appeals in the *Odes*, however, is the appeal to ethos. For an orator, the appeal to ethos is the speaker’s appeal to his own legitimacy: in order for anything he says to be taken seriously, he must demonstrate that he is wise and virtuous—that he knows what he is talking about and is worthy of being trusted. One way that Horace establishes his ethos is by inserting poetic passages where he proves his poetic inspiration and capability (see, for example, 2.19 and 2.20). But the question of ethos is different for a poet than an orator, for Horace must primarily convince his reader not of his own character but of that of his persona. Davis explains that “Lyric arguments are communicated, however obliquely, by “fictional delegates…whose ideas and attitudes may or may not coincide with those of the actual historical personage” (5). That is, although the poet has a distinct “tone of voice” (Nisbet & Hubbard xxv) and an “identifiable character” or ethos in the *Odes* (Davis 5), this character is to some extent assumed in order to promote the point. As Nisbet and Hubbard observe, this is one reason it has proven difficult to use his poetry to construe a biography of the poet: as Horace’s tone shifts from the acerbic writer of the *Sat-
ires to the gentle philosopher of the *Odes*, the picture of the actual historical person remains fuzzy (xxv-xvi).

Even within the *Odes* this manipulation of ethos is evident. Tarrant suggests that Horace alters the structure and syntax of his language to reflect his character in the narrative. Thus the logical incoherence of 1.22, in which Horace introduces the noble principle that a life of integrity protects a man, only to conclude that he himself was protected in his encounter with a wolf because of his love for Lalage, reflects the incoherence of the supposedly infatuated poet, while the elegant, artificial dialogue structure of 3.9 reveals the characters of those speaking (Tarrant 37). Similarly, Horace’s exclamations and repetitions in 2.19 mimic the frantic nature of a Bacchic revel; twice Horace repeats the cry of the followers of Bacchus (“euhoe!”), twice he pleads for mercy, twice he insists that it is permitted for him to sing of Bacchus. The frantic tone continues through the four repetitions of “you” in quick succession through the middle of the poem: “you bend rivers…[you bend] the savage sea, you bind the Bistonian’s woman’s hair…you...hurled back Rhoetus.” The calmer syntax in the concluding two stanzas, and their depiction of Bacchus’s departure from a meek and subdued Cerberus, implies the withdrawal of Bacchus from the breast of the similarly subdued poet. By varying his arrangement and style, Horace thus promulgates the ethos that suits the proposition or argument of the particular ode. Indeed, throughout the *Odes* Horace seems to be “an actor wearing different masks” (Nisbet & Hubbard xxvi), appearing in some odes as the grand visionary or ardent patriot, in others as the petty lover or unconcerned philosopher enjoying his country farm. Ultimately, Horace proves as adept at trying on
different characters as different meters.

While Horace’s employment of the rhetorician’s three appeals of invention is fairly straight-forward, his use of the second canon of rhetoric, arrangement, is less clear. Far from classical rhetoric’s organization of a speech into five sections, the Horatian odes have frequently been criticized for their lack of direction, accused of “meandering” (Davis 10) or completely lacking “anything like a connected train of thought” (Tarrant 38). While syllogistic arguments may be detected within an ode, implied arguments are harder to discern. An ode frequently seems to begin in one place and end somewhere completely different. 2.13, for example, begins with Horace cursing a tree and ends with a vivid vision of an underworld; 1.7 jumps from Horace’s praise of the Tibur to the poet’s advice to his friend, only to conclude with a retelling of Teucer’s speech to his co-exiles. While there is an inferential connection between the earlier statements in the ode and the image Horace leaves the reader with, there is no circling back to make the connection explicit.

Nevertheless, various structures within the odes have been discerned. Nisbet and Hubbard demonstrate that some odes have a 2 + 2 + 3 structure, in which the first four stanzas narrate certain events or actions and the final three detail the consequences (Tarrant 25). Tarrant notes the frequent use of a da capo ABA structure, in which the final section recalls the language, theme, or both of the opening section; thus in 1.9 the seem-

3 See, for example, Ode 2.7. The history of Horace and his friend and addressee, Pompeius, is described in the first four stanzas, while the fifth stanza’s introductory “ergo” marks the switch to the only logical conclusion of such a history—a feast and drinking party in celebration of Pompeius’s return (Tarrant 38 ff.).
ingly disparate opening and closing sections are united under their common advice to make the most of the season, be that the season of winter or the season of one’s youth (42). The ode is also almost chiastic in structure: a picture of winter (“Do you see how Soracte stands there shining with its blanket of deep snow…?”) is followed by the injunction to pile up the logs on the fire, then the injunction to take each day as it comes and enjoy one’s youth is followed by a picture of what such enjoyment looks like (“Now is the time to make for the Park and the city squares…when dusk is falling, and delightful laughter comes from a secluded corner”). The effect is musical and symmetrical, but it is also rhetorical: the reader moves from image to image to the intended conclusion.

Davis explains that this subtle movement exemplifies how Horace’s arguments progress: “Horatian lyric discourse typically ‘argues’ a coherent nexus of ideas through nuanced variations in form and presentation. The building-blocks of these arguments consist of motifs, topoi, recurrent metaphors, and rhetorical conventions that, for the most part, are set forth paratactically” (3). This highlights one of the biggest differences between the use of arrangement in oratory and its use in poetry. Whereas the orator systematically lays out his case, structuring his argument so that his evidence will clearly lead to his conclusion, the poet arranges his images and allusions so they more obliquely suggest his conclusion, with the intervening logical steps left to be inferred by the reader.

Davis demonstrates how the three seemingly disconnected sections of Ode 1.7—Horace’s praise of the poetic possibilities of Tibur, his advice to Plancus, and his narration of Teucer’s speech—all support the ode’s central
argument: an acceptance of the natural ups and downs of life will allow one to live contentedly, regardless of his current situation (197). As Davis explains, Horace’s opening rejection of poets who write “long continuous [perpetuo]” poems overlaps with the second section’s rejection of those who refuse to accept the changeability of nature and persist in believing that the sky will “invariably [perpetuo] produce rain” (Davis 197-198; Horace Odes 2.13). Contrary to this belief, Horace urges Plancus to philosophically accept his circumstances and console himself with wine. Of course, as it encourages Plancus to develop a certain inner attitude towards life, Horace’s advice transcends all circumstances; hence in the final section even Teucer, exiled from his beloved homeland, can encourage his men not to despair and to “banish [their] worries” with wine (Davis 199; Horace Odes 2.13). Teucer and his story thus becomes a “concrete” example of Horace’s philosophical advice expressed in the centre of the poem and introduced in his opening poetical critique (Davis 198). As this example shows, Horace’s use of arrangement in his Odes is just as intentional as that of the orator, but it is much more subtle.

Finally, Horace is famous for his mastery of the third canon of rhetoric—style. As the supreme stylist of the Latin language, Horace’s success has long been tied to his use of rhetorical figures of speech. His Odes are full of the apostrophe, imperatives, rhetorical questions, and personification typical of lyric poetry. Horace’s address in the opening of the allegorical “ship of state” ode incorporates three of the above figures: “O ship!…O, what are you doing?” (1.14). But Horace also makes ample use of other tropes and schemes. Metaphor and simile, synecdoche and metonymy all
contribute to the creation of his lovely images; anadiplosis and anaphora lend dramatic emphasis, such as in 3.5 (derepta vidi; vidi ego — “I have seen [arms] snatched [from Roman soldiers]; I myself have seen [the arms of citizens] . . .”) and in 2.16 with the triple repetition of otium (“a quiet life is what a [sailor caught in a storm] prays . . . is the prayer of the Thrace . . . is the prayer of the Medes”). Asyndeton and polysyndeton steer the direction of the poems by connecting Horace’s images and thoughts, while irony, oxymoron, and litotes contribute to his pervasive tone of “dry humour” (Nisbet & Hubbard xxv). Latin’s inflected endings also allow for additional poetic effect and rhetorical emphasis by means of “symmetry, parallelism, [and] antithesis,” as Shorey explains (xxix).

But Horace’s style is as notable for what it leaves out as for what it includes. Nisbet and Hubbard describe his diction as comparatively dry, his poetry marked by “realism,” a “down-to-earth” style, and fewer dramatic poetical flourishes than contemporary poets (xxii). Horace’s vocabulary is sparse, his choice of words prosaic, his word-order straightforward, and his use of alliteration or onomatopoeia minimal (Nisbet and Hubbard xxii). Yet the felicity of language which he attains within his economy of expression is unparalleled in Latin verse. Shorey attributes this to Horace’s skill in joining ordinary words together to form an extraordinary expression (xxvii). In the *Ars Poetica* Horace tells the aspiring poet: “With a nice taste and care in weaving words together, you will express yourself most happily, if a skillful setting makes a familiar word new” (46). Horace is the master of crafting such skillful settings, as his many well-known phrases attest.

His simplicity of style and the success of his combinations also
demonstrate Horace’s adherence to the principle of decorum. This concept that the subject matter must be suited to the artist’s talent, that the form must be suited to the genre, and that the words must be suited to the thought (i.e., that the artist’s manner must be suited to his matter) is praised both in the rhetorical treatises of Cicero and Aristotle and in Horace’s own *Ars Poetica* (Grant & Fiske 14-15). From his judicious variation of tone based on his subject matter, to his deliberate employment of rhetorical figures of speech, to his decision of what word to put where, the success of Horace’s phrases ultimately displays his understanding of what is fitting. Nietzsche describes the result:

"In certain languages that which Horace has achieved could not even be attempted. This mosaic of words, in which every word—as sound, as place, as concept—pours out its strength right and left and over the whole, this minimum in the extent and number of the signs, and the maximum thereby attained in the energy of the signs—all that is Roman and…noble par excellence. All the rest of poetry becomes, in contrast, something too popular—mere sentimental blather (206)."

While Horace instructs his reader through his use of logic and guides the reader with his arrangement, it is ultimately Horace’s skillful placement of words that weaves each of his odes into a cohesive whole.

What is the overall effect of Horace’s use of rhetoric’s appeals, arrangement, and style? Davis claims that all these rhetorical elements of the
Horatian ode work together to make Horace’s case, to persuade the reader “to accept a particular way of looking at the world” (3). But Horace’s way of doing this is perhaps more subtle than the rhetorical connotations of the term “persuasion” suggest. According to Horace, the aim of poetry is not to change the hearer’s mind but to “lead the hearer’s soul” (Ars Poetica 100). As he crafts his ethos, obliquely suggests the connection between his thoughts, and startles or charms the reader with his apt “mosaic” of words, Horace is not so much forcing the mind of his reader to intellectually accept his position as he is “enchanting the soul” (Plato, Phaedrus). Perhaps the most fascinating insight to be gained from the study of rhetoric in Horace’s Odes is that rhetorical figures are a crucial part of the enchanting effects of both the orator and the poet. However mechanistic or formulaic they may seem, rhetorical techniques do not only convince the intellect; they are also the means by which souls are led.

It seems a modern trend to wish to find meaning or profundity in the original or the formless. But the dependence of orators and poets throughout history on strict forms and figures suggests otherwise. Besides acting as persuasive conveyors of meaning, perhaps poetical or rhetorical rules also foster the invention and arrangement of ideas and feelings. Perhaps the existence of such rules does not stifle creativity, but rather encourages it. Perhaps form does not hinder the discovery of meaning, but allows for it. Perhaps profundity was only ever to be found within the boundaries of forms, and perhaps this pursuit of meaning and profundity is what an adherence to classical rhetoric frees the poet to do.
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In her now classic book, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, narratologist Mieke Bal proposed a view of the humanities as one discipline composed of “word-and-image studies” (33). Whether applied to the pursuits of the poet-painter William Blake, the genre of emblematic poetry, or simply to the peculiarity of the art-historical standard of attaching written description to physical objects—Bal’s proposition is most clearly enforced by the sheer frequency of humanities-based work that dialectically pairs words with images. Further, Bal’s proposition draws attention to the fact that the qualifying term, “word-image,” has yet to be condensed to a singular term. Even when presented as a singular adjective applied to a broad body of work, the terms “word and image” are not “a whole, do not match, do not overlap; they can neither do with nor without each other” (34). In effect: these terms are not so much working in combination as they are actively colliding. Additionally—by the very nature of being able to collide—they become fit for, and demanding of, the act of translation. Thus describes the ultimate in translational investigation—the intermedial hybrid work, the singular entity that is partially between word and image, benefitting from and expanding upon its inclusions of each.

One such work, Sebastian Brant’s *The Ship of Fools* (Das Narrenschiff) (1494), addresses the synergistic effects of combining verse and
imagery by employing these two components to a didactic end. Composed of over one hundred individual chapters, Brant’s work analyzes human folly through a structured approach of three lines of text that can be termed a “motto,” followed by a woodcut print, followed by several pages of verse. This format repeats for each instance of folly, providing engaging modes of both visual and textual significance through which to understand the faulty nature of humanity. There is hardly any deviation from this format, and no instances in which a chapter includes solely an image or solely a body of text. Though Brant’s work is peculiar in its intermediality, what is most perplexing about the composition is its slew of revised editions. Given Brant’s complex reliance upon intermediality in order to convey his ideas, it seems a daunting task to reproduce these ideas with the exclusion of either medium. Yet, in the trajectory of this work’s republication, the revised editions and reprints tend to exclude the original woodcuts, regarding them as unnecessary. Notable examples include the following sixteenth and seventeenth century reprints, each of which is lacking the original woodcuts: 1553, Hermann Gülfferich; 1560, Weygand Han; 1574, Nicolaus Höninger; and 1625, Jakob de Zetter (Zeydel, “Introduction” 22). Considering the popular indifference amongst republished editions to the inherent intermediality of the original, it would be almost impossible to imagine an edition of Brant’s work that is exclusively visual. Yet, such is the advent of Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Ship of Fools* (1495-1500), a painted translation of the oft-revised book that dismisses all semblances of textual elements in favor of an entirely new composition. A unique response to a unique original, Bosch’s fully-transformed rendition of Brant’s work affords
further insight into the genre of intermedial works by providing a radical
counterpoint to the existing transformations of Brant’s work, one that equi-
tably promotes the verbal and visual achievements of the original.

Sebastian Brant’s text *The Ship of Fools* was published in Basel in
1494 and exercised tremendous influence over both Brant’s career and the
existing canon of European literature. Immediately received and exten-
sively translated across Europe, *The Ship of Fools* solidified Brant’s renown
and introduced a distinctly German perspective into the literary world of
Europe (Zeydel, “Preface” v). Though the exact philosophical nature of this
perspective is debated—whether humanist, realist, or medieval—its con-
tent is ubiquitously accepted as a satirical approach to the shortcomings of
human nature (Gaier 266). Obviously humorous in its underlying descrip-
tion of a ship of poorly-behaving “fools” dressed to various extents in jester’s
clothing, the text is doubly humorous in its inclusion of visual aids. These
aids—appearing in the form of woodcuts—accompany every textual detail,
and often expand upon them. “Dame Venus” is not just textually prolific
as an enchanter of fools, but she is also forcefully depicted as a cohort of
death, wielding her many fools upon her many leashes (Figure 1, below).
The “world upon [the fool’s] back” is not just metaphorically significant,
but is seen in full physical capacity weighing upon the donkey-eared sufferer
(Figure 2); and so on, as each fool chronicled is paired with an equally criti-
cal depiction. Thus, in Brant’s *The Ship of Fools* visual and textual elements
each contribute essential meaning to the work. The inherent humor, the
very essence of Brant’s design, is anchored in rendering the verbal metaphors
visual.
Despite this clear intermediality, there is evidence to suggest that the textual content of Brant’s work was historically perceived by publishers as superior to the visual content. As is noted in Edwin Zeydel’s introduction, the woodcuts were not reproduced in their entirety in a later edition of Brant’s work until 1872—almost 400 years after the original edition was published (“Introduction” 19). Critical of this approach, Zeydel suggests that this tactic of partial reproduction limits the effectiveness of the verbal translations. Further, he promotes his own current translation into English—which includes the entire body of original woodcuts—by concluding that Brant’s original work “cannot be fully understood or appreciated without this integral component” (“Preface” v). With conviction, Zeydel’s edition and criticism renders obsolete the purely textual approaches to Brant’s work, as we will see, and elucidates Hieronymus Bosch’s early, cohesive response to the complementary effect of image and text in Brant’s work.

Initially created as the left panel of an otherwise unfinished triptych, Bosch’s painted adaptation _The Ship of Fools_ was completed around 1500—shortly after Brant published his wildly successful book—and functions as the artist’s visual translation of the well-known text (Figure 3). Seeking to cement the connection to Brant, Bosch engages in both image-to-image and text-to-image translation in his work. Specifically, he uses compositional aspects from the woodcuts to organize his figures and visual references to certain lines of Brant’s verse to construct the appearances of these figures. This latter practice is what Bal would consider a form of intermedial “quotation” (_Caravaggio_ 10). As is implied by the term “quotation,” the mechanism at work is the grounding of visual elements of Bosch’s work
in specific lines of Brant’s text in service of constructing a new final detail. The effect of this structure is that the original written narrative and Bosch’s new visual narrative “are in tension, but not in contradiction” (Bal, *Reading Rembrandt* 21). Colliding, these narratives recognize the “already known”—Brant’s work—and thus allow for the “communication of a new, alternative…content”—Bosch’s painting—without dishonoring the original (35). Both the text-to-image and image-to-image mechanisms considered, what is most significant about Bosch’s final composition—beyond its value as a tribute to Brant’s original—is that it undertakes these trials of interpretation and ultimately succeeds in achieving meaning that is decidedly different from that which Brant seemingly intended. Namely, it allows for distinct criticisms of the behavior of identifiable classes beyond Brant’s generic “fools.” Only by constructing his painting as a product of the entirety of Brant’s text—using the writing as well as the compositional choices made in each woodcut—does Bosch produce a representation that is both true to Brant’s formal principal of textual-visual intermediality and, by virtue of referencing an original, expansive in its meaning.

The figure that is a both an apt translation of the text and a subtle tribute to Brant’s supplementary woodcut is Bosch’s image of the gluttonous man (Figure 4). This man reflects the qualities Brant describes in his chapter “Glutrony and Feasting,” where he addresses the issue of consuming wine in excess. In addressing wine’s dangers, Brant points to it as the downfall of several Biblical heroes, the basis for many “grave offenses,” and as something that “wise men” would successfully avoid. In the context of these grievances, Brant believes a glutton to be one who is “round and staunch,” “neglects his
friends,” and is a “silly swine” (97). Additionally, a glutton is “defenseless on the ocean deep,” and does not possess the same foresight as the biblical Noah, who “cared no whit” for wine (97).

Guided by these Brantian verbal cues, Bosch allows for his image to both honor and transfigure the words upon which the image is based. Rather than deliberately contradict or literally represent Brant’s descriptions, Bosch conjures a textually-grounded armature upon which further visual details are molded. The resulting character is not simply a glutton, but is commonly understood as an allegory of Gluttony itself (Morganstern 300). Here, Gluttony appears as an overweight man who is observably “round and staunch,” yet must be deduced to be one who “neglects his friends” through his expressed ignorance to those swimming beneath him. In a subtle dissonance of word against image, Gluttony recalls the “silly swine” through his pink garments and pig-like facial structure, yet fails to embody the literal visual translation for Brant’s line of text as he is not an actual swine (97). In further referential detail, Gluttony rides aboard a leaking barrel in a sea of wine, honoring Brant’s earlier description of the “wise man” Noah (Figure 3). Conversely to the sober Noah, this gluttonous man is entirely obedient to wine’s wiles, and is slowly sinking to his death in the very thing he desires, unable to navigate the wine-filled “ocean deep” (97). In the hands of Bosch as mediator, Gluttony is at the complex intersection of a well-divined metaphor and a veritably human fool, the latter expected by the viewer, having read Brant. As is observed in each of these text-to-image acts of translation, it is the isolation of each individual textually-constructed detail that allows for the text to be refitted for the purpose of Bosch’s visual character.
Having delivered a skillful representation of what Brant verbally describes, Bosch draws no further details from the “Gluttony and Feasting” woodcut to personalize his figure. Brant’s woodcut, depicting a large crowd gorging themselves about a feasting table, has no indication of a sea of wine, nor of any singular gluttonous man (Figure 5). Rather, gluttony is spread about the entire crowd, as some figures consume legs of meat, others choke down gallons of wine, and all celebrate in greedy enjoyment. Comparing this scene to the allegorical image presented by Bosch, it is clear that the Brantian woodcut is quite different in visual representation. To understand why—in the case of Gluttony—Bosch performed an act of text-to-image translation rather than image-to-image translation, an important aspect of Bosch’s translated Gluttony must be considered. Free from the constraints of individually associated chapters, Bosch’s translation of textual Gluttony now exists in a continuous narrative, that of the painted canvas. To compress Gluttony to a singular figure composed of textual references, rather than preserve the entire feast of the woodcut, better serves this allegorical end. Though the indoor feasting scene from Brant’s “Gluttony and Feasting” woodcut is not included in Bosch’s work, it is important to note that the collective imagery produced in this woodcut is not entirely lost. Bosch is able to distribute this concept across the remaining larger narrative. This is clearly shown by Bosch’s central image of the group on the boat (Figure 6), and further enforced by the fact that the painted allegory of Gluttony is united with these figures in a shared environment, the depicted body of water.

Thus, Bosch’s allegory of Gluttony—as an individual figure—serves
as a Bal-ian quotation of Brant’s work, reliant but expanding on the extensive textual detail he presents. The value in this approach to depiction, rather than a holistic one, is that the excluded visual elements can still be easily incorporated across the larger narrative, and so allow Bosch to create new meaning. In combination with the practical effects of condensing a long series of text and image into the space of one canvas, Bosch’s decision to apply the visual renditions of the crowds from Brant synecdochically across the variety of the follies in the painting becomes a clear reflection of his effort to extend the reaches of Gluttony. In Bosch’s reading of the text, Gluttony allegorized in one particular instance, as Brant includes it, is integrated into the collective image of the shared category of fools. Thus, in Bosch’s translation, he juxtaposes the investigation of Gluttony alongside Brant’s other inquiries. Having successfully condensed Gluttony to be represented by a singular figure, the sea of wine becomes an extended symbol, one that sweeps up the entire ship of celebrating singers, and by extension, all fools. In this way, Bosch is able to convey Brant’s fundamental criticisms of gluttonous behavior whilst enumerating his own reading of this characteristic as a universal human folly.

Though Brant’s written text is essential for Bosch’s expansion upon his own conception of Gluttony, Bosch is not as reliant on the text for the creation of his other details. For example, in the case of Bosch’s singing group (Figure 6), the major depicted details are drawn primarily from Brant’s woodcuts. This detail, making up the center of the painting, portrays a group of singers: mouths open, instruments poised, gazes falling on the pancake that hangs between them. Amongst this group, the two identifiable
characters are the monk and nun sitting in the front—each recognizable by their traditional garments. This formulation of characters, of a group singing in a circular formation, is taken directly from the composition of the woodcut that accompanies Brant’s chapter “Of Serenading at Night” (Figure 7). In Brant’s woodcut, there appears a motley group of fools—bearing characteristic donkey-eared attire—with mouths open mid-song in disregard for those sleeping. Placing particular attention on the placement of the instrument in the hands of Brant’s furthest left performer, Bosch’s use of Brant’s image becomes clear. Consistent with the Brantian woodcut, Bosch’s group serenades in complete ignorance to their surroundings and Bosch’s furthest left singer bears the very same guitar (Figure 6). Yet, despite these consistencies, there are several important Boschian developments from the original woodcut. Of particular interest are the presence of the monk and nun figures, as the representation of these figures is absent in Brant’s woodcut. In the woodcut, all the singers sport jester costumes and—beyond their differing stances—are indistinguishable from one another. Further, only one line in Brant’s text is referenced by Bosch’s figures, the one in which Brant advances the identities of the figures who serenade as “priests, students, laity hell-bent” (207). Thus, unlike his heavily textual portrayal of Gluttony, Bosch’s portrayal of the singers can be condensed to a primary compositional reference to a woodcut from *The Ship of Fools*, and only a singular line of text. However, this minimal reliance works in Bosch’s favor, as he is now available to insert his own further interpretations without sacrificing Brant’s groundwork.

Returning to the conspicuous monk and nun figures as a now clear
application of Bosch’s representational freedom, the narrative that they contribute to becomes especially controversial, as it both does not originate in Brant’s visual work and directly interferes with a key Brantian agenda. By creating a generic representation of a fool in his woodcut, Brant avoids offending powerful institutions such as the church. By contrast, Bosch freely elects to target the church directly by depicting two of its foolish members. Thus, Bosch’s portrayal is both deeply based in Brant’s work and profoundly bold. In making Brant’s broader criticism more specific, Bosch allows for an additional layer of social commentary that departs from Brant’s original intentions.

Bosch’s choice to add social commentary to Brant’s work and to diverge from Brant’s visual representation of Gluttony increases the overall complexity of his relationship with Brant’s work. Though Bosch honors lines of Brant’s work, and draws on the composition of Brant’s woodcuts, he does so in the overarching pursuit of a different goal. In the case of Bosch’s presentation of Gluttony, he uses Brant’s text to form a visual representation that is neither ideologically controversial nor a strong departure from what the text describes. Using the same mechanism as a quotation, Bosch establishes a reference to Brant and then places this reference in connection with an entirely different narrative. Outside the context of the chapter in which Brant includes it, this reference then illustrates Gluttony as an item of conceptual importance for all Brantian fools rather than an isolated character trait. In the case of the serenading group, Bosch draws a connection to Brant in the consistent visual representation between Bosch’s collective group and the group in one of Brant’s woodcuts. Simultaneously utilizing
and developing this association, Bosch inserts additional criticisms of foolish behavior that specify and offend specific social classes without sacrificing the connection to Brant’s original. In both the instance of Gluttony and the serenading group, Bosch establishes a connection to Brant’s text that still allows himself the freedom to explore the work’s latent possibilities. Thus, Bosch manages to advance a translation of Brant’s work which ultimately goes much further than the original in terms of social criticism, yet still uses references to the original as an effective protective alibi.

What is of final consideration, then, is the context of Bosch’s Ship of Fools painting as merely one panel of a larger triptych. Having greatly expanded on Brant’s original work within the painting, Bosch goes on to externally expand upon Brant’s text through his juxtaposition and synthesis of The Ship of Fools with the thematic implications of the other panels of his triptych. These panels contain no further references to Brant’s work, and are divergent in the content they address as well as their visual cohesion. Thus, what unites these panels with the panel under examination is the singular shared exploration of allegory. In Bosch’s only other fully complete panel of this triptych, entitled “Death and the Miser” (Figure 8), the scene depicted has long been considered an allegory for Avarice (Morganstern 301). As a counterpart to the allegory for Gluttony already discussed, this panel reveals the likely broader ideological implications of Bosch’s entire triptych. Preoccupied towards using “the traditional imagery for the Sins as a point of departure for his ruminations on the human condition,” Bosch’s whole oeuvre is eminent for his depictions of allegorical sin (302). It is then likely that this same interest is at work here, and that a completed triptych would
have revealed several other depictions of allegories of sin.

Returning to considering the finished panels within this larger vision of sin, Bosch’s choice of the glutton in relation to the miser—as opposed to other common sinners—emphasizes the opposing examples of indulgence and parsimony. As the counterpart to the allegory of Avarice, Bosch’s inclusion of *The Ship of Fools* places final emphasis on the allegory of Gluttony represented by the overweight barrel-rider. Beyond a counterpart to the other references to Brant’s *The Ship of Fools* contained within the singular panel, Gluttony now becomes the binding element of the painting to Avarice, and is thus extended to the narrative of the larger triptych. In the context of the earlier analysis of Bosch’s approach to depicting Gluttony, it becomes clear that this approach not only allowed for Bosch to expand upon Brant’s commentary, but also to contribute a commentary that is entirely his own.
Works Cited


FIGURES

Fig. 1. Sebastian Brant. Woodcut from “Of Amours.” *The Ship of Fools*, p. 88.

Fig. 2. Sebastian Brant. Woodcut from “Of Too Much Care.” *The Ship of Fools*, p. 116.
Fig. 3. Hieronymus Bosch. Reconstruction of The Ship of Fools (left wing of The Wayfarer triptych). 1495-1500, Musée de Louvre, Paris and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. The bottom half and top half of the painting were separated at some point in history and are currently displayed separately in two fragments. This is a reconstruction of the two panels as they would have originally appeared in a single panel.
Fig. 4. Hieronymus Bosch. Detail from An Allegory of Intemperance (fragment of the left wing of The Wayfarer triptych). 1450-1500, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

Fig. 5. Sebastian Brant. Woodcut from “Of Gluttony and Feasting.” *The Ship of Fools*, p. 96.
Fig. 6. Hieronymus Bosch. Detail from *The Ship of Fools* (left wing of The Wayfarer triptych). 1450-1500, Musée de Louvre, Paris.
Fig. 7. Sebastian Brant. Woodcut from “Of Serenading At Night.” *The Ship of Fools*, p. 206.

Fig. 8. Hieronymus Bosch. *Death and the Miser* (right wing of *The Wayfarer* triptych). 1485-1490, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
“If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear”: Reading the Creature’s Development Through Godwin’s Educational Theory in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Mikaela Huang

Our moral dispositions and character depend very much, perhaps entirely, upon education.

*William Godwin, An Account of the Seminary*

Being the daughter of the early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and the radical philosopher William Godwin, Mary Shelley felt the burden of carrying on her parents’ legacies. In particular, both of her parents emphasized the formative power of education and intellectual pursuit. Shelley, like many women of nineteenth century Britain, was not educated in a public institution; instead, her own curiosity and feverish perusal of books inspired her education. This type of desire-driven education, motivated exclusively by her enthusiasm to acquire knowledge, is fundamental to her father’s educational theory, which argues that a pupil’s motivation to learn needs to arise from his or her own desires.

In addition to the pupil’s desire to learn, Godwin also stresses that society is an indispensable aspect of education because it allows the youth to practice his or her learned virtue. Though Shelley read and studied much on her own in her educational pursuits, she by no means received her education in isolation. Intellectual and philosophical devotees such Percy Shelley and Samuel Taylor Coleridge often visited her father in the privacy of her home. Her own arduous study, driven by desire and constant contact with keen intellects, contributed significantly to Shelley’s intellectual development. This led to the conception of her literary and historical masterpiece, *Frank-
Learning in the company of other intellects became an essential part of Shelley’s own intellectual pursuits from an early age. Accordingly, she positions the Creature in *Frankenstein* to learn in social isolation to illustrate the detriments of private tutoring. Abandoned by his creator upon animation, the Creature learns to distinguish between his bodily senses while foraging alone in nature. Once his rudimentary education in nature is completed, he discreetly observes complex societal constructions and values from benevolent cottagers. Concealed within his hovel, the Creature learns to distinguish between virtue and vice and understands that the brutal treatment he received from the villagers results from his appearance. The tender exchanges and loving relationships between the cottagers also incite the Creature to yearn for companionship. He helps the cottagers by supplying wood and material needs and develops a plan to eventually reveal himself. Once rejected, however, the Creature abandons all practices of virtue and resorts to causing fear to humanity, which he deems responsible for his condition. By positioning the Creature in *Frankenstein* as an individual whose vicious practices result from solitude, Shelley, like her father, also stresses the importance of society in education and the development of virtue.

Despite acknowledging Shelley’s own arduous pursuit of education, critics predominantly overlook Godwin’s influence and argue that, as far as the Creature’s development in *Frankenstein* is concerned, Shelley draws heavily on Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s educational philosophy. In *Emile*, Rousseau argues youths should be educated more or less in isolation, so as to retain their natural inclination towards benevolence. The critics argue
that everything good within the Creature comes from nature and that “everything evil [comes from ...] the hostility and prejudice he meets at the hands of men” (Lipking 428). Ron Broglio claims that Shelley’s depiction of the Creature’s educational experience reflects Rousseau’s notion that human nature is most pure and virtuous apart from society. Rousseau argues for individuals to be educated privately by a tutor, who carefully arranges “natural” experiences from which the pupil can learn. The pupil should also be educated more or less in isolation as to not be exposed to society’s vice. These critics who support the Rousseauvian influence presume that the Creature has been educated in social isolation. They also neglect the fact that the Creature’s acquaintance with humanity includes benevolence as well as vice, such as the mild, tender, and loving manners displayed by the cottagers. The Creature gravitates towards the benevolent disposition of the cottagers as he discreetly observes them. Through his observations, the Creature also learns the value of language and education, which excites his curiosity to acquire language and to learn from various texts.

I argue, then, that had the Creature not learned the value of language through observing the conversation of the De Lacey family first, he would not have the desire to glean information from various texts. The De Lacey family’s ability to converse and share empathy ignites the Creature’s desire to learn, which reflects Godwin’s desire-driven education rather than Rousseau’s educational philosophy. However, the Creature did not directly interact with his peers as Godwin would have preferred, ultimately leading the Creature to abandon virtue for the practice of vice. Shelley’s depiction of the Creature’s educational environment and circumstances closely resem-
bles Emile’s, but, in the portrayal of the Creature’s education process, she ultimately exemplifies Godwin’s advocacy for desire-driven education and criticism of private education. Shelley, like Godwin, criticizes private tutoring due to its inability to develop self-esteem and cultivate the ability to act virtuously within the pupil; according to Godwin’s theory, privately tutored individuals are unable to overcome societal temptation and have no opportunity to gradually acclimate and defend themselves against society’s vice.

Granted, the contrived process of the Creature’s education does reflect an aspect of Rousseau’s philosophy. At first, the Creature, apart from society, seems to be Shelley’s version of Rousseau’s Emile. Rousseau gives Emile a tutor who contrives natural opportunities for him to learn through personal experiences. Like that of Emile, the Creature’s educational development process unfolds by means of a process carefully controlled by the author, which, in a sense, makes Shelley the Rousseauvian “tutor” who orchestrates the “natural” opportunities for the Creature to learn. In Emile, Rousseau states that “It is not [the tutor’s] business to teach [the pupil] the various sciences, but to give him a taste for them and methods of learning them when this taste is more mature. That is assuredly a fundamental principle of all good education” (135-136). Essentially, Rousseau argues that a pupil needs to learn by experience and not to be taught directly by a tutor. In Frankenstein, the Creature does not have a tutor but learns through his experiences in nature and with humanity in a logical and contrived manner. The circumstances through which the Creature learns make it hard for the reader to negate Shelley’s presence. First, the Creature, abandoned by Frankenstein, wanders alone in nature and learns to distinguish his senses through
experiencing hunger, thirst, lethargy, and various temperatures. Shelley then tactfully arranges for the Creature to be exposed only to magnanimous cottagers; she positions him within a fertile environment to cultivate his moral disposition. Once literate, the Creature chances upon various texts to exercise his judgment. Shelley, as his private tutor, carefully selects texts such as *The Sorrow of Young Werther*, *Paradise Lost*, and Plutarch's *Lives*, to encourage the Creature to develop empathy and “ardour for virtue [...] and abhorrence for vice” (90). Shelley’s contrived scenarios in the development of the Creature’s education seems to mimic that of Emile’s experience with his tutor. Both Emile and the Creature learn through their experiences, and they are both unaware that their experiences are delicately controlled by an external party.

Despite the Rousseauvian influence, however, Shelley’s portrayal of the Creature’s educational pursuit only after his awareness of its value reflects Godwin’s philosophy of desire-driven education. Whereas the pupil’s development in Rousseau’s philosophy depends entirely on the tutor’s constant involvement in every aspect of the pupil’s experience, the pupil’s development in Godwin’s philosophy relies on the pupil’s disposition. As a result, Godwin’s theory allots more agency to the pupil than Rousseau’s. In *The Enquirer*, Godwin claims that “[t]he most desirable mode of education [...] is] that all the acquisitions of the pupil shall be preceded and accompanied by desire. The best motive to learn, is a perception of the value of the thing learned,” which can be “intrinsic” or “extrinsic” in nature (63). In desire-driven education, an individual must perceive the “intrinsic motive” or the “extrinsic motive” within education. Intrinsic motive is the discovery
of the inherent, unchangeable, and natural value of something. The Creature is first motivated to learn based on his awareness of the intrinsic value of language. Through his observation of the De Lacey family, the Creature recognizes the advantages language affords: he “found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds […] the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenance of the hearers” (77). The Creature concludes that language gives the De Lacey family the ability to communicate emotions and to elicit empathy from one another. This intrinsic quality of language excites his desire to acquire it. The intrinsic value of language, which the Creature perceives, is the ability to articulate feelings and thoughts to another being. In accordance to Godwin’s educational philosophy, the Creature only needs to understand that language acquisition will benefit him to excite his desire in acquiring this skill.

After his initial excitement, the Creature’s arduous work in language acquisition results from extrinsic motive, another significant factor in Godwin’s philosophy of desire-driven education. Learning that is excited by an extrinsic motive is also due to the perceived value of the learned object, but its perceived value arises “from the accidental attractions which […] may have [been] annexed to it” (63). The perceived value from the extrinsic motive is the benefit attached to the object that does not arise from the object’s constant and inherent characteristics. Although the desire to acquire language skills initially comes from the Creature’s acknowledgment of the value of language, his later arduous study is motivated by an extrinsic value that the Creature assumes to be a benefit of language acquisition.
Creature believes that language acquisition could earn him the cottagers’ acceptance and affection, which excites his desire to learn. After a period of observation and admiration of the cottagers’ benevolent dispositions, the Creature desires to “first win their favour, and afterwards their love” (79). The Creature proclaims, “[t]hese thoughts exhilarated me, and led me to apply with fresh ardour to the acquiring the art of language” (79). The Creature associates the cottagers’ affection as a benefit that can result from language acquisition. This extrinsically attached value motivates the Creature to vigorously pursue the art of language, which results in his ability to admire virtue and disdain vice. Both the intrinsic and extrinsic learning motives further the growth of the Creature’s character and mind.

Shelley further exemplifies Godwin’s educational philosophy in the Creature’s ability to recognize “the self” as separate from society and not imbued by its vain prejudices. Godwin’s philosophy presumes that desire-driven education, regardless of the intrinsic or extrinsic nature of the pupil’s motivation, engages the mind and renders the pupil a rational individual. This individual can then formulate opinions that are unaffected by society’s preconceived notions. In *The Enquirer*, Godwin asserts that “the pure and genuine condition of a rational being” is to have one’s education governed by intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Exercising the mind in this manner “elevates us with a sense of independence. It causes a man to stand alone, and is the only method by which he can be rendered truly an individual, the creature, not of implicit faith, but of his own understanding (62). Here Godwin claims that learning through desire is the precursor for becoming a “rational being” who is capable of formulating his or her
own identity. Because the Creature has undergone Godwin’s desire-driven education, which motivates him to continually exercise his mind, he is a “rational being” in the Godwinian sense. Despite the realization that the villagers perceive him as a monster due to his appearance, the Creature judges himself independently from their opinion. When he finally approaches the blind, elderly De Lacey, the Creature tells him that “I have good dispositions; my life has been hitherto harmless, and in some degree, beneficial; but a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable Creature” (93). The Creature’s understanding of himself does not conform to social standards as practiced by various villagers he encounters. Instead, it derives from his understanding of virtues learned from his study. This desire-driven education allows the Creature to gain a true sense of individuality and thus fashions for himself an identity not dependent on society’s preconceived notions.

Despite having fashioned a strong sense of identity, the Creature’s willingness to compromise his own self-worth to gain the De Lacey family’s acceptance exemplifies Godwin’s criticism of private tutoring. Whereas Rousseau advocates for individual tutoring away from society, Godwin thinks that “[t]he pupil of private education is […] chiefly anxious about how he shall appear […] too often continues for the remainder of his life timid, incapable of a ready self-possession” (The Enquirer 135). In this critique, Godwin claims that a privately tutored individual preoccupies him or herself with the image that is perceived by society at large. This preoccupation, when left unchecked, can lead the individual to compromise his or her identity in order to be accepted in a certain social circle. Shelley’s
Creature, in his desperation to share in the companionship of the cottagers, purposefully presents an ideal image of himself to them. He imagines that “when they should become acquainted with my admiration of their virtues, they would compassionate me, and overlook my personal deformity… I resolved…in every way to fit myself for an interview with them” (91, emphasis added). Instead of presenting his authentic self to the De Lacey family, the Creature attempts to mold, to “fit,” himself into an image that he assumes would be successful in gaining the favor of the cottagers. He wants the De Lacey family to know of his “admiration of their virtue” rather than his own character, magnanimity, and benevolent disposition. Even though the Creature’s admiration is a genuine aspect of himself, the image he wishes to present does not encompass his entire character. Had Shelley’s conception of the Creature’s education been completely influenced by Rousseau, as many critics argue, his developed disposition should remain as unchanged as Emile’s when he enters society.

The Creature’s proclamation that solitude is the chief cause of his downfall also suggests Shelley’s support for Godwin’s claim that society should be part of the educational process. Godwin argues that the continued development of an individual’s moral disposition is entirely dependent on social interactions: “I cannot entertain a generous complacency in myself, unless I find that there are others that set a value on me. I shall feel little temptation to the cultivation of faculties in which no one appears to take an interest” (The Enquirer 46). Not only is human society a place for individuals to exercise their virtue, it also serves as a motivator for its continuing development. The Creature, likewise, feels the need for a companion
who is capable of sharing his sensibilities. The Creature pleads with Frankenstein to create a mate for him with the argument that her existence would allow him to continue practicing benevolence:

If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion […] My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded. (103-104, emphasis added)

Unlike the Rousseauvian individual who retains goodness in measured solitude, Shelley's Creature claims that his “vices” derive from “forced solitude” because he lacks the opportunity to participate in a society that practices affection and magnanimity. Essentially, the Creature argues that, not being a part of society, he has no motivation to continue the exercise of his benevolent disposition towards humanity since his physical appearance forces his seclusion.

The Creature’s seclusion also makes him ill-prepared for the extent that society practices vice due to its prejudice. Similar to Rousseau, Godwin believes that society can corrupt an innocent individual because of men’s tendency to be “treacherous, deceitful and selfish” (51). However, Godwin believes that gradually introducing an individual to society can mitigate this shock and protect an individual’s virtue against corruption. If the Creature could have been educated in society, his resistance to society’s vice would slowly build and his emotional maturity would gradually develop. Godwin
argues that private education’s most fatal effect is introducing its students to society’s “temptation unprepared” (51). For Godwin, “temptation” is a traumatic experience. Shelley illustrates the Creature’s “temptation” in his encounters with the younger De Lacey members and the two lovers he afterwards meets in the woods. After being rejected by the younger De Lacey members, the Creature feels his benevolent sense of self annihilated. After the cottagers depart out of fear for his presence, he sets fire to the cottage and “bend[s his] mind towards injury and death” (97). The emotional wound he receives at the hands of the cottagers is then compounded by the gunshot wound he sustains from the two lovers. These practices of vice propel him to declare “revenge—a deep and deadly revenge, such as would alone compensate for the outrages and anguish I had endured” (99). Both the younger De Lacey members and the young lovers are blinded by vain prejudices, and their actions to injure the Creature are guided by the need for self-preservation. In this, Shelley exemplifies what Godwin considers to be the temptations of society. Because the Creature manages to shelter himself from all reproach for the duration of his education, he has not developed skills to react appropriately to these temptations.

Shelley’s depiction of the Creature’s swift change from benevolence to viciousness reflects Godwin’s argument against private tutoring. The Creature claims men’s vice for himself and triumphs in this appropriation. As opposed to the pupil who receives an education within the public sphere, Godwin claims that privately educated individuals, like Shelley’s Creature, are not prepared to “endure suffering with equanimity and courage” (135). Furthermore, Godwin argues that the individual might be inclined to
believe that “the practices of the sensual and corrupt [are] the only practices proper to men” (51). The shock of humanity’s vice to an individual in an isolated upbringing could prove fatal in that he or she foregoes the practice of magnanimity and adopts vicious practices to satisfy his or her own desires. The isolated Creature resorts to finding temporary solace in the practice of violence and vice that he has learned from men. In his first act of murder, the Creature feels his “heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph” while he exclaims, “I, too, can create desolation; my enemy is not impregnable” (100, emphasis added). Not only does the Creature take pride in his ability to mimic human transgressions, he exults in his first act of murder. This practice of vice exceeds any violence he has experienced in the hands of men. He retains none of the benevolent disposition and sentiments that have been displayed during his education. Because of the Creature’s change from desiring to practice magnanimity to committing the most heinous crime, Shelley ultimately endorses Godwin’s perspective that private education is inadequate in preparing an individual to be a beneficial part of society.

As critics like Lipking and Broglio have noted, Rousseau’s influence on Frankenstein does permeate the novel’s characters and plot, but it does not negate the influence that Shelley’s father had on the conception of the novel. Employing a Rousseauvian reading of the Creature succeeds only in exemplifying Rousseau’s exaltation of nature and criticism of society. It also ignores the multifaceted nature of the Creature’s development. Shelley draws on Rousseau’s comments on human nature and the vice of society, but the conception of the Creature’s education draws on both Rousseau and
Godwin’s educational philosophy. The Creature’s educational experiences do seem to resemble Emile’s, but the mode of education ultimately exemplifies Godwin’s desire-driven education. The Creature attains virtue and self-identity, but these characteristics remain untested by society because his education has chiefly taken place outside society. The Creature’s subsequent, sudden change from the practice of virtue to vice also further exemplifies Godwin’s critique of individual tutoring and ultimately Shelley’s endorsement of her father’s educational philosophy. Instead of reading *Frankenstein* as an example of unresolved enigmas, as is the case with the Rousseauvian reading, we should take into consideration that perhaps Shelley’s unorthodox education provided her with insights into various causes of societal dysfunction exemplified in her masterpiece.
Works Cited


Portraiture and the Convergence of Social Classes in *Bleak House*

Heather Twele

In Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House*, Lady Dedlock is the subject of two portraits which are intricately woven into the mystery plot of the novel. The primary plot centers on Esther Summerson, a young woman of illegitimate birth under the care of her guardian Mr. Jarndyce, and Lady Honoria Dedlock, Esther Summerson’s mother. Honoria’s youthful affair with a British Captain and Esther’s birth were kept secret, and after being told that her daughter died at birth, Honoria married her wealthy suitor Sir Leister Dedlock. Once Lady Dedlock learns of Esther’s existence, she attempts to conceal her connection to Esther to avoid tarnishing the aristocratic Dedlock name. However, Mr. Tulkinghorn, the protective Dedlock family lawyer, and Mr. Guppy, a law clerk in love with Esther, uncover Lady Dedlock’s secret after they discover the identity of her former lover, Nemo (formerly Captain James Hawdon). The two portraits of Lady Dedlock reveal the physical resemblance of mother and daughter, which increases the danger of their connection being publicly exposed.

An oil portrait of Lady Dedlock inhabits her country residence of Chesney Wold, Lincolnshire, while the other, an engraving, resides for a short period in Krook’s Rag and Bottle shop, London. The different mediums and locations are significant, for in the nineteenth century, the status and position of art in society was rapidly changing. Portraits were no longer the sole property of the upper class to display their prominence and
wealth; instead, portraiture filtered down to the middle and lower classes through the cheaper medium of mass-produced engravings. Although the mediums differed, portraiture connected the upper and lower classes during the nineteenth century, shattering the aristocracy’s strict hierarchical social structure. The separate private and public spheres were also integrated in an unprecedented manner through the process of industrialized engraving. The exclusive sanctity of upper-class habitations became popular subject matter for mass-produced engravings, particularly reproductions of private portrait collections for the lower class. Lady Dedlock’s likeness existing as an oil portrait for private viewings and as a mass-produced engraving for public enjoyment mirrors that societal shift in the nineteenth century. The difference between the two mediums is suggestive of the old aristocratic views and the new emerging middle-class ideals. Oil paintings require numerous layers of paint and varnish, whereas the intaglio printing process requires the strength to scrape away layers of copper plate to form an engraving: the former is additive and the latter subtractive. While the upper-class desired to protect their elevated station and privileges, the lower classes wanted egalitarianism. Through the portraits of Lady Dedlock, Dickens reveals that the interrelated transformations of art and Victorian society are inextricably linked. Art possesses the capacity to transcend the confines of class structure, and Bleak House presents the unique shift during the Victorian era in which the boundaries between upper class and lower class, and private and public spheres, begin to break down.

Dickens strategically connects portraiture to the character of Lady Dedlock, one of the only characters who experiences social mobility. Lady
Dedlock’s marriage to Sir Leicester raises her from the middle-class to the aristocracy. Once she discovers that her daughter, Esther, is alive, Lady Dedlock exerts her influence to keep the truth secret in order to protect her reputation and the status of her husband. The mediums of oil paint and copper-plate engraving reflect Lady Dedlock’s social mobility and connect her middle-class past to her aristocratic present. The additive layering of oil painting mirrors Lady Dedlock’s attempt to conceal her past transgressions, while the subtractive process of engraving illustrates the reversal of that attempt.

The portrait of Lady Dedlock in the long drawing-room at Chesney Wold is first mentioned when Mr. Guppy and his friend, Mr. Weevle, visit under the strict watch and guidance of the housekeeper, Mrs. Rouncewell. Guppy is described to be in “spirits . . . so low that he droops on the threshold” of the long drawing-room (82). However, he immediately “recovers” when he notices the painting of Lady Dedlock: “a portrait over the chimney-piece, painted by the fashionable artist of the day, acts upon him like a charm . . . He stares at it with uncommon interest” (82). Guppy’s interest originates from his recognition of similar facial features between Lady Dedlock and his love interest, Esther Summerson, to whom he declares, “Thy image has ever since been fixed in my breast” (114). When he asks who the portrait represents, Rosa, Lady Dedlock’s maid, replies that “[t]he picture over the fireplace . . . is the portrait of the present Lady Dedlock. It is considered a perfect likeness, and the best work of the master” (82). Although the narrator does not reveal the identity of the “fashionable artist” or the exact medium of the portrait, the majority of painted portraiture during the nineteenth century was completed in oils through a “complex multi-step and multilayer process”
Many nineteenth-century artists including the English painters J. M. W. Turner and Augustus Wall Callcott used “varnish interlayers so that later paint could be applied safely” (183). This “multilayer process” of oil painting protected the layers of pigments beneath, requiring sufficient money to compensate the artist for his time and supplies. Since the artist is “fashionable,” such a caliber of portrait would only be available to the aristocracy. The portrait of Lady Dedlock functions not only as a “likeness” but also as a symbol of the social and economic power of the ancestral Dedlock family.

The distinction between high- and low-quality oil paintings is introduced when the narrator describes the portrait of the Snagsbys, a lower middle-class husband and wife: “The portrait it displays in oil—and plenty of it too—of Mr. Snagsby looking at Mrs. Snagsby” (118). The mocking phrase “and plenty of it too” implies that the painter used too much oil in the process of mixing the paints, and thus, the painter’s work was of low quality. Regina B. Oost comments on the “ubiquity of portraits among the novel’s middle-class characters” (141), particularly the portraits of “Guppy and the Snagsbys” (142). In the nineteenth century, oil painting became common among the middle classes as they tried to consolidate their newly asserted status in society, and Anthony Edward Dyson notes that “the impulse of the rising middle classes” was “to emulate those they considered their social superiors” (4). To gain legitimacy in Victorian society, the middle class used oil portraits to display their wealth and newly established social power. However, only the rich could afford high quality paintings. Although the narrator never comments on the quality of Lady Dedlock’s
portrait at Chesney Wold, he implies that a “fashionable” artist is associated with a high standard of technique and execution. Therefore, the especially oily quality of the Snagsby’s portrait separates it from Lady Dedlock’s “fashionable” portrait. Although the oil medium for both portraits indicates the narrowing divide between nineteenth-century classes, the quality of the paints reveals that the divide has not been completely eradicated.

Introducing fine art from private collections into the lower classes, mass-produced engravings also complicated the previously strict class divide in nineteenth-century England. Lady Dedlock’s second portrait is a “copper-plate” engraving “from that truly national work, The Divinities of Albion, or Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, representing ladies of title and fashion” (256). Mr. Weevle, otherwise known as Jobling, hangs the engravings on his walls, thereby liberating the “impressions” from their previous confinement in a “bandbox” (256). A textual note in the Norton edition of Bleak House states that “[a]nnuals, featuring portraits of ladies of fashion, were popular publications in the Victorian period,” such as “The Book of Beauty, or Regal Gallery” (256). Ronald R. Thomas also suggests “Heath’s Book of British Beauty (1844)” as a possible “model” for the “copper-plate impressions” decorating Weevle’s wall (137). The general popularity of annuals filled with portraits of fashionable, aristocratic women reveals that Lady Dedlock’s mass-produced likeness is a source of connection between the middle and lower classes and the upper class. Weevle feels as though he has a connection to Lady Dedlock, even though he has never seen her in his entire life. Through annuals, the lower class felt a connection to the private lives of the aristocracy in a way that was previously unheard of.
However, despite the new-found connection between the lower and upper classes, the annuals only provided the viewer with stereotypical images of aristocratic women. The engraving of Lady Dedlock is not mentioned until Mr. Guppy observes it “over the mantel-shelf,” and he pronounces it to be a “speaking likeness” of Lady Dedlock (396). In contrast to Lady Dedlock’s Chesney Wold portrait, the engraving is described in detail:

Mr. Guppy affects to smile; and with the view of changing the conversation, look with an admiration, real or pretended, round the room at the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty; terminating his survey with the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantel-shelf, in which she is represented on a terrace, with a pedestal upon the terrace, and a vase upon the pedestal, and her shawl upon the vase, and a prodigious piece of fur upon the shawl, and her arm on the prodigious piece of fur, and a bracelet on her arm. (396)

However, the lack of description of Lady Dedlock’s physical presence limits the considerable amount of detail illustrating the engraving for the reader. Evidently Lady Dedlock’s body is missing from the description, other than a brief mention of her “arm” (396), and the engraving is “fraught with symbols that connote the wealth of the model” (Talairach-Veilmas 118). According to Laurence Talairach-Veilmas, the printed portrait’s “display of luxurious items crowded together turns the portrait into a publicity image,” and the body of Lady Dedlock “seemingly vanishes” (118). The engraving of Lady Dedlock is a symbol of wealth and aristocracy, but the engraving also
allows the viewer to gaze upon her “likeness,” which Guppy mentions with surprise. Although the engraving does not allow the viewer an intimate window into her private affairs, Lady Dedlock’s privacy is still violated and the intuitive viewer might be able to read her internal struggle in the carefully cut lines of her engraved face.

The exact intaglio method of “copper-plate impressions” of the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty is never mentioned, but Roger Baynton-Williams indicates that “[t]he most widely adopted intaglio method was line engraving” and “[c]opper was the favoured metal . . . used until the early part of the 19th century” (47). The creation of “incisions on the plate” is the trademark of intaglio methods of image production, including “line engraving, etching, drypoint etching, mezzotint, stipple engraving, soft-ground etching and aquatint” (46). However, “line engraving” was the popular choice in the early nineteenth century. The engraver’s tools included “v-shaped chisels, known as ‘burins’ or ‘gravers’, which were used to cut tiny channels into the plate,” and the depth of the “incisions” in the copper determined the “light and shade” of the “finished print” (47). In opposition to the additive layering process of oil painting, engraving requires the subtractive process of removing layers of copper to produce an image. This distinction is heightened through the comparison of the tools: the pliable bristles against the elasticity of the canvas surface, and the sharp burin scratching against the smooth, hard copper surface. Another point of comparison lies in the affordability factor of the different mediums. Antony Griffiths states that copper was the “preferred” metal until the early nineteenth century because “it provided the optimum balance between softness
(for ease of engraving) and hardness (for length of print run), while being available and affordable” (28). The affordability of the copper engravings increased depending on the length of the print run: “higher prices at the top end compensated for shorter print runs, while the long runs from crudely engraved plates enabled prints to be sold much more cheaply at the bottom end of the market” (50). The varying levels of quality in the print trade can be compared to the difference in quality of oil portraits at the beginning of the nineteenth century as the middle-class adopted that artistic medium to increase their prominence in society. However, overall affordability of lower quality engravings was greater than lower quality oil portraits; hence, the lower-class character, Weevle, can afford a copy of the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauties.

To understand the societal implication of the two different mediums of Lady Dedlock’s portraits and their connection to Victorian society as a whole, the reader must first understand the changing social structure in the nineteenth century. In particular, the terms upper, middle, and lower class must be discussed in light of the distinct yet merging public and private spheres. Discussing the issue of privacy as a historical “social construction,” Mats G. Hansson defines the private sphere as “a protected zone for the individual and family, where the curiosity of outsiders can be excluded, and family matters can be dealt with in secret, secluded from the outer world” (16). Families create this safe zone to maintain credibility and integrity in society. The term “social construction” indicates that the separation of the public business and private home life was created for and “altered in different social situations” (15), including social and class power. In addi-
tion, Hansson indicates that “economic circumstances” are one of the main factors in “determining the form of private life” (17). For example, the “economic circumstances” of the “urban poor,” particularly overcrowding, in the nineteenth century to the twentieth century restricted their access to private spaces. The public and private spheres merged, particularly for people who lived on the streets and in alleyways (17-18). The lower-middle class also experienced a merging of the private and public spheres, which is seen most clearly in the characters of the Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby with their law-stationary business. The shop is located underneath their private apartment, and as Hansson states, “the tradesman’s customers, as well as his family, were part of the domestic scene” (18). Mrs. Snagsby is involved in the law-stationary business as much as her husband.

In contrast, the upper-middle class and the aristocracy possessed the monetary means to establish a strict delineation between private and public spheres. Hansson attributes this social distinction between private and public spheres to the “gender division between the home and the outside world” that was highly influenced by the evangelical movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century (21). The evangelical writer Hannah More promoted “the view of man as a person responsible for public duties, while woman was responsible for the spiritual and moral education of the family” (21). Men were allowed to engage in the private and public spheres, whereas women were expected to remain solely in the realm of domesticity. “The correlation between the men’s and women’s spheres of influence,” Jaquie Smyth confirms, “and the spheres of the public and private is strikingly apparent in European history” (28). While women were confined within the nine-
teenth century patriarchal ideas of the separation of business and domesticity, men were allowed to traverse the limits of both. In essence, the strict boundaries between public and private spheres existed only for women, who were expected to remain solely in the home. However, the firm distinction between public and private spheres is only possible for the rising bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

The separation of the private and public spheres for the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie is distinctly illustrated through the characters of Sir Leicester Dedlock, who represents the aristocracy, and Guppy, who represents the rising middle-class. In contrast to the Snagsbys, whose private life and business are inextricably intertwined, Sir Leicester Dedlock and Guppy religiously adhere to the separation of private and public spheres. When Guppy tours Chesney Wold and shows interest in Lady Dedlock’s portrait, he asks Rosa, “Has the picture been engraved, miss?” (82), and she replies that “[t]he picture has never been engraved. Sir Leicester has always refused permission” (82). Sir Leicester’s firm denials hint that he assumes the role of protector of Lady Dedlock, and he demands that the sacred privacy of the domestic sphere be respected. According to Emily Epstein Kobayashi, “Sir Leicester essentially wishes to make Chesney Wold impermeable to the outside . . . Sir Leicester’s wife is similarly off-limits” (198). Although people of the lower classes are sometimes allowed to tour Chesney Wold, Sir Leicester refuses to allow anyone access to the domestic sphere of his household outside the confines of the country estate itself. In a similar way, Guppy separates his business from the peace of his home. In fact, the reader is wholly unaware of any aspect of Guppy’s private life until he proposes to
Esther and reveals that he has strong ties to his mother, stating that “[s]he is eminently calculated for a mother-in-law. She never interferes, is all for peace, and her disposition easy” (113). Since Guppy desires to marry Esther, allowing her into the private sphere of his life, he informs her of his financial and personal situation.

However, Sir Leicester is more concerned with class distinction than Guppy. Expressing agitation over the maintenance of his aristocratic status and the “Dedlock dignity” (12) in an age of societal and economic transformation, Sir Leicester desires absolute respect and obedience from people who he deems beneath him: “Sir Leicester Dedlock is only a baronet, but there is no mightier baronet than he. His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable” (12). Sir Leicester’s desire for respect extends to his wife, who gained the rights to that respect when she married into the Dedlock family, and when Detective Bucket relates Mr. Tulkinghorn’s suspicions about Lady Dedlock to Sir Leicester, Sir Leicester exclaims, “My Lady’s name is not a name for common persons to trifle with!” (638).

In opposition to changing class structure, Sir Leicester’s wish to safeguard Lady Dedlock’s name as well as preserve the sanctity of her portrait also originates from his desire to keep his wife’s image out of “common” hands. Sir Leicester’s burst of outrage at Bucket’s insinuations about Lady Dedlock reflects the social anxiety prevalent in the nineteenth century surrounding changing class structure, which threatened to reduce aristocratic power and authority. Presenting the aristocratic versus the bourgeois delineation of class division, Jerrold Seigel discusses the “language of class” (158):

Although people in the nineteenth century believed
that the practice of dividing society into distinct and separate classes was a novelty of their time . . . Penelope Corfield has shown that the term ‘class’ was regularly used before 1800, first alongside the older vocabulary of ‘ranks’ and ‘orders,’ then in its stead. The earlier vocabulary reflected a notion of society as a stable configuration of parts whose relations to each other were widely presumed to be rooted in some divine or natural principle independent of human will . . . Class, by contrast, referred not to an ordained division but either to one in which particular human action played some part. (157)

The first definition of “class,” synonymous with “rank” and “orders,” is Sir Leicester’s view of class order as “independent of human will” ordained by a “divine or natural principle” (157). Sir Leicester views everyone who does not have an aristocratic lineage as beneath his notice: lower classes are useful but are not to be fraternized with. In contrast, Guppy’s view of class is not determined by divine order; instead, human will determines class, particularly those who have the economic means to create a defined order of humans. However, despite Sir Leicester and Guppy’s differing views on the exact definition of class structure and its origins, both the aristocracy and the rising middle-class simplify human existence: “The language of class thus at once fostered a recognition that actual social relations are intricate and unpredictable, and offered opportunities and temptations to reduce them to a simpler state” (158). This “simplification” continued to foster the
The hierarchical societal structure in nineteenth century England, clearly laying out three main classes without taking into account social mobility and the complexities of human relationships. Despite Sir Leicester’s insistence on the separation of classes and spheres, Lady Dedlock’s image still graces Weevle’s wall in the squalor of Krook’s shop and punctures the privacy of the aristocracy.

The two portraits of Lady Dedlock integrate aristocratic values with the rapid lower-class consumption of industrialized products. A mass-produced medium, the engraving in Weevle’s room in Krook’s dilapidated shop is associated with the economic means of the lower-middle class as well as the public sphere owing to the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauties’ wide circulation. A high-quality oil painting, the portrait at Chesney Wold represents the wealth of the upper class as well as the private sphere since the portrait remains concealed, for the most part, in the long drawing-room of the Dedlock ancestral home. These two portraits not only reveal the shifting class structure at the time and the strong connection between art and society in the nineteenth century, but they are also a physical representation of Lady Dedlock’s internal struggle and her desire to keep the truth about her daughter, Esther Summerson, a secret. Layers of protection surround Lady Dedlock: Lady Dedlock herself, Sir Leicester, and Esther act to maintain her reputation in society. The layers of protection surrounding Lady Dedlock parallel the additive medium of her portrait at Chesney Wold: an oil painting. In contrast, the black and white subtractive medium of the mass-produced engraving on Weevle’s wall foreshadows that Lady Dedlock’s secret will escape the boundaries of her control and the control of those who seek
to protect her from the scrutiny of the public eye.

Hiding her secrets beneath a veil of “haughty” indifference (448), Lady Dedlock attempts to protect her own image and position in society. Lady Dedlock possesses “[a]n exhausted composure, a worn out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by satisfaction” (13). Composed of many layers of oil paint, glazes and varnish, Lady Dedlock’s oil portrait symbolizes her estimation of herself: “She supposes herself to be an inscrutable Being, quite out of the reach of ordinary mortals” (14). Wrapped in layers of practiced aristocratic indifference and boredom, Lady Dedlock believes that her “mask” (452) makes her invincible and unreadable. Discussing class and gender in nineteenth-century fiction, Arlene Young reveals that characters with aristocratic “social status” are often “to a greater or lesser extent, idle, haughty, vain, extravagant” (48). Lady Dedlock uses these common aristocratic characteristics to protect herself from prying eyes, particularly Mr. Tulkinghorn’s keen observance as he investigates the mysteries of her past. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator hints that “while Mr. Tulkinghorn may not know what is passing in the Dedlock mind at present, it is very possible that he may” (15). Continuing to foster a sense of mystery surrounding the interactions between Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock, the narrator reveals possibilities of their internal dialogue:

[H]e and she are as composed, and as indifferent, and take as little heed of one another, as ever. Yet it may be that my Lady fears this Mr. Tulkinghorn, and that he knows it . . . It may be that her beauty, and all the state and brilliancy surrounding her, only give him the
greater zest for what he is set upon, and make him the
more inflexible in it. (357)
Through the continual use of the verb “may,” expressing possibility and
suggesting probability, the narrator emphasizes that Tulkinghorn is neither
deceived nor defeated by Lady Dedlock’s “mask” of composure and aristocratic indifference. Lady Dedlock’s futile self-protection is a direct example
of Leila Silvana May’s idea that humans “are necessarily self-interested social psychologists”: “we must try to guess what others are thinking, and learn to
protect ourselves against those plans of others that would be detrimental to
us” (3). Throughout the novel, Lady Dedlock attempts to read Tulkinghorn’s
mind until she realizes the impossibility of knowing for certain what he is
planning. Then, she confronts him about her imminent “exposure,” stating,
“I am to remain on this gaudy platform, on which my miserable decep-
tion has been so long acted, and it is to fall beneath me when you give the
signal?” (509, 512). In her attempt to conceal the secrets of her past, Lady
Dedlock has met her match in Tulkinghorn’s inscrutability. Her privacy has
been violated, and her attempts to limit the destructive nature of the viola-
tion are unsuccessful.

Sir Leicester’s desire to protect the image of Lady Dedlock’s por-
trait from reproduction presents the reader with his layer of protection
of Lady Dedlock’s reputation in society. Sir Leicester’s insistence on the
separation of classes and his pride in his aristocratic lineage indicates to
Lady Dedlock that her husband only cares about maintaining their social
standing and image of wealth. The “issue of respectability” in Victorian
England is evident in discussions of Lady Dedlock’s reputation throughout
the novel, and Colleen Denney uses words such as “mask” and “façade” to emphasize the “sexual virtue” and “cleanliness” required for a woman to be deemed “righteous and above suspicion” (41). Denney reveals that often women were required to hide their past in order to integrate into respectable Victorian society; Lady Dedlock also displays an urgent need to hide her past to preserve her new social position. Not merely a selfish act, Lady Dedlock shows concern for Sir Leicester should the news of her former lover, Captain Hawdon, become public knowledge: “I must keep this secret . . . not wholly for myself. I have a husband” (450). The importance of his aristocratic status is evident in Sir Leicester’s concern for the maintenance of the “Dedlock dignity,” and when Lady Dedlock confronts Tulkinghorn about his suspicions of her past, Tulkinghorn indicates that his sole interest in Lady Dedlock’s past is also to “save the family credit” (511). Both Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock are concerned about the preservation of Sir Leicester’s family name and social standing. However, despite Sir Leicester’s preoccupation with class, ironically Lady Dedlock is wholly unaware that her husband “married her for love” (12) and that she is more important to him than a spotless societal standing, so she attempts to conceal news of her illegitimate child, Esther.

Even though Tulkinghorn and Guppy have already detected the secret of Lady Dedlock’s past, Esther protects Lady Dedlock from further exposure when she contracts an infectious disease and her face becomes slightly disfigured: “I was very much changed—O very, very much” (444). Jolene Zigarovich states, “this extraordinary resemblance between Esther and Lady Dedlock is soon disrupted,” identifying Esther’s changes as an “erasure
of resemblance” (77). Continuing on the theme of “erasure,” Zigarovich writes that “[t]he illness that has erased her identity has proven fortunate, for Esther’s face no longer mirrors her mother’s” (77). Even though Esther’s change in physical appearance is beyond her control and is therefore not a conscious effort to protect Lady Dedlock’s reputation, Esther expresses gratitude when she realizes the positive outcome of her illness:

[When I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace likeness; as that nobody could ever now look at me, and look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us. (449)]

However, it is important to note that Esther’s physical “identity” has been changed, not “erased” as Zigarovich claims. Esther’s internal and spiritual identity remains unchanged by her illness. Esther’s altered appearance is the layer of varnish and the final defence designed to protect Lady Dedlock from further discovery; however, Lady Dedlock’s image is already circulating in the public sphere. Unbeknownst to Esther, her changed appearance has no effect on the outcome of Lady Dedlock’s secret seeing the light of day. Tulkinghorn already knows that Esther is Lady Dedlock’s child, and Lady Dedlock leaves Chesney Wold before he can tell Sir Leicester about her illegitimate child.

In contrast to the additive layers of protection emulating the oil painting process, the subtractive method of engraving symbolizes those lay-
ers of protection being scraped away. The concerted efforts of Tulkinghorn, Guppy, and the moneylender, Mr. Smallweed, undermine the endeavours of Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester, and Esther to protect Lady Dedlock’s reputation. It is important to note that Sir Leicester is unaware of Lady Dedlock’s secret and protects her image out of love for his wife. Unlike the vague oil portrait, the engraving is described with scrupulous detail. The black and white medium of the engraving mirrors the clarity with which Lady Dedlock’s portrait is described. However, the lack of description of Lady Dedlock’s physical presence limits the considerable amount of detail illustrating the engraving for the reader. As mentioned above, Lady Dedlock’s body is absent from the description, and the engraving becomes a mere “publicity image” of aristocratic wealth (Talairach-Veilmas 118). Although the engraving receives considerably more description than Lady Dedlock’s Chesney Wold portrait, neither portrait displays Lady Dedlock’s body. The narrator’s vague description of Lady Dedlock’s portrait at Chesney Wold merely states that she has a “handsome face” (499). In a similar way, the narrator’s exclusion of Lady Dedlock’s bodily presence in the “copper-plate impression” (256) is slightly counteracted by Guppy’s observation that it is a “speaking likeness” of Lady Dedlock (396). In both instances, the reader must rely on the narrator to present the facts. And while portraiture contains the power to give insight into complex characters, at the same time, according to Piehler, “portraiture can reveal, and sometimes conceal, layered attributes of its subject” (105). In both portraits, Lady Dedlock’s strangely absent body presents her as a symbol of the aristocracy within the private and public sphere.

The hierarchical class implications of Lady Dedlock’s two portraits
can be summarized in relation to the different mediums. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, oil portraits were still considered the unique possessions of the aristocracy. In a “lecture to the Academy,” painter and critic Henry Fuseli states, “portrait-painting, which formerly was the exclusive property of princes, or a tribute to beauty, prowess, genius, talent, and distinguished character, is now become a kind of family calendar” (qtd. in Bray 10). Fuseli’s apparent anxiety about the relationship between the visual arts and changing class structure aligns with Sir Leicester’s indignation. The rising middle-class also began using family portraits to exhibit their increasing wealth and power in society, which limited the aristocracy’s control of portraiture as merely a symbol of upper-class values. Members of the lower class, such as Weevle, who cannot afford original portraits, collect the cheap mass-produced portraits of aristocratic and wealthy families. Margaret Beetham argues that “The rise of mass-production . . . ‘moved the portrait of the aristocratic lady from the wall of her home into different contexts where its meaning was radically altered’” (qtd. in Talairach-Veilmas 118).

Whether or not the engraving is a reproduction of Lady Dedlock’s portrait at Chesney Wold, the likeness of her produced in the “Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty” (256) moves Lady Dedlock’s image from the private sphere of her aristocratic home and acquaintances to the public sphere of Krook’s dingy shop in Weevle’s room, compliments of the mass-produced engravings catalogue. Lady Dedlock’s likeness is not merely seen by intimate acquaintances at Chesney Wold, but it is now circulated to a wide audience throughout the middle and lower classes. Neither she nor Sir Leicester has control over the dissemination of her likeness. Distinctions between the lower,
middle and upper classes, as well as between the public and private spheres, have weakened as a result of Lady Dedlock’s two portraits.

Through the two portraits of Lady Dedlock, Dickens presents the reader with a mystery plot in which the oil painting and the engraving simultaneously conceal and reveal the secret of Lady Dedlock’s illegitimate daughter, Esther. Lady Dedlock’s image erupts into the public sphere through the mass production of an engraving, despite Sir Leicester’s attempts to protect his wife’s privacy. The subtractive method of engraving contrasts with the additive layering process of oil painting, mirroring the thwarted attempts of Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester and Esther to maintain Lady Dedlock’s privacy. The two portraits, in other words, become a platform to discuss the transformation of the hierarchical class structure in England in which the separation of the private and public spheres played a crucial role.
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Born in Newark, New Jersey to a well-established New England family, Stephen Crane grew up surrounded by relatives with a strong sense of heritage and belonging. He descended from a long line of farmers, sheriffs, judges, ministers, and others who served integral and respected roles in their community (Caze-majou 6). Eventually forsaking much of the tradition of his family, Crane regularly found himself isolated, ideologically, at least. As the youngest of fourteen children, Crane received little attention from his mother, a vocal activist in the Temperance Movement, or his father, a devout Methodist minister who died when Crane was nine years old. His unconventional upbringing was later reflected in a peculiar personality; Crane was remembered as being a hurried, anxious man who, feeling inescapably compelled to write, often agonized over his work (Berryman, “Crane’s Art” 32). He traveled widely, especially in the years following the success of his 1895 novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, reaching destinations including New York, Nebraska, Mexico, Greece, England, and Cuba (Berryman, *Stephen Crane*).1

Crane set much of his early work in the urban slums of New England and the battlefields of the Civil War. Consequently, his 1898 Western story “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky” stands out against the backdrop of

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1 The author would like to thank Dr. Diya Abdo of Guilford College, in whose class this paper was first drafted.
his previous work. Yet, the themes underlying his portrayal of the urban Northeast and that of the “wild” West are strikingly similar. Both are in keeping with Crane’s commitment to writing honestly and authentically, even when telling stories outside of his own personal experience, as he famously did in *The Red Badge of Courage*. To Crane, as for many others, the West was a reservoir of simple American authenticity. It follows then, that the shift of the American West from an untamed, unfragmented “honest frontier” to a mimicker of the East would disturb him. He witnessed the culmination of the settlement of the West in his lifetime, as the U.S. Census Bureau declared the frontier officially closed in 1890 (“Following the Frontier Line”). In his short story “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,” Crane communicates his anxiety over what he saw as the loss of the ideal American West through his depiction of Western ideals, Jack Potter’s personal transformation, and imagery of death and decay.

To Crane, the Western lifestyle was a more ideal, enlightened, pure experience. Many of his own personal ideals were tied to the values he associated with the American West. Crane’s contemporary Frederick Jackson Turner even lauded the Western frontier as the wellspring of the individualist zeal so central to American identity (Turner). Above all, Crane saw the West as authentic. He often wistfully compared the “honesty” of the West with the pretentiousness and falsehood of his own native New England. Sending his book *George’s Mother* to fellow writer Hamlin Garland, Crane inscribed it “To Hamlin Garland of the great honest West/From Stephen Crane of the false East” (Collins 146). Crane, though he recognized its
imperfections, saw something uniquely honest in the West that he had not found in the East. As observed by Michael Collins, “[though] the world of the Western story...is clearly not a perfect world...it is, in its simplicity, a pure world, an ideal world” (139). Crane acknowledges that the rugged hardship of life on the frontier is far from Edenic, yet he idealizes its unstained simplicity.

Another indicator that Crane’s own ideals were heavily influenced by Western culture (or at least his perception of it) is that he forsakes the patriarchs/folk heroes of his own native culture in favor of Western heroes; he pays homage to Western legends rather than to those of his native New Jersey. The actual Jack Potter, Crane’s main character’s (likely) namesake, was a legendary cowboy responsible for driving and establishing the Potter-Bacon Trail through northeast Texas in 1883 (Thalacker 180). Interestingly, the legendary Jack Potter’s father was a Methodist circuit preacher like Crane’s own father (Sorrentino, “Stephen Crane’s Sources” 53). Jack Potter would have been locally well known in Texas, though he was by no means a folk hero recognized as far as New Jersey (Thalacker 180). Crane could have chosen a different name for his protagonist without affecting the Western quality of “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky.” The saloon was necessary. The sheriff was necessary. The notorious town drunk was necessary. But the sheriff’s name could have been nearly anything; Crane could have taken the process of naming his characters as an opportunity to pay tribute to influential Easterners or to thank individuals responsible for shaping his own early experience in the East. Yet Crane chose Jack Potter, providing his main character with the Western heritage that he himself lacked.
The Jack Potter of Crane’s creation is immensely dynamic, undergoing a fundamental change from frontier hero to domesticated husband as the story progresses. Returning to town as a married man after many years as a bachelor, Potter is understandably nervous: “As a matter of truth, Jack Potter was beginning to find the shadow of a deed weigh upon him like a leaden slab” (535). Potter’s anxiety over his new role and identity mirrors Crane’s own concern over the changing role and identity of the West in the wider American context. Crane continues his description: “[Potter], the town marshal of Yellow Sky, a man known, liked, and feared in his own corner...had gone and...actually induced [the girl] to marry him” (535). Potter is in many ways the Western hero—a focused, able leader of the frontier community—before his marriage, at least. The structure of Crane’s description gently implies that Potter was no longer the same popular, lauded, respected man he was before his marriage since he had been softened by his bride. Critics argue that the bride is the embodiment of domesticity itself as she grounds Potter, making him into a family man. Her presence alone is enough to tame the fighting streak in Potter and in his rival Scratchy Wilson, as well, in the final confrontation scene. In the same way that the “West Cure” (the male counterpart to the “rest cure” prescribed to anxious women of the time) promised renewed vigor, health, and competence for overworked Eastern men of the time, Potter’s removal from “the West” through his marriage is framed as detrimental to his health and ability to function (Will 296). He is no longer an ideal Westerner. Crane seems to suggest that a hero is not a hero without the West.

Through his marriage, Potter’s formerly simple, archetypal character
is so entangled with domesticity, obligation, and the “Eastern” experiences he had on the train that he no longer meets the expectations of the Yellow Sky community by fighting Scratchy. Potter has changed so that, in a broader sense, he no longer fits the mold of the Western hero who uses a pistol to establish order. The Western hero is not “furtive and shy” as Potter was on the train; he is confident, commanding, and charismatic. The Western hero is definitely not married; “[Potter’s marriage] makes him as much of anomaly in a Western story as he is on the Pullman” (Collins). He is no longer the lone, untameable cowboy he once was. Jack Potter through his marriage becomes a mundane, subdued, even Easternized family man. Jules Zanger observes that “[Potter’s] bourgeois transformation involves a loss of grace, confidence, and potency, precisely those attributes of manliness so central to [Theodore] Roosevelt’s and [Owen] Wister’s image of the heroic Westerner” (162). By marrying, Potter forfeits the very qualities that he shared with the Western hero, and he is no longer extraordinary or exotic to the Eastern reader. If a character as classically Western as the sheriff/marshal of a frontier Texas town can be so easily tamed, then the survival of Western culture itself is brought into question. Even to the Eastern consumer—especially to the Eastern consumer—who has never experienced any of the “true” West, the contamination of that romanticized Western culture is the demise of hundreds of childhood daydreams and bedtime stories, and thus the death of an ideal.

Emphasizing the immediacy of the decline of the West, Crane weaves allusions to death and decay into “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky.” Behind each moment that qualifies the story as a Western is an allusion
to death or decay. For example, in the Weary Gentlemen Saloon there are six men: a salesman, three Texans, and two Mexicans. A typical group of pallbearers also includes six men (Burns 37). Symbolically, at least, the town appears to be preparing for a funeral when Potter returns with his bride. Potter’s name, likewise, is a potential allusion to Potter’s Field, the tract of land Judas Iscariot bought with the money he received for betraying Jesus (Burns 38). The land, also known as the Field of Blood, was a graveyard for foreigners (“Potter’s Field”). Jack Potter possesses the dormant remnants of the fleeting Wild West (a concept foreign and exotic to many Easterners) as Potter’s field held the foreigners who had died in Jerusalem.

Also injecting imagery of death into the story, another dimension of meaning in Potter’s name is its association with Reuben Marmaduke Potter, a soldier in both the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War (Sorrentino, “Stephen Crane’s Sources” 52). Reuben Potter won his own fame and contributed to that of San Antonio, Texas by writing the “Hymn of the Alamo” (53). The allusion to a famous veteran of wars of Western conquest contributes to the collection of allusions to death, and this war reference also supplies an element of conflict. Crane could be referring to his own conflict between his New Jersey upbringing and the Western ideals which he came to hold so dear. Reuben M. Potter, coincidentally, was also born in New Jersey (Karras 55).

By dramatizing the Easternization of the West, Crane implies that the West was not simply being domesticated, but destroyed at its core. Marriage serves as a symbol of this doom. When the train is about to stop near Yellow Sky, for example, Crane describes Potter as having a “tight throat and
face, as one announcing death” (Crane 536). As he brings his bride nearer to the town where he was once the hero, Potter becomes increasingly anxious. He is rendered helpless by his own decision to marry—to abandon his identity as the Western hero—and dreads the moment when he must announce the death of his “Western” element to his town.

Furthermore, when Scratchy begins his rampage, the “surrounding stillness” exacerbated by his opponent’s absence seemed to “form the arch of a tomb over him” (Crane 539). Not only is Potter killing the Western culture he carries within himself, but he is also entombing the Western spirit that Scratchy carries within himself. As the story reaches its climax and Potter finds himself unarmed with a gun pointed at his chest, “Potter’s mouth seemed to be merely a grave for his tongue” (540). This description bears similarity to a passage in the Christian New Testament with which Crane, having been raised in a devout Methodist family, would likely have been familiar. In explaining that everyone—both Jew and Greek—is sinful, the author of Romans quotes multiple Old Testament scriptures: “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips” (The Bible Rom. 3:13). The Biblical image of the mouth or throat as a grave adds complexity to Crane’s original description. Is Crane saying that Potter is deceptive? Not necessarily, but Potter’s guilt over bringing home his Bride is partially derived from his feeling that he betrayed or deceived the people of Yellow Sky by not considering them in his marriage. The image of poisonous snakes also lends immensity and complexity to the theme of the death of the West. Snakes are often associated with the “Wild West”; Potter has the venom of the West in his mouth, and as he speaks he
is spreading that venom. By marrying without the consultation of his town, Potter is poisoning himself and his community. Through his betrayal, he has destroyed the “Westernity” of his town, poisoning himself, his town’s hero.

Crane also imbues his story with a sense of impending decay, again highlighting his concern that the West was being irreversibly contaminated. Crane’s writing indicated that the deterioration of the West’s authenticity and frankness deeply distressed him. It reveals that he sensed that the truth once held by the West was quickly, fleetingly, irreversibly decaying. Again and again appears the image of an hourglass—a concrete representation of time running out and a symbolic representation of Western values slipping through Crane’s hand as unrestrainedly as grains of sand (Tietz 90). In the final scene, for example, Scratchy Wilson holsters his guns and walks away, “his feet [making] funnel-shaped tracks in the heavy sand” (Crane 541). Crane affords a place as paramount as his final sentence to the description of tracks in the sand which resemble funnels: he describes an hourglass (Tietz 90).

Crane also includes more delicately woven references to funnels, hourglasses, and time running out, infusing the story with a deep sense of powerlessness in the face of immediate loss. As Potter and his bride approach Yellow Sky, Crane includes the seemingly unimportant detail that “The train was approaching it [The Rio Grande] at an angle, and the apex was Yellow Sky” (Crane 535). Again, the reader finds the hourglass/funnel shape with Yellow Sky at the narrowest point (Tietz 90). The narrowest point in an hourglass is also the point where the sand is moving most quickly, where it is departing from the top bulb of the hourglass at
the fastest rate. If the reader extends this principle to Crane’s own linkage of the funnel shape and pivotal moments in the story, Yellow Sky is departing from its tradition more quickly and completely than it ever has before. Because Potter married, Yellow Sky can never return to the simple frontier town it once was, just as the sand that has slipped through to the bottom of the hourglass cannot return to the bulb where it once was unless the entire system is overturned.

Exploring the sense of rapid decay and destruction in “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,” critic Chester L. Wolford proposes that the central elements of Crane’s story are also those informing Homer’s *Iliad*: “In both a man returns from a journey bringing a ‘bride,’ both to avoid confrontations, and both in doing so fail to live up to their positions in the community” (129). In the *Iliad*, Helen’s presence catalyzes war and the demise of Troy. Likewise, Potter’s bride “precipitates a fall of the old order of Yellow Sky” (129). However, there are critical differences between Potter’s and Paris’ actions. Paris precipitates war by kidnapping Helen, allowing the launching of “a thousand ships,” while Potter defuses the conflict that arises when he brings his bride into the community. Another central difference between the two tales is the presence or absence of actual physical conflict. The *Iliad* features explicit war scenes in a social situation so complex that implicit, internal conflict among the characters would have sufficed to create suspense. “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,” on the other hand, though its setting is so conducive to outright, explicit, physical violence, involves only implicit, subtle, allusive conflict.

This absence of conventional conflict is striking. Western stories
generally have two distinguishing features: a gunfight and a “focus on external rather than internal action” (Collins 139). Crane’s tale lacks both. Every moment leading up to the climax (or lack thereof) prepares the reader for a traditional “Wild West” gunfight; however, Crane supplies no gunfight. At the conclusion, it is evident that Potter has stepped out of his role as the Western hero and no longer meets the expectations of his town or, more importantly, of the Western genre.

Though Stephen Crane was fully capable of constructing a story that perfectly met each of the standards of a Western, he didn’t. In 1898, the year Crane published this story, he was ostracized by his family, overwhelmed with insurmountable debt, and plagued with tuberculosis. He had succumbed to the stress of a writer’s life (Bassan, “‘True West’” 16). As his career seemed to progress, Crane himself drifted further and further from the hopeful pursuit of the authentic that he had begun so enthusiastically as a young, impoverished writer. By the time he died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-eight, Crane was no longer the youthful, experimental writer who would even “sleep in Bowery flophouses and stand in blinding snowdrifts with the unemployed” just to find “the real thing” (Bassan, “Introduction” 1). Crane’s friends noted that as his career progressed, Crane fashioned himself into a more of a distant, isolated enigma than a man, and the image he projected of himself became much brighter than the truth of his identity. He was “just making a biography for himself,” one friend joked (Sorrentino 6). In effect, Crane had married the writing profession, taking on all the obligations to publishers and editors and readers to make an alluring identity for himself and write marketable stories. Like Potter, he took his bride
and lost his former authenticity.
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Roald Dahl once said, “I am totally convinced that most grown-ups have completely forgotten what it is like to be a child between the ages of five and ten…I can remember exactly what it was like. I am certain I can” (Boy: Tales of Childhood 179). There is no doubt that Dahl’s lasting connection to childhood facilitated his writing for children. Known as “The World’s No. 1 Storyteller,” Dahl proves continuously popular, especially amongst his child readership. This popularity certainly is due in part to his celebration of nonsense, in which “the fantastic would always triumph over the literal, lest he succumb to his ‘constant unholy terror of boring the reader’” (Sturrock 567). His carefully crafted stories are not all fun and games, however. Amidst his humor and fantastical plot elements, Dahl manages to relate to the child’s position as “other” in an adult-centric world, illuminating the dynamics of their precarious situation. Dahl represents the ways in which children’s otherness impacts the nature of their relationships with adults. He thus provides his readers with the opportunity to consider their relationship to others, urging empathetic interactions across the socially constructed adult-child divide he sees in the world and presents in his stories.

Applying the concept of “the other” to the child is not uncharted territory. Owain Jones approaches “the otherness of childhood” in an expansive essay that explores the range and complexities of the topic, detail-
ing several concepts that prove enriching to an in-depth analysis of Dahl’s work. Broadly speaking, the child is other to the adult (196). As the child is often associated with development and “becoming,” the adult is more often associated with fixedness and “being,” even though “becoming” need not truly end when a person reaches an arbitrary point in their life. Social spaces are created primarily for being and are adult-centric in nature (200). Take the average kitchen counter, for example. They are designed and constructed to cater to the adult’s height, in order for the adult to easily utilize the space. If a three-year-old were to approach the counter, however, their eyes might not even reach the level of the counter. Dahl’s representation of children confirms this difference, both the intrinsic and the constructed. It is important to note that, while in discussing race or ethnicity, otherness is fixed, the same cannot be said when discussing the child as other. All adults were children at one point in time, and therefore have experienced the otherness of childhood firsthand. In the process of becoming, however, it seems that a disconnect occurs for many adults. It is these adults, the ones who have forgotten what it is like to be a child, that Dahl’s fiction interrogates. In turn, he celebrates those who can continue to identify with children, even as adults.

With regard to adult-child relationships, adult-lead socialization is an inevitable and natural part of a child’s otherness. Adults teach children, inform their development, and therefore impart their constructions of childhood and adulthood onto the child. As Jones writes, “otherness is not only healthy for children and for child-adult relationships, it is essential to what children are” (197). While socialization is not an inherently naga-
tive process, as the “becoming” of a child is dependent on the “being” of the adult, Jones recognizes that often “adult agendas […] seek to colonize and control childhood,” as well as determine “what children are and what they should be” (196). The word “colonization” itself suggests imposition through force, such as that of a strict teacher who treats the otherness of the child as something needing to be fixed or corrected. There is no doubt that adult constructions of childhood often influence the nature of relationships between adults and children. As Jones suggests, “The question then is, what is the nature of these differences between these worlds, and what manner of trade can occur between them?” (196). We can also ask, how does otherness manifest itself in the lives of children, and how might adults interact with this otherness? Dahl’s stories suggest answers to these questions. Individually, *Matilda* (1988), *The BFG* (1982), and *Danny the Champion of the World* (1977) present the reader with a differently situated protagonist. Matilda has two abusive and apathetic parents, Sophie of *The BFG* has no living parents, and Danny has one living parent who loves him. Each child relates to the adults in their lives in differing ways, and therefore their respective experiences of otherness differ. Collectively, however, these stories illuminate the dynamics of their otherness for Dahl’s child readers.

**Matilda: Other to the Ordinary**

While Dahl’s beloved *Matilda* centers on the small but mighty titular character, he devotes much of the narrative to two adults in Matilda’s life: the terrifying Miss Trunchbull and the sweet Miss Honey. Like Matilda’s family, the Wormwoods, Miss Trunchbull treats children as people
who should already be adults, stating, “I cannot for the life of me see why children have to take so long to grow up. I think they do it on purpose” (145). Their otherness as children irritates Miss Trunchbull, and her ensuing expectations and treatment of children are rather contradictory in nature. She expects children to act as mature as adults yet also believes they are incapable of doing so. In contrast, Miss Honey reaches out to children in their vulnerable, shifting state: “she seemed to understand totally the bewilderment and fear that so often overwhelm young children who for the first time in their lives are herded into a classroom and told to obey orders” (61). Instead of treating them like a group of “herded” animals, Miss Honey attends to each of their needs as children who are others in their world. Applying Jones’ terminology of “being” and “becoming,” it becomes clear that Miss Trunchbull is fixed in her ways. She fails to comprehend the necessity of “becoming” and therefore abuses children on account of their lack of “being,” according to her own constructions of how children should act and what they should be in relation to adults. The open-minded Miss Honey, on the other hand, presents structured space for the child’s “becoming,” as is demonstrated through her interactions with all of her students, including Matilda.

“Extraordinary” is the first word ascribed to Matilda. “By that,” the narrator adds, “I mean sensitive and brilliant. Matilda was both of these” (4). While she may be small in stature and physical strength, her brain-power extends far beyond that of those around her. As Dahl establishes from the very beginning, Matilda’s existence differs greatly from those who are a part of her world. She is a lover of literature amidst a family of television
addicts. She is a small child in a large, adult-focused world, where people like Miss Trunchbull routinely belittle and abuse children in their inherently vulnerable state. She is a masterful thinker amidst her young peers who are only just learning how to read. She possesses supernatural brain-power that sets her apart from everyone else in the novel, both friend and foe, child and adult. Matilda, the extraordinary, is other to the ordinary. She is becoming and being at the same time, not strictly adhering to Jones’ dichotomy. Not only that, but she is other to the adult constructions of childhood that seem to enclose her on all sides, especially to Miss Trunchbull’s construction of the child. She has the knowledge of an adult while inhabiting the body of a child. This hybridity acts as a means to explore constructed otherness versus genuine otherness, that is, adult constructions of childhood versus the innate development of a child. In looking at Matilda, one is prompted to ask several basic questions: what does it mean to be a child? What does it mean to be an adult? And what does it mean for each to relate to the other?

The reader first comes to understand Matilda’s individuality through her relations with her family, the Wormwoods. Dahl presents the Wormwoods as the worst kind of parents. To the Wormwoods, Matilda is a bothersome scab that they must shed over time: “Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick her away, preferably into the next county or even further than that” (4). They feel that their daughter is a burden while she is in the state of childhood, and only when she enters into the independence of adulthood will she not be an annoyance to them. Even though Matilda is speaking by the age of one and a half and reading by the age of three, her
parents are “wrapped up in their own silly little lives.” They often become verbally abusive, as when Matilda points out the reality of her father’s crooked business tactic. He responds, “You’re just an ignorant little squirt who hasn’t the foggiest idea what you’re talking about” (19). While Matilda’s older brother Michael “seemed to have inherited his father’s love of crookery” and mimics the ways of his parents, as many children do, Matilda does not (18). Rather, her very nature veers drastically from her own family’s shallow existence. In making the gap between Matilda and her family extreme, Dahl represents the child’s view of the situation. For Matilda and other children, it can seem like the whole world is against them. Dahl validates this sentiment in the way he chooses to describe Matilda’s family.

While her parents are oblivious to her unique, intellectual abilities, others take immediate notice, such as the friendly librarian, Mrs. Phelps, who is “slightly taken aback at the arrival of such a tiny girl” at the public library (6). Upon reading all of the children’s books that are available to her, Matilda quickly moves on to the world of literature intended for adult readers, coming into contact with such authors as Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, and John Steinbeck. Amidst a family who does not seem to understand her, Matilda finds comfort and belonging in the books she reads where there is space that is much needed for a child’s “becoming,” according to Jones. For the child who does not fit into an adult understanding of childhood, for Matilda, adult literature offers a space relatively free of restrictive assumptions, a place where Matilda can explore various models of mature being that her parents fail to provide. It is especially pertinent to consider Matilda’s appreciation of Dickens, an author who often offers social critique.
through his writing, especially concerning the hardships children faced as vulnerable members of Victorian England. Through reading such texts, Matilda would not only consider her own abusive situation, but she would also gain insight into the world of the other, the adult.

At the age of five and a half, Matilda shifts her time from reading at the library and undermining her father at home to studying at school. At Crunchem Hall Primary School, Matilda, as in her family, is at the bottom of the hierarchy with “eighteen other small boys and girls” (60, emphasis added). They are small not only in comparison with adult figures, but also in comparison with the older, bigger children. This space, while intended for children, still presents problems for the child. At the school, Dahl introduces the two central adult figures of the text: Miss Trunchbull and (her niece) Miss Honey. Aside from their positions as educators and their shared family history, they differ in nearly every way. Miss Trunchbull, or just “The Trunchbull” as Dahl often refers to her, is identified largely by her looming physical presence as a former Olympic athlete. “If a group of children happened to be in her path,” Dahl writes, “she ploughed right on through them like a tank, with small people bouncing off her left and right” (61). The very language used to describe her presence makes her seem inhuman, as she is explicitly compared to a machine of war. As she is unusually large, the physical distance that differentiates her from the children under her supervision is enlarged. Matilda and her classmate, Lavender, quickly learn in the schoolyard that “she hates very small children” and “thinks five-year-olds are grubs that haven’t yet hatched out” (96). Such sentiments are extremely ironic as Miss Trunchbull is the headmistress of a school for children.
In Miss Trunchbull’s construction of childhood, children are individuals who should already be adults, or should at least act like adults. At the same time, she believes children should be “seen and not heard” (5). She shows no compassion for the child, unlike Miss Honey. Rather, she abuses children as a result of her own fixed and closed-off mindset. For example, when Amanda Thripp, another of Matilda’s classmates, wore “childish” pigtails in her hair to school, Miss Trunchbull orders her to cut them off. When the considerably smaller Amanda does not cooperate, Miss Trunchbull grabs the girl by her pigtails and throws her over the fence at the edge of the schoolyard, using her physical superiority to abuse Amanda. More generally, anytime a child displeases Miss Trunchbull, she locks them up in “the Chokey,” a claustrophobia-inducing cupboard designed for maximum discomfort. Her hatred of children is central to her character. Miss Trunchbull takes her place among Dahl’s adult characters “who reject and abuse children” and so “have no redeeming features either physically or morally speaking” (Alston 87). In order to reflect what Dahl views as their inner ugliness, he assigns characters noticeable attributes according to their treatment of children, defining them as either child-abusers or child-supporters.

While she despises children’s inability to grow up on demand, Miss Trunchbull uses her low regard of children to keep them entrapped within the otherness that she has constructed through her own conceptions of childhood. For someone who claims she “never was one [a child]”, Miss Trunchbull certainly has a strongly developed sense of what a child should and should not be able to do (80). For example, during her first weekly visit to Matilda’s class, she is outraged when she discovers that the young children
have learned to spell “difficulty.” She says, “What nonsense […] you are not supposed to learn long words like that until you are at least eight or nine” (140). Because they are young children, she presupposes the extent of their abilities and disregards the reality that unfolds before her eyes. Her understanding of their otherness is fixed, even though she interacts with children every day. When the children subvert her notion of the child, as they are all able to spell the word with ease because of a song Miss Honey helped them learn, she erupts. At the same time, however, this response contradicts her previous exclamations that children take too long to become adults. It seems that Miss Trunchbull is at an utter loss with how to interact with the inevitable otherness of the child, whether she chooses to recognize it or not. After falsely accusing Matilda of putting a stink-bomb in her office, Miss Trunchbull replies firmly, “I am never mistaken […] of course you did” (80). Her response is decidedly fixed in tone.

In presenting a character like Matilda, and in bringing her into a hostile classroom environment, Dahl challenges Miss Trunchbull’s construct of the child as other. Matilda the extraordinary escapes the confines of Miss Trunchbull’s version of what a child should and should not be. For example, Miss Trunchbull thinks that children are “stupid” and “idiotic,” yet Matilda surpasses the intellect of any adult in the story, breaking past the restrictive construction that guides Miss Trunchbull in all her interactions with children. Her philosophy on the nature of children could be likened to that of 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who believed that humans are innately evil and therefore need restrictions in order to avoid societal collapse (Lloyd and Sreedhar). For Miss Trunchbull, however, restrictions often
come in the form of physical abuse and physical restriction, as through the tight confines of the Chokey. Dahl paints Miss Trunchbull as an undoubt-
edly frightening individual. While Matilda does not exhibit much fear or intimidation in her interactions with Miss Trunchbull, as she has the mind of an adult, the other children, who have the minds of children, are not as easily able to escape the anxiety that precedes Miss Trunchbull’s terror. After all, it is their childness that Miss Trunchbull attacks.

Miss Honey is the antithesis of the notorious Miss Trunchbull. While Miss Trunchbull’s construction of childhood can be identified with Hobbes’ view of humanity, Miss Honey’s could be likened to that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a philosopher who believed that humans are innately good when in a free environment (Bertram). Miss Honey, who admires her intellectual tendencies, is the only one Matilda is able to turn to, perhaps because she feels best known and understood by her, as Miss Honey was also raised in an abusive and restrictive household. While Miss Honey is herself no longer a child, she nonetheless recognizes the inherent value of childhood and is therefore willing to appreciate and protect such otherness. In comparison to her fellow teachers, even Miss Honey recognizes that she is “the exception” (187). Like Dahl himself, Miss Honey manages to stay in touch with childhood.

Rather than abusing her power through her position in adult-child relationships, she uses it to uplift the child, as is quite clear in how she interacts with Matilda. Relating to children is Miss Honey’s “rare gift” (60). She celebrates children and their current state of being, rather than forcing them forward into adulthood. Instead of bestowing hatred upon the children, she
gives them love and attention. She does not assume the life of the child, but rather allows the child the space to explore. In the language of Jones, Miss Honey “deliberately leave[s] space for the otherness of children” and “do[es] not attempt full colonization” (199). Rather she assumes the role of socialization-guide for the child, assisting the child in their becoming.

Miss Honey’s approach becomes evident when Matilda finally discovers her supernatural power. When Matilda first shares her peculiar ability, Miss Honey, while at first unsure that Matilda could have tipped over a glass of water by using just her eyes, is still open to hearing Matilda out: “It is extraordinary, thought Miss Honey, how often small children have flights of fancy like this” (167). As seen through this example, it is clear that Miss Honey is not void of constructions of childhood. However, even in light of her own understanding, she nonetheless allows Matilda the space to prove her wrong. Although she is still shocked at Matilda’s ability, she invites Matilda over for tea, where Matilda finally learns that Miss Trunchbull is Miss Honey’s abusive aunt. With that information, Matilda takes it upon herself to use her new-found power to pursue justice, a theme that is common throughout Dahl’s fiction (Worthington 126). Once Miss Trunchbull is gone and Matilda is free to join an upper-level class (as Miss Trunchbull would not allow her to do so before), she ends up losing her supernatural ability. Yet her extraordinariness does not fade away with it. She continues to thrive as she comes under the care of Miss Honey, the sole adult in the text who shows Matilda what every child, and adult, wants and needs: love. As Dahl writes early on, after describing the nature of the Wormwoods, “Matilda longed for her parents to be good and loving and understanding
and honourable and intelligent” (43). Miss Honey, while not her biological parent, possesses all the attributes that Matilda identifies with desirable parenting.

“Am I a phenomenon?” Matilda asks Miss Honey in discussing her supernatural power (173). Miss Honey responds, “it is quite possible that you are.” Not only is Matilda a phenomenal child, but Dahl’s narrative is also an extraordinary account detailing the various ways that otherness is a part of childhood, showcasing not only the power of the child, but also the ways in which an adult can positively interact with and celebrate such otherness and becoming, which are central to a child’s experience. In comparing the ways in which Miss Trunchbull and Miss Honey approach children through their own constructions of childhood, it becomes clear that, when given the opportunity to develop outside of limiting adult-formulated constructions, every child has the potential and power to be extraordinary. For the child reader, even one who interacts with a “Trunchbull” in their own life, Dahl demonstrates the possibility to break past restrictive constructions and oppressive forms of adult colonization. Additionally, he showcases the ways in which caring and understanding adults can positively influence and support the child in their becoming, a becoming that is perhaps not so distinct from the adult’s own continual development. As Ann Alston so aptly comments, “the message remains: children and adults must remain open to learning from each other” (98).

*The BFG: Parallel Forms of Otherness*

*The BFG* is a tale of fantastical proportions about Sophie, a young
girl, and the Big Friendly Giant, who together combine their efforts to stand up against the evils they encounter in their worlds. Upon discovering that the other inhabitants of Giant Country eat humans every night, Sophie teams up with the BFG, finally convincing the Queen of England to put a stop to the deadly behavior of the beastly giants. On a thematic level, The BFG is an exploration of otherness. The young protagonist is an orphan, an other to the majority of children who have parents. She is a female in a male-dominated culture. She is a child in an adult-centric world. Likewise, her friend the BFG similarly assumes the role of the other, as he is a small, snozzcumber-eating, loner giant who is more often than not at the mercy of the human-bean-eating giants that loom over him at twice his size. And yet their respective forms of otherness prompt them to effectively change their world. Their uncolonized, child-like imaginations give birth to their own happy ending. Their very “becoming” allows for their triumphant being.

Dahl appeals to his child reader’s smallness. While he certainly does so in his other books, such as Matilda, his attention to this aspect of the child’s life is most evident in The BFG, a story which exaggerates the power-size dynamic through the introduction of actual giants. In the real world, children find themselves in a world where spaces are created to best accommodate the adult population, a population in which the individuals are physically larger than their child counterparts. In The BFG, this reality takes center stage through Sophie’s experience in the orphanage and in her interactions with the giants of the story. The reader discovers the consequences of Sophie’s physical size early in the book. For example, Sophie was punished for not following the strict rules in the orphanage. She was
locked up in a “dark cellar for a day and a night without anything to eat or
drink,” physically deprived, much like the Chokey in *Matilda* (31). In that
situation, Sophie was at the mercy of Mrs. Clonkers, the adult who had
physical power over her during her time at the orphanage. The size differ-
ences between Sophie and Mrs. Clonkers establish Sophie as the other to
the fully-developed adult. All children can relate to this, of course, as all
children must deal with the physical reality of their size difference. Dealing
with size difference, therefore, is inevitable. Dahl intentionally takes this size
dynamic a step further when he introduces the looming BFG himself.

The first time the reader meets the BFG, the narrator describes
him as “so tall its head was higher than the upstairs windows of the houses”
(4). His largeness, and implicitly Sophie’s smallness, is central to the first
several chapters. It is clear that, from the beginning, Dahl crafts a strong
sense of physical-size disparity, and he builds up the tension through the
use of mystery. By withholding important details, such as the underlying
benevolence of the BFG, the reader feels Sophie’s fear and anxiety. Only
during the “witching hour,” when everything is “pale and ghostly and milky-
white,” does the narrator disclose the size of the BFG, the one aspect of the
giant that Sophie can comprehend in that time and space. At the mercy of
the giant’s huge hand in the chapter entitled “The Snatch,” Sophie “wanted
to scream, but no sound came out” (8). In this moment of the story, she is
utterly helpless, a sentiment that other children can identify with whether or
not they have encountered a giant. Being dependent, and in a way “help-
less,” is central to what it means to be a human child. The physical size of
the child, Sophie’s petite frame in this case, plays into this reality.
Of course, this size dynamic becomes even more evident once the story transitions into the land of the giants, where Sophie enters the “enormous cavern with a high rocky roof” that is the BFG’s home (16, emphasis added). The landscape looms over Sophie. She is but the size of a pencil on the giant’s table that stands at least twelve feet from the ground. In a conversation consisting of questioning and word-play with the BFG, however, Sophie quickly comes to realize that the giant who has taken her is friendly, a “nice and jumbly Giant in Giant Country” who will not eat her, as the other giants surely would (22). The size disparity between Sophie and the BFG seems to shrink as they come to learn more about each other. For example, when the BFG learns that Sophie is an orphan and is often abused at the orphanage, he begins to cry. Sophie notes in the moment, “his heart is melting for me” (31). Sophie exhibits similar behavior upon witnessing the BFG’s abuse at the hands of the other giants. Empathy towards each other’s experience of otherness seems to lessen their difference in size. Their respective forms of otherness create a bond that pushes past the otherness that initially separates them.

In Giant Country, the other giants enter the frame and the BFG becomes the smaller one. As he explains to Sophie, “Those giants is all at least fifty feet tall with huge muscles and cockles alive alive-o. I is the titchy one. I is the runt. Twenty-four feet is puddlenuts in Giant Country” (28). The other giants verbally and physically abuse him, tossing him around as if he were an inanimate object, calling him such names as “Troggy little twit! Shrivelly little shrimp!” and “Mucky little midget!” (67). Dahl crafts the story in such a way that both Sophie, a little girl, and the BFG, a giant,
are considered small and helpless in their respective settings. The bond that forms between Sophie and the BFG begins to make sense in light of this subtle reality; these two seemingly opposite beings are able to relate to one another in the way that their respective worlds have shut them out.

Sophie is in a state of “becoming,” as a child, and is constantly learning about the ways of the world, both human and giant. Similarly, the BFG showcases a tendency towards growth, especially as he learns more about the human world through Sophie. Dahl emphasizes the becoming of both characters through his use and creation of language. Made-up words, also known as gobblefunk, fill the pages when the BFG is speaking. There is much talk of whizzpopping, a funny-sounding word for flatulence, along with snozzcumbers, fleshlumpeaters, buzzy-hum, bloodbottler, and glumptious, to name a few of the words and names that one might find upon randomly flipping to any page of the book. These lingual creations not only develop the BFG’s singular voice, but also display the ways in which he is learning and becoming. As he learns human words after finding and studying a human book, and he considers his own lexicon, the BFG develops his voice. Telling Sophie of the book he used to learn how to write (Charles Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby*), he says, “I is reading it hundreds of times […] And I is still reading it and teaching new words to myself and how to write them. It is the most scrumdiddlyumptious story” (105). His becoming is not restricted by a fixed end-date.

The linguistic inventiveness does not end there, as much of the dialogue between Sophie and the BFG is filled to the brim with word-play. In fact, their very first conversation consists solely of it. The BFG explains
that “Turks from Turkey is tasting of turkey” and “Greeks from Greece is all tasting greasy,” both instances using homophones of the countries’ names (18). He continues, claiming that, “human beans from jersey is tasting of cardigans,” referring to jersey fabric rather than the state itself (20). Their discourse is a game of words, resulting in a humorous effect. Sophie even questions, “but were they jokes?” Humor, by extension, is for the child a way to examine their world and the world of the adult, ask questions about it, point out absurdities, and turn confusion or anxiety in fun and play (Stallcup 32). It can even act as a source of empowerment to the child. After all, the adult-world is other to the child, a place to be discovered and interpreted. Not only do these puns make for a funny bit of dialogue, but they also represent part of the child’s perspective, as children are in the process of learning the—sometimes arbitrarily—constructed rules of grammar. In breaking down proper English, the child can find joy in their becoming and perhaps even consider how they might take control over language in their own life, whether that be through making up words, as exemplified by Dahl, or by simply expanding their vocabulary. As others in an adult-centric world, children have the opportunity to explore the otherness of adulthood through their exploration of language and the constructed rules governing it.

Words are not the only humorous elements of the story. As explained near the beginning of the story, the BFG captures dreams, creates new dreams, and then blows such dreams into the bedrooms of sleeping children. The BFG describes his creations positively, calling them, “Nice dreams. Lovely golden dreams. Dreams that is giving the dreamers a happy
time” (34). Near the middle of the story, the reader gets a glimpse of some of these dreams. One dream is labeled, “I is inventing a car that runs on toothpaste” (102). Another is marked as, “I is abel to jump out of any high window and flote down safely” (103). Another reads, “I has a pet bee that makes rock and roll musik when it flies” (104). They are seemingly peculiar dreams, but they are just strange enough to appeal to the child’s sense of worldly possibilities that extend beyond the practicalities of the adult world. All are dreams with a sense of child-like freedom, in which no question is a wrong question, anything is possible, and even spelling is irrelevant to the benevolent potency of the dream. These dream-creations showcase the BFG’s own understanding and inevitable construction of childhood, a construction that allows space for the otherness of the child. Instead of nudging children towards a future of static adult-being, the BFG specializes in encouraging children to dwell in their becoming, as thinkers whose minds have not been colonized by adult-centric agendas.

Sophie does not interact or deal much with adult constructions of childhood within the confines of the narrative. The BFG, while he appears to be an adult figure, actually mimics the becoming nature of Sophie and is child-like in the way he interacts with the world around him. In a way, he is a child of the giant world, where he is smaller than everyone else. Simply put, there are few adults in her life who could impose their constructions of childhood. It is not until Sophie actually confronts the Queen of England that she interacts with a human adult, aside from her interactions with Mrs. Clonkers, which lie outside the narrative proper. Upon reaching the Queen, Sophie considers the unique situation she finds herself in: “She
found it almost impossible to believe that she, Sophie, a little orphan of
no real importance in the world, was at this moment actually sitting high
above the ground on the window-sill of the Queen of England’s bedroom,
with the Queen herself asleep in there behind the curtain not more than
five yards away. The very idea of it was absurd” (139). Nevertheless, the
Queen remains calm and speaks with Sophie plainly, respecting her claims
even though she is a young child who has seemingly magically appeared at
her window. Instead of belittling her, the Queen responds to her as a fellow
human being, rather than as an adult speaking down to a child. Any of the
Queen’s unspoken doubts are quieted when the BFG responds to Sophie’s
call and comes to the window to greet the Queen. While Sophie’s identity as
a child is not erased, her identity does not subject her to abuse in the pres-
ence of the queen. The entire story, rather than emphasizing her childhood
and its limits, emphasizes her and the BFG’s parallel paths of becoming. For
the child reader, reading The BFG offers the opportunity to simply dwell in
their becoming. They can laugh at Dahl’s invented words, or consider their
own absurd dreams, or perhaps even imagine meeting the Queen of Eng-
land. When The BFG celebrates becoming, it correspondingly celebrates the
otherness of the child.

Danny the Champion of the World: Others Together

In Danny the Champion of the World, Dahl focuses on the shared
otherness of a loving father and adoring child. Upon reaching the end of
Danny, after a whirlwind of pheasant-poaching and small-English-village
adventure, Dahl leaves his (child) readers with a strong suggestion for when
they have children of their own. He writes, “a stodgy parent is no fun at all / What a child wants / and deserves / is a parent who is / SPARKY” (215). Out of context, the message might seem irresponsible and careless, but such a message fits the narrative superbly. More than anything, Danny is a story about the love between an eccentric, “sparky” father and his adoring son. Danny speaks highly of his father, saying “it was impossible to be bored in my father’s company. He was too sparky a man for that. Plots and plans and new ideas came flying off him like sparks from a grindstone” (17). When Danny discovers his father’s pheasant poaching habit, the father-son duo goes on to create a masterplan to poach all of the nasty Mr. Victor Hazel’s pheasants. United, as father and son, as friends, as equals, as others together, they embark on a seemingly absurd journey to execute their wildly entertaining plan.

While many, if not most, of Dahl’s stories involve magical or supernatural elements, such as giants in The BFG or mind-powers in Matilda, Danny is firmly rooted in reality, that is, in the same world as the reader. Although some of the key plot points may seem extraordinary or unlikely, such as drugging hundreds of pheasants with spiked raisins in order to poach them, they are still an imaginable possibility. The realistic setting and story are not the only distinguishing factors of Danny, however. Danny’s father is not like other parents in Dahl’s stories. While Matilda’s parents are cruelly apathetic and Sophie’s parents have passed away, leaving her an orphan, Danny’s father is benevolent, present, and an ideal parent. Danny begins to showcase that paternal benevolence from the very beginning of the story, within the first few pages. Rather than a story of his own life, Danny
points the reader’s attention to the father he looks up to, perhaps encouraging the reader to come to know his father, and then also look up to him.

The reader comes to know Danny’s father through his son’s adoring descriptions. While *Matilda* and *The BFG* were both told in the third person, *Danny* is distinguished by the use of the child’s first-person voice. The reader can enter the mind of a child, that is, according to Dahl’s own understanding of what it means to be a child. Early on, Danny describes the fatherly love that he has received, and continues to receive, from his father. Upon disclosing the death of his mother, Danny details his father’s actions after their loss. He says, “When I was still a baby, my father washed me and fed me and changed my nappies and did all the millions of other things a mother normally does […] But my father didn’t seem to mind. I think that all the love he had felt for my mother when she was alive he now lavished on me” (2-3). Danny’s father loves him in multiple ways, even in ways that were not usual for a father-figure in 1970s Great Britain, such as by performing stereotypical motherly duties. Danny continues his praise: “most wonderful of all was the feeling that when I went to sleep, my father would still be there, very close to me, sitting in his chair by the fire, or lying in the bunk above my own” (7). He treats Danny with regular storytelling, including stories of the BFG. He prepares midnight snacks for the both of them. He walks Danny to and from school each day, two miles each way. His care and love for his son is evidenced throughout the story, and the enduring strength of their filial bond claims center stage. To Danny, his father was “without the slightest doubt […] the most marvelous and exciting father any boy ever had,” a sentiment which he repeats word-for-word as the final
While these characteristics certainly establish Danny’s father as one of the few good parent figures in Dahl’s canon, it is his poaching habit, and his inclusion of Danny in that part of his life, that distinguishes him as a “sparky” parent, as one who is not afraid to indulge in fun and subvert the adult-constructed rules that surround both himself and his child. His imagination, when it comes to pheasant-poaching specifically, is untamed. He is the ideal father because he has not forgotten what it was like to be a child, as he often recounts tales of his childhood when telling of his own father’s poaching adventures. As Dahl’s own father died when he was very young, Danny’s father seems to be, perhaps, a slice of Dahl’s imagination in considering what his father might have been like. There is no doubt that Dahl has designed Danny’s father as an ideal parent figure, perhaps one who he might have longed for in his own boyhood.

Danny’s love for his father is not blind, however. He recognizes his father’s imperfections. Before detailing his father’s secret to the reader, a moment which can be identified as the turning point of the narrative, he comments on his feelings towards his father’s otherness, for just as the child’s world is other to the adult, so is the adult world other to the child. Danny remarks, “You will learn as you get older […] that no father is perfect. Grown-ups are complicated creatures, full of quirks and secrets. Some have quirkier quirks and deeper secrets than others, but all of them […] have two or three private habits hidden up their sleeves that would probably make you gasp if you knew about them” (25). He recognizes that what his father does is technically illegal and is at first surprised: “my own father a
thief! This gentle lovely man!” (30). Danny’s father explains himself, justifying himself and his own father who had also practiced “the art of poaching,” by commenting on the wealthy, pompous, and artificial nature of pheasant-shooting. From there, Danny asks to go along on future poaching ventures with his father. When Danny learns of his father’s activities, the gap between their respective child and adult worlds seems to lessen. Or rather, Danny’s father never truly abandons the child within, an aspect that seems to characterize Dahl himself. The act of poaching, after all, violates the adult-constructed legal order. While his father’s parenting methods may, at times, seem careless and bound for disaster to other adults in his world, it is clear that Danny has all he needs to grow and thrive: a parent who celebrates his otherness and his becoming, but most importantly, gives Danny unconditional love.

While their deep love for each other certainly defines their relationship, there is another aspect of their interactions that counters assumptions about childhood and adulthood. An early example in the book emphasizes this unique dynamic. Upon realizing his father has not returned from poaching at the predetermined time, Danny decides to take immediate action. In order to act as efficiently as possible, he decides to drive a car to locate his father in the dead of night. With only a flashlight in hand and a basic understanding of how to drive a car with manual transmission, he sets out into the darkness. The very act of a child driving a car is alarming, yet through this act, Danny takes a step into the adult world. Just as Danny’s father subverts the laws of poaching, he subverts the laws of the road. After finding his father injured in a pit designed to catch poachers, he drives him
home and then ensures that he is tucked in comfortably while they wait for
the doctor to arrive to take care of the father’s injured ankle. In his moment
of action, Danny becomes, in a way, the adult or parent of the situation,
while his father, in turn, takes on the role of child who is physically help-
less and unable to care for himself. Danny disregards the limits of a socially
constructed childhood (i.e. not being able to legally drive) in order to save
his father: “There are differences within childhood—but they are just that—
within something that society has felt the need to mark as different from
adulthood” (Jones 196). While some constructions are genuine and neces-
sary according to the vulnerable nature of children and their actual other-
ness as non-adults, other constructions inhibit the child’s natural way of
becoming. Such constructions, therefore, are able to be dismantled for the
benefit of the child and the adult.

This is not the only time where Danny assumes the position of
responsible “adult.” Upon deciding that they will fill 200 raisins with sleep-
ing pill powder, the two consider the project’s logistical implications. Danny
voices his concerns about their limited time-frame, saying, “Each one will
have to be cut open and filled with powder and sewed up again, and I’ll be
at school all day” (105). In response, Danny’s father says, “No you won’t
[…] you will be suffering from a very nasty cold on Friday and I shall be
forced to keep you home from school.” Danny responds with a simple and
joyous “hooray!” While Danny initially voices the responsible, adult-minded
perspective, that he must attend school, his father counters by suggesting
that he should skip school altogether, because preparing raisins for the pur-
pose of poaching pheasants is far more fun than attending school. Danny’s
father continues to be the voice of fun that seems to fit better within the world of a child’s understanding. Danny is practical and pragmatic. His father is still practical, but in a way that seems to subvert the usual understanding of what it means to be a responsible parent who socializes the child according to societal norms and expectations. It is in moments like these that Dahl is reaching out to the child reader, and catering to their interests. It is as if, through Danny’s father, he is saying, “I understand.” He refuses to let the inherent otherness of childhood become an excuse for relational inequality.

Later on, as the two consider the riskiness of their business, Danny’s father is firm in his dedication to fun. Danny asks, “how will we stop the keepers from seeing us?” Danny’s father responds light-heartedly saying, “That’s the fun of the whole thing. That’s what it’s all about. It’s hide-and-seek. It’s the greatest game of hide-and-seek in the world (133). Even once the heist is complete, and the pheasants are in their possession, Danny’s father continues to be the voice of fun while Danny continues to act as the responsible figure between the two. When Danny’s father says, “I have decided to buy an oven” in order to roast the pheasants, Danny responds practically, rhetorically questioning, “Won’t it be very expensive?” In line with his character, Danny’s father boldly declares, “No expense is too great for roasted pheasant” (171). In the case of Danny and his father, “there is not a simple division between children and adults” (Jones 196).

While his home life is idyllic in the way that his father has not entirely dissociated himself from the child’s world, Danny is no stranger to the reality of an adult-centric world, a place where the child’s otherness
is a disadvantage and even a weakness. This is clearly evidenced during his
time in school, particularly through his teacher Captain Lancaster, a harsh
teacher who cares little for the children in his charge, much like the fictional
Trunchbull in *Matilda*. In fact, he was “a violent man, and we were all terri-
fied of him” (113). As Danny comments on Lancaster’s interactions with his
peers, “He never called any of us by our names. It was always ‘you’ or ‘boy’
or ‘girl’ or something like that” (117). Lancaster clearly belittles the children
in his classroom, calling them “blithering little idiot[s],” and even physically
punishes Danny and his friend Sidney Morgan. In this way, he dismisses
their personhood. Because they do not follow the adult-designed rules with-
in the classroom, Lancaster abuses them in their vulnerable, othered state
as children. The Captain imposes his position of power on the children,
who are all physically smaller than himself. Because he is both an adult and
their teacher, he assumes that he has authority over the others. Classroom
power dynamics find their way in Dahl’s other texts, such as *Matilda* and his
autobiography *Boy: Tales of Childhood*. However, in Danny’s case, he has the
support of his parent, whereas Matilda did not.

While Lancaster is certainly a villain within the school and in
Danny’s school life, Mr. Victor Hazel claims the title of main antagonist of
the story. A “roaring snob” who “tried desperately to get in with what he
believed were the right kind of people,” it becomes quite clear why Danny
and his father dislike the man. Once, upon stopping by to get gas for his
Rolls-Royce, he belittles and bullies eight-year-old Danny. In a barking
manner, he states, “fill her up and look sharp about it [...] and keep your
filthy little hands to yourself, d’you understand?” (45). His hatred towards
Danny is magnified when Danny voices confusion in response to his blunt instructions. Hazel says, “If you make any dirty finger-marks on my paint-work [...] I’ll step right out of this car and give you a good hiding.” Fortunately for Danny, Hazel does not get the opportunity to lay a finger on him, as his caring father is quick to the scene. He says, “next time you threaten someone with a good hiding I suggest you pick on a person your own size” (46). Danny’s father recognizes the adult-child power dynamic between his son and Hazel, and he is prompt to ensure that Danny’s otherness as a child is not abused by Hazel. Put in his place, Hazel drives off in a blur. By the end of the story, both Danny and his father “get back” at Hazel through the execution of their poaching plan, the plan that gives Danny the title of “champion of the world.” Hazel’s hostile othering of Danny becomes silenced.

Size is not only used to emphasize the maliciousness of bad adult characters, as seen in the behavior of Lancaster and Hazel. It can also act a sign of solidarity with those of a similar size. Doc Spencer, who is first introduced when he is called on to attend to Danny’s father’s injured ankle, is described as a physically small adult: “He was a tiny man with tiny hands and feet and a tiny round face [...] he was some sort of an elf [...] Nobody feared him. Many people loved him, and he was especially gentle with children” (80). His smallness, and therefore his affinity with the child’s reality, makes him the perfect candidate to be truly understanding of the child.

No one, however, identifies with Danny’s position as a child more so than his own father. Not only does this ideal parent figure physically protect Danny in his otherness, but his passion for adventure and unadul-
tered fun showcases the way in which he celebrates the child, even within a world that so often celebrates the growing-up of a child into adulthood. In a world where Mr. Hazel-type individuals hold the financial power and have the means to suppress others, people like Danny and his father find ways to thrive. In the end, while Danny is a fun story about a father and son stealing some birds, it is also something more. For the child reader, Danny offers an opportunity to consider their own otherness, including varying constructs of that otherness. It is a celebration of the adult who has not forgotten childhood and is not so wrapped up in their own adult-centrism as to neglect the realities of the child’s experience. It is a story where the adult does not attempt to erase the child’s otherness, but rather chooses to participate in it. Being other does not equate to being alone, as is evident through the active involvement of Danny’s father in his life. Looking again to the conclusion, perhaps Dahl could have written something else. Perhaps Dahl means to convey a great deal about the nature of Danny’s father in the sole word of his choice: “sparky.” Perhaps he could have written, “a parent fixed in the adult-world is no fun at all. What a child wants and deserves is a parent whose outlook is not restricted to the realm of adult-thinking, a parent who is able to uplift children in their otherness and perhaps even participate in it—a parent who never stops becoming.”

Concluding Thoughts

Speaking on the nature of his own writing, Roald Dahl once said, “Sometimes it gives me a funny feeling that my writing arm is about six thousand miles long and that the hand that holds the pencil is reaching all
the way across the world to faraway houses and classrooms where children live and go to school. That’s a thrill all right” (Sturrock 568). Reaching into the lives of children, as others, clearly brought much joy to Dahl, just as his stories continue to bring joy to many readers. Dahl is a Miss Honey to his child readers, providing space for their otherness in the way he constructs his stories. Dahl is the quintessential dream-blower, mixing up a story as the BFG mixes up a dream. A book published by Dahl is a dream blown into the world for any reader to enjoy. He crafts narratives that appeal to the unshackled imagination of the child, as well as reawaken the youthful musings of the adult reader. Dahl is undoubtedly sparky in both his choice of content and tone. He openly participates in and celebrates the world of the child, urging readers of all ages to pursue continual becoming and relational understanding across constructed borders of otherness. Not only does Dahl’s attention to the child provide readers with a way of approaching constructions of childhood, but his work throughout his various books demonstrates the extent of his literary artistry and the rightful place of his work within the genre of children’s literature.
Works Cited


Jones, Owain. “‘True geography [] quickly forgotten, giving away to an adult-imagined universe.’ Approaching the otherness of childhood.” *Children’s Geographies*, vol. 6, no. 2, May 2008, pp. 195-212


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