THE OSWALD Review Undergraduate Research and Criticism In the Discipline of English: Volume 7 Fall 2005

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THE

OSWALD Review

An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English

Editor:
Tom Mack
Department of English
University of South Carolina Aiken
Aiken, SC 29801
tomm@usca.edu

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Address correspondence and inquiries to Dr. Tom Mack, Editor, The Oswald Review, Department of English, University of South Carolina Aiken, 471 University Parkway, Aiken, SC 29801.

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In L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy and three friends, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Lion, travel to Emerald City in search of happiness. In the process, they also find home. The characters’ journey through the Land of Oz is not a linear progression; rather, it is a jumbled passage through the forests and the fields to the city—and then back again. The confusion that Dorothy and her companions experience during their seemingly aimless travels in Oz reflects the confusion that many Americans experienced during the 1900s in the developing Midwest: the conflict between economy and ecology. Baum, who lived in the Dakotas, saw the dustbowl transformed into an industrial frontier. His fictional Kansas and Oz reflect this reconstruction of the natural world. He sets a gray but real
Kansas prairie against a rich but illusory Emerald City that, in many ways, resembles Chicago after the 1893 Columbian Exposition. In this way, Baum situates his novel at the nexus of the environmentalist debate. Published in 1900, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* speaks to a young generation faced with a new set of ideological questions. Dorothy and the Tin Woodman are products of their natural environments and their socioeconomic environments. Throughout the story, these two characters waver between acting for themselves and acting for their environments. They are both wild and domestic. They are both protectors and destroyers.

The first American ecologists were turn-of-the-century writers and politicians. While nineteenth-century essayists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau wrote about the value of the American environment, twentieth-century activists like John Burroughs and John Muir wrote about the vulnerability of the American environment: “although the roots of an environmentalist consciousness can be found in Romanticism and . . . Transcendentalism, environmentalism in its modern sense—which implies an active effort to conserve and protect nature—is little more than a hundred years old” (Rahn, “Green Worlds for Children” 151). Baum lived and wrote during this transitional period. His story captures the beginning of an American identity crisis historically and geographically. David B. Parker, Professor of History, explains that Baum published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* “when the
United States was in a tremendous state of flux, its rural agrarian society steadily giving way to cities and factories. Some Americans championed the new urban/industrial order, while others mourned the loss of a more traditional life and the values and virtues that had accompanied it” (2). Dorothy represents this divided American population because she comes from Kansas, a state in the heart of an American Midwest that was in a period of transition. The characters in The Wonderful Wizard of Oz experience the tensions of Baum’s time as they travel across the Munchkins’ fields towards the Wizard’s Emerald City.

The publication of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz marks an important moment in American children’s literature and in American environmental literature. In “Green Worlds for Children,” Suzanne Rahn explains the deep-rooted connection between the two:

[N]ot surprisingly—if one believes, like the Romantics, that children and the green world belong together—children were informed and involved from the outset. In fact, merely by studying old volumes of St. Nicholas Magazine that children read in the 1870s and ‘80s and ‘90s, one can trace the changes in attitudes toward the wilderness and its creatures with which environmentalism began. (151)

Activists created the first green magazines and organizations in the late 1800s and early 1900s for children, not for adults.
Consequently, these children were the first Americans widely exposed to conservationist thinking. Baum speaks to the children of this generation through the actions of Dorothy, a little girl. Fred Erisman writes, “Baum wrote for children—children who would become the adults of the next generation. He presents to them a twofold picture of the world: in one form it is flawed, but still possesses, in traditional values, the seeds of perfection; in the other, it is perfect” (qtd. in Bloom 6). When reading *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, children must confront this conflict of values. Baum does not reduce the setting of his story to a symbol. Dorothy, the Tin Woodman, the Lion, and the Wizard feel connected to the countryside, not to the country. They define home as a natural place, not as a political construction. Still, Baum’s book is not a scientific study of the plants and animals in the Land of Oz. Instead, it is the story of an American girl who must choose between profiting from the land and preserving the land as she tries to find herself and her way home.

Baum introduces Dorothy by describing the land from which she comes: “Dorothy lived in the midst of the great Kansas prairies, with Uncle Henry, who was a farmer, and Aunt Em, who was the farmer’s wife” (Baum 11). The first sentence of the story tells the reader very little about Dorothy. Instead, it places the protagonist in an environmental and economical context: Dorothy comes from a rural, but agricultural, area and probably from a poor, but hard-working, family. The words “in the midst” suggest
that Dorothy is just a small part of her surroundings. Likewise, Uncle Henry is simply “a farmer” and Aunt Em is simply “the farmer’s wife.” Baum describes Uncle Henry with an indefinite article, making him appear anonymous in the “great Kansas prairies.” Interestingly, Baum’s initial depiction of Aunt Em makes her the domesticator and the domesticated: she lives and works on the farm, but she belongs to her husband.

From the start, nature seems more powerful than people. The sun and the wind—untamed, intangible parts of nature—define the land and the families who depend on it. In the opening scene, Dorothy is static because her surroundings are static:

[W]hen Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. (12)

The young girl sees the emptiness of the American Midwest from the doorway of her house, the only visible boundary in the scene. Dorothy’s home appears empty and eroded—but vast. The soil is weather-beaten. The sun, which should nourish the grass, has killed it. The words
“nothing,” “not,” and “gray” make the ground appear barren, like the Dakota badlands, not fertile, like the fields in Kansas. Biographers attribute this geographical incongruence to the fact that Baum lived in the Dakotas, not in Kansas (Bloom 1). Agriculture is central to their small community, but the land means more than money. In the chapter entitled “‘Now We Can Cross the Shifting Sands’: The Outer Landscape of Oz,” Rahn explains that “Baum’s most conspicuous cluster of sensory details occurs in the first two chapters of The Wizard, creating the contrast between gray, dry Kansas, and the colorful, fertile world of Oz; his purpose here . . . is not simply to make both places vivid to the imagination but to define them as states of being” (The Wizard of Oz: Shaping an Imaginary World 80). The land is as alive as the people. The sun has human actions — it bakes, burns, and plows. These verbs describe a sort of domestication: the weather cooks the grass until the ground is gray and dead. Through these verbs, Baum suggests that the farmers affect the land at least as much as the land affects the farmers. In fact, before Americans made the Midwest the agricultural center of the country, the grass grew five or six feet high (Chicago: City of the Century). Nature domesticates the land through the heat of the sun and the farmers domesticate the land with the blades of their plows. The reader—a child at the turn of the century—must decide whether the land in the story is gray because it is wild or gray because it has lost its wildness.

Baum also attributes the graying of the house and
the people to the weather, an uncontrollable part of the Kansas wilderness. The paint on the farmhouse fades and cracks, like the soil, despite Uncle Henry and Aunt Em’s effort to preserve it: “once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else” (Baum 12). Nature has a similar damaging effect on Aunt Em, who becomes gray, physically and psychologically, after she moves to Kansas: “when Aunt Em came there to live she was a young, pretty wife. The sun and wind had changed her, too. They had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray, also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled, now” (12). Aunt Em, a childless woman, is infertile because her environment is stagnant. Similarly, Uncle Henry defines himself and his life by the cycle of the sun and the cycle of the soil. Farming allows Uncle Henry to be independent from the political development of the country but forces him to be dependent on the agricultural development of the land. The farm is Uncle Henry’s work, but it is also his home: “he worked hard from morning till night and did not know what joy was. He was gray also” (15). Thus, in the first few pages of the story, Baum reverses the typical human-nature relationship. The land does not reflect the people’s psychological or physiological state. Instead, the health of the people reflects the health of the land (Barry 259). With this subtle difference, Baum establishes an ecological—rather than an anthropomorphic—attitude.
Toto, Dorothy’s dog, brings the scene and the little
girl to life: “it was Toto that made Dorothy laugh, and
saved her from growing as gray as her other surroundings.
Toto was not gray; he was a little black dog, with long,
silky hair and small black eyes that twinkled merrily on
either side of his funny, wee nose. Toto played all day
long, and Dorothy played with him, and loved him dearly”
(Baum 15). Like Dorothy, an orphan, and Aunt Em, a child­
less woman, Toto seems displaced in rural Kansas. Little
black dogs are not native to the Midwest. Toto’s fur is
black and healthy against the gray fields, and he is a pet,
not a sheepdog or a wolf. Perhaps he is black because he
is not completely wild or completely tame. Toto is stuck
in the middle of the struggle between humans and the en­
vironment. Because he is not part of this struggle, he is
not gray.

Eventually, a cyclone disrupts the stillness and the
silence on the farm. Before the storm approaches, the
people are static: Dorothy stands in the doorway, Aunt Em
stands at the sink, and Uncle Henry sits on the porch. Af­
ter spotting the dark clouds, however, Uncle Henry “ran
toward the sheds where the cows and horses were kept”
and “Aunt Em dropped her work and came to the door”
(16). The characters’ movement on the farm is only a re­
action to the movement of the approaching storm. Uncle
Henry’s warning to Aunt Em serves as the first piece of
dialogue: “‘[T]here’s a cyclone coming, Em,’ he called to
his wife; ‘I’ll go look after the stock’” (16). In this way,
the storm introduces Baum’s story. Interestingly, Uncle Henry behaves like a farmer in this moment, not like a husband. His instinct tells him to protect the farm animals first, not Aunt Em or Dorothy. The reader must wonder whether Uncle Henry runs to the barn to save the cows and the horses because they are helpless animals or because they represent a potential profit.

When the cyclone hits the farmhouse, the wind sweeps Dorothy and Toto up into the air. The passage describes the energy and the entropy of the storm, not the fears of the girl caught up in it: “the north and south winds met where the house stood, and made it the exact center of the cyclone. In the middle of a cyclone the air is generally still, but the great pressure of the wind on every side of the house raised it higher and higher, until it was at the very top of the cyclone; and there it remained and was carried miles and miles away” (16-17). Indeed, Baum’s language is scientific. He positions the house in the “exact center” of the spinning cyclone and measures the “pressure of the wind” that surrounds Dorothy and Toto. The weather’s function is practical because the cyclone removes Dorothy from one setting and replaces her in another in a very real way. As Peter Barry states, “the storm is a storm, and not just a metaphor” (259). The external chaos in the environment does not represent an internal chaos in Dorothy’s mind.

In fact, the cyclone does not scare Dorothy until Toto wanders “too near the open trap door” (Baum 17).
Both Dorothy and Toto appear desensitized to nature because of their respective forms of domestication. Dorothy manages to fall asleep while the house whirls across the desert to the Land of Oz. When Dorothy wakes up, she finds herself in a very different environment: “banks of gorgeous flowers were on every hand, and birds with rare and brilliant plumage sang and fluttered in the trees and bushes. A little way off was a small brook, rushing and sparkling along between green banks, and murmuring in a voice very grateful to a little girl who had lived so long on the dry, gray prairies” (22). Baum sets the green in Oz against the gray in Kansas, the “rich and luscious fruits” against the “baked” and “burned” grass, and the birds’ songs against the prairie’s silence. As an outsider, Dorothy appreciates the natural beauty of the trees, but Baum also attaches a monetary term to them. Their fruit is “luscious” and “rich” (22). Dorothy, who was raised on a farm, sees the trees as plants and as a form of produce. The Land of Oz becomes a sort of utopia because it is “rich” in aesthetic and economic value.

Still, Dorothy never plans to stay in Oz. She feels homesick for her family and her farm in Kansas. Eventually, she meets the Good Witch of the North, who tells her that the Wizard in Emerald City will help her find a way home. When Dorothy asks how to find the city, the Good Witch says that “it is exactly in the center of the country” (31). Dorothy learns that Emerald City was built by the Wizard, a man from Omaha. While Dorothy represents
the rural people in the Midwest, the Wizard represents the city-builders. Architects came to Chicago and "built the White City of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition from the marshes along Lake Michigan" (Hearn 267). Within a few years, this "mud hole" was transformed into a "metropolis" (*Chicago: City of the Century*). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was published only seven years after the World's Fair. Chicago, like Emerald City, sits in the center of an agrarian country. Both cities serve as links between the East and the West. Furthermore, both cities display their developers' wealth. Chicago's White City was classical. The buildings and the streets were constructed of white marble. Likewise, the Wizard paves the streets of his city with marble and lines the cracks with emerald stones. His city's green glow is artificial. Michael Patrick Hearn writes, "Of course the magic of the White City of Chicago was all an illusion like that of the Emerald City of Oz" (267). Emerald City, the capitol of Oz, reflects the industrial need for money in place of nature. Historians say the same about the construction of the White City: "for much of the nineteenth century . . . [America] was a familiar world, rooted in nature," but "Chicago turned this world on its head" (*Chicago: City of the Century*). In essence, Emerald City, like Chicago, "was a crucible of the larger transformations that the country was undergoing—from agriculture to industry, from rural isolation to the crowding of urban life, from the seasons and the movements of the sun dictating our rhythms to the movements of the punch
clock” (*Chicago: City of the Century*). Dorothy—like all Americans at the turn of the century—must confront these “transformations” so that she does not stay stranded, alone, in an unfamiliar country.

Dorothy begins interacting with her environment more directly when she begins her journey through Oz along the yellow brick road. The choices that she makes in order to survive reveal her system of values. In some cases, Dorothy’s actions are defined by self-interest; in other cases, her behavior suggests a growing concern for the environment. Before she leaves the house and starts down the yellow brick road, Dorothy prepares some food, but she eats only bread and fresh fruit during her long journey to the Emerald City:

> [W]hen Dorothy was left alone she began to feel hungry. So she went to the cupboard and cut herself some bread, which she spread with butter. She gave some to Toto, and taking a pail from the shelf she carried it down to the little brook and filled it with clear, sparkling water. Toto ran over the trees and began to bark at the birds sitting there. Dorothy went to get him, and saw such delicious fruit hanging from the branches that she gathered some of it, finding it just what she wanted to help out her breakfast. (Baum 35)

Baum details Dorothy’s eating habits throughout the story. For instance, she eats eggs and porridge when she stops to
rest in a Munchkin farmer’s house. On another occasion, Dorothy and the Tin Woodman beg the Lion not to hunt a deer even though they have run out food. Dorothy’s diet suggests that she is a vegetarian: “Oz was free from many of the fads which have attracted much attention in the outside world,” S. J. Sackett wrote in ‘The Utopia of Oz.’ At one time, however, Dorothy was taken by an idea which was rather close to vegetarianism. A close look at Dorothy’s diet in *The Wizard of Oz* reveals no meat of any kind” (Hearn 118). Dorothy does not subscribe to vegetarianism out of necessity. The Tin Woodman and the Lion, friends she makes while traveling down the yellow brick road, are quite capable of hunting. Dorothy, like Baum’s mother-in-law, Matilda Joslyn Gage, is likely an ethical vegetarian. Gage writes that such vegetarians “think all life—even of animals, birds, and insects—is sacred. They think it is very wrong to kill anything that lives. They also think it is bad for anyone to eat flesh food” (qtd. in Hearn 118). Dorothy never eats any kind of animal. In his “Introduction,” Baum claims that *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is not designed to teach morality; however, Dorothy, like Baum’s readers, is a child who is in the process of learning right from wrong. Dorothy’s decision not to eat meat reflects her evaluation of the ethical environment in which she lives. On several occasions, she chooses an animal’s welfare over her own.

When Dorothy meets the Scarecrow, however, she must question her clear-cut definition of “animal.” The
Scarecrow—a man made of straw, not flesh—appears very much alive to Dorothy and Toto. Baum describes his body in great anatomical detail: “its head was a small sack stuffed with straw, with eyes, nose, and mouth painted on it to represent a face. An old, pointed blue hat, that had belonged to some Munchkin, was perched on his head, and the rest of the figure was a blue suit of clothes, worn and faded, which had also been stuffed with straw” (Baum 42). The Scarecrow blurs the line between the human world and the natural world. His body, which is stuffed with straw, comes from the land, but his face, which is painted, comes from the people who harvest it. Furthermore, the straw man wears a Munchkin’s clothes. Dorothy accepts these liminal states because she has seen scarecrows in Kansas; however, she feels confused when the Scarecrow begins to move: “while Dorothy was looking earnestly into the queer, painted face of the Scarecrow, she was surprised to see one of the eyes slowly wink at her. She thought she must have been mistaken, at first, for none of the Scarecrows in Kansas ever wink; but presently the figure nodded its head to her in a friendly way” (42-45). In Kansas, the scarecrows stand still in the cornfields. In Oz, however, these mannequins become real men.

The new agricultural and industrial landscape challenges Dorothy, like all Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century, to evaluate what critic G. Stanley Hall describes as “the difference between living tissue and dead matter, between life and mechanism” (qtd. in Culver 614).
Dorothy confronts this difference through her doll-like friends, the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman. Dorothy and the Scarecrow understand that he has a very different kind of body—hers is human, while his is dried grain—but Dorothy does not make a distinction between the two kinds of life. Does the Scarecrow consider himself a person or a product of the agricultural landscape? He says that he cannot feel because he is not made of flesh: “I don’t mind my legs and arms and body being stuffed, because I cannot get hurt. If anyone treads on my toes or sticks a pin into me, it doesn’t matter, for I can’t feel it” (Baum 47). The Scarecrow devalues his own body, suggesting that he is vulnerable because he is constructed of natural elements unnaturally. He is unfeeling physically, but not emotionally. The Scarecrow’s complicated sensitivity helps to make Dorothy aware of the perhaps muted environmental debate of her time. Ultimately, Dorothy must decide whether she can identify with the Scarecrow. Accordingly, Hall “saw in the doll ‘the most original, free and spontaneous expression of the child’s mind’ . . . Doll play seemed . . . an important tool for getting children to confront difficult questions about human identity and embodiment” (Culver 613). In the real world, children learn that dolls cannot move or speak or feel, but in Baum’s world, Dorothy learns the exact opposite through her anthropomorphized friend.

Dorothy and the Scarecrow talk about the meaning of home as they travel down the yellow brick road together:
"Tell me something about yourself, and the country you came from," said the Scarecrow" (Baum 52). Dorothy tells him "all about Kansas, and how gray everything was there, and how the cyclone had carried her to this queer Land of Oz" (52). While she describes Kansas, Dorothy says nothing about herself, her family, or her own interests. She tells the Scarecrow only about the farm and the weather. Dorothy’s response suggests that she defines herself by her homeland. Moreover, Dorothy interprets the word "country" to mean countryside. For Dorothy, Kansas is a natural environment, not a political environment. When the Scarecrow replies, "I cannot understand why you should wish to leave this beautiful country and go back to the dry, gray place you call Kansas," Dorothy becomes defensive. She says, "No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home" (52-53). Ironically, the little, lost girl must explain her feeling of rootedness to the man made of straw. Before Dorothy rescued the Scarecrow, he stood above a cornfield, attached to a pole. Despite this physical connection to the land in Oz, the Scarecrow cannot understand Dorothy’s emotional connection to her home in Kansas. Dorothy explains to the Scarecrow that unlike people of straw, "people of flesh and blood" depend on their homes for happiness and security (52). In essence, Dorothy says that she chooses home because her natural instincts overpower her interests in beauty or wealth.
Still, the Scarecrow may have a point. In his discussion of wild and domestic lands, Barney Nelson describes Western writer Mary Austin’s perspective on rootedness and its relationship to the concept of homeland. Austin was “so fiercely loyal to place that she believed any desire to return to a former homeland, through a mythic longing either for a lost Eden, for lost tribal lands, or for lost childhood places, was a sentimental, nostalgic journey that devalued the current home” (Nelson 19). In this way, Dorothy’s yearning for her home in Kansas, for either emotional or economical reasons, “devalues” the Scarecrow’s home in the Land of Oz.

As the two continue down the path, the fields fade into the forest. The environment and the animals that live in it become wilder: “there were no fences at all by the road side now, and the land was rough and untilled. Towards evening they came to a great forest, where the trees grew so big and close together that their branches met over the road of yellow brick. It was almost dark under the trees, for the branches shut out the daylight” (Baum 58). When Dorothy and the Scarecrow venture further into this wild part of Oz, they meet the Tin Woodman, who is debatably the least wild of the four main characters in the novel. The Tin Woodman blurs the distinction not only between human and not human but also between wild and domestic. His tin body reflects the Industrial Revolution, the time period during which Baum wrote his story, particularly the industrial impetus that led to the development
of Chicago. Baum’s contemporaries—like the notorious muckraker Upton Sinclair—and modern-day historians look to the meatpacking industry as the prime example of the Midwest’s economic and environmental exploitation:

‘[I]n Phillip Armour’s Chicago, they did it straight,’ Norman Mailer would write, ‘they cut the animals right out of their hearts,’ which is why it was the last of the Great American Cities. And people had great faces, as carnal as blood, too impatient for hypocrisy, an honest love for plunder. The Chicago packing houses became the largest killing field in the world[...] a person could visit the lumber yards or the grain elevators without pondering their meaning—not the stockyards. (Chicago: City of the Century)

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, people destroyed trees and killed animals living on the land on which they built cities. Baum embodies this conflict between man and nature through a character—the Tin Woodman. He humanizes the Tin Woodman, who retains a human spirit even when his physical body is replaced with a mechanical body. This humanization redefines what a living organism is and, therefore, what a wild organism is. Hearn writes that “by transforming the talking beasts of ancient folk tales into talking machines, Baum grafted twentieth-century technology to the fairy tale tradition. The useful, friendly, companionable creatures of Oz became part of the child’s
family life, much as the automobile was becoming integrated into contemporary American society” (88). The Tin Woodman relates the tale of his recreation, during which the Wicked Witch of the East enchants his axe so that it chops off one of his legs, then the other, and continues in this piecemeal manner until the Tin Woodman must craft himself an entirely new body. He becomes tin from head to toe. In losing his physical and natural body, it is surprising that the Tin Woodman is able to maintain his life. He does not lose the source of “wildness” present in all living things. In his essay “Walking,” Henry David Thoreau “argues that wildness is [. . .] something that cannot be lost, something that should be both valued and feared” (Nelson 4). Like Thoreau, Baum “makes it clear that civilization can hide it, oppression can stifle it, but scratch the surface deep enough to draw blood, and wildness springs eternal” (Nelson 4). Perhaps the Tin Woodman’s lack of blood leads to his ecological ignorance and ambivalence. The paradox of simultaneously being a producer and a destroyer originates from the “wildness” that remains in his human soul—the undeclared driving force which keeps him alive. Nelson writes that “in short, the ‘wildness’ Thoreau struggles to define cannot be bred out, beaten out, preached out, educated out, or domesticated out of any animal” (7). Nor can it be chopped off, as in the Tin Woodman’s case.

The Tin Woodman also proves uncategorizable because his line of work places him in the midst of a natural
setting—the wilderness of a thick forest. But he lives like the less wild, more realistic Munchkins: he has a job, owns a cottage, and interacts with the Munchkins, especially associating himself with “one of the Munchkin girls who was so beautiful [he] soon grew to love her with all [his] heart” (Baum 70). Both the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow blur Dorothy’s categorical definitions. The Tin Woodman admits that he has no brains, like the Scarecrow; still, the Woodman chooses ignorance over unhappiness: “‘I shall take the heart,’ returned the Tin Woodman; ‘for brains do not make one happy, and happiness is the best thing in the world’” (73). This choice to remain without brains reflects the fact that the Tin Woodman is ignorant about ecological matters and about the consequences of his actions.

The Woodman’s dualistic nature is further developed through his trade. As a woodcutter, he is part of the wilderness, but he also destroys the wilderness. His profession requires him to be an inhabitant of the forest—not of the village or the city. This puts him in constant close contact with nature. At the same time, however, he chops down trees to build houses, making him both producer and destroyer. The producer-destroyer duality in the Tin Woodman’s occupation echoes in the duality of his own physical body: as his new tin body was produced piece by piece, his old, natural body was destroyed. Consequently, the Woodman’s first contribution to the newly-formed group happens when he “set to work with his axe and chopped so well that soon he cleared a passage for the entire party” (69).
He produces a clear path for the group as he destroys the surrounding natural habitat. As he does this, the Tin Woodman states that he "was the son of a woodman who chopped down trees in the forest and sold the wood for a living. When [he] grew up [he] too became a wood-chopper" (70). Thus, the Tin Woodman reveals that the dismemberment of the forest has a predestined, patriarchal history.

Dorothy learns to distinguish between flesh and straw when she meets the Scarecrow. Similarly, she learns to distinguish between male and female when she meets the Tin Woodman:

[T]ypically in Oz, women are . . . organic or ‘meat people,’ while men are more often than not manikins or robots; thus Baum’s child reader learns sexual difference as she learns what Hall saw as the more basic distinction between organic and vital organization. As she learns this difference, the reader confronts two antithetical drives: the female urge to incorporate is juxtaposed to a masculine desire first articulated in *The Wizard of Oz* by the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman. (Culver 619)

He is a Tin Woodman, while Dorothy is a young girl. The Woodman, living on the edge of civilization, reflects all the characteristics of a typical male figure: "frontiersmen, mountain men, and cowboys are represented as romantic, handsome, aggressive, self-reliant, and, of course, happily single" (Nelson 54). Indeed, the Tin Woodman
proves romantic and self-reliant, but also happily single. Though he says he laments his lost Munchkin love, the Tin Woodman desires even more the emotion and happiness that come with having his own heart. Culver writes that “one could argue that while Baum’s male characters anticipate science fiction’s obsession with the robotic duplication of humanity, his female characters look back to the archaic and aristocratic dualism of wicked witch and fairy princess” (616). Even the Tin Woodman’s instinct becomes mechanized when his axe turns his body to tin. His longing for a heart is really a longing for a tangible organ, not a longing for intangible love.

As the three companions continue toward Emerald City, Dorothy notices that “the road was still paved with yellow brick, but these were much covered by dried branches and dead leaves from trees, and the walking was not at all good” (Baum 79). The trees hide the vestiges of human construction when the environment gets wilder: the natural brown branches cover the man-made yellow bricks. The animals in the forest grow wilder, too. Dorothy hears “a deep growl from some wild animal hidden among the trees,” and moments later, the Lion “bound[s] into the road” (79-80). The Lion attacks the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman, but Dorothy smacks him before he hurts Toto. At first, the Lion seems characteristically violent; however, he soon reveals that he feels just as scared as Dorothy and her friends. The Lion says, “‘[A]ll the other animals in the forest naturally expect me to be brave, for the Lion is
everywhere thought to be King of Beasts,” but he continues, “Whenever I’ve met a man I’ve been awfully scared; but I just roared at him, and he has always run away as fast as he could go” (82). Thus, the Lion, like Dorothy, feels stuck between instinct and self-interest. He knows that he is supposed to protect the forest from human invaders, but he gets caught up in his own emotions. He is a wild beast, but he is also a scared animal. The Lion’s violent response and Dorothy’s violent response are rooted in the same fear—a fear of otherness. Dorothy and the Lion become frightened because they cannot distinguish each other as clearly wild or clearly domestic creatures. Writers of the American West “realized not only that this imagined dichotomy between the wild and domestic was false, but that it also encouraged treating the West as a place of wild ‘otherness’” (Nelsen 57). When Dorothy scolds the Lion for attacking her dog and her new friends, the Lion asks what kind of creature Toto is: “[I]s he made of tin, or stuffed?” asked the lion. “Neither. He’s a—a—a meat dog,” said the girl” (Baum 82). The Lion, like Dorothy, seems to struggle with distinguishing between flesh and straw and tin.

Although Dorothy does not seem shocked that the Lion has human qualities, his personification is significant to the text. The popularity of animal stories in the late 1800s and early 1900s reflects the period’s politicized conservationist climate. According to Suzanne Rahn, “one of the most striking developments in the history of children’s literature is the sudden rise of the animal story, both
realistic and fantastic . . . particularly, the story of wild animals. Before 1890, the few animals had been nearly all domestic animals” (“Green Worlds for Children” 159). Furthermore, Rahn writes that “perhaps the most startling innovation in the animal stories of this period is the appearance of wild predators in sympathetic roles” (6). The Lion is not just a wild animal: he is a predator, but he is a cowardly predator. Like Dorothy, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Woodman, the Lion feels displaced and incomplete in his surroundings so he decides to travel to Emerald City to see the Wizard. When the Lion joins Dorothy and her companions, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* becomes a classic American animal story and an early example of children’s environmental fiction.

Baum’s environmentalist stance is most obvious toward the end of the characters’ journey to the Emerald City. The tensions between the characters in Baum’s story represent the tensions between the people who supported preservation and the people who supported production: the Lion serves as a protector of his natural environment while the Tin Woodman appears to be its destroyer. The Lion reminds the reader that nature is its own protector against the industrial and destructive influence of man. The Lion, a “meat” or flesh animal, coexists with nature and serves to scare away the potentially dangerous human predators. The Lion is a representative of the Transcendentalist sentiments that saturated American Literature in the nineteenth century. Through the Lion, Baum echoes Thoreau’s
environmentalist thinking that “in Wildness is the preservation of the world” (qtd. in Nelson 4). Nelson continues by explaining that “[Thoreau] does not say that wildness needs our condescending protection, but rather that wildness will protect us” (4). Throughout the novel, the Lion ignores his cowardice to protect the party of travelers, much as he protects his fellow forest creatures before meeting Dorothy, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Woodman. The reader meets the Lion during one of his protective bouts, when he views these half-men as a potential threat to his homeland. Nature seems well-suited to care not only for its inhabitants but also for itself. For example, when the three first leave the frontier and enter the wilderness, the Tin Woodman declares, “[I]f I should get caught in the rain, and rust again, I would need the oil-can badly” (Baum 69). The Tin Woodman learns to fear the rain—a natural force. He seems to understand that nature will fight against his abuse of the forest, perhaps rendering him immobile for “more than a year” again (65). Nature repeatedly gets its revenge for the Tin Woodman’s violent tree chopping.

During their journey out of the forest, the Woodman inadvertently steps on a beetle and kills it. In this instance, his natural instincts overcome his industrial, tin half and make him “very unhappy, for he was always careful not to hurt any living creatures” (85). It seems paradoxical that the Woodman, whose body blurs the distinction between animal and machine, creates such a clear distinction between creature and non-creature. He has no qualms about
chopping trees, but he “[weeps] several tears of sorrow and regret” over one beetle (85). Hearn comments on this entrenched incongruity: “Despite his lack of a heart, the Tin Woodman is still able to express concern for all living creatures; evidently he has learned from the experience that closed the last chapter. But his moral position remains ambiguous” (118). The Woodman’s body is both natural and industrial, and his behavior reflects this blurred identity. He wavers between supporting nature and supporting industry.

Even the Tin Woodman’s environmental activism appears tainted by his industrial nature. His activist tendencies resurface when the group stops for dinner after joining up with the Lion, who offers to “go into the forest and kill a deer” (Baum 89-90). The Tin Woodman vehemently objects to hunting. “Don’t! Please don’t...I should certainly weep if you killed a poor deer,” he pleads (90), identifying with a natural wildness and reinforcing the vegetarian lifestyle that values animals as living organisms, but, ironically, devalues plants. The Woodman, like the intrusive and destructive speculators in early twentieth-century Chicago, is driven by self-interest. While he acts like an ecological activist for the life of the woodland creatures, he denies the Lion’s natural tendencies as a predator and a provider. In this way, the Tin Woodman realigns himself with his industrial half. He also reinforces a masculine model—the industrial man as the provider. He opposes the Lion’s offer to hunt, but he has no problem
chopping down trees. He uses his man-made tools to provide warmth for Dorothy, but he denies the Lion a more instinctive means of providing food for her. The Tin Woodman mimics the selfish speculators of the American frontier because he is driven by profit—a new heart awaits him in Emerald City. Likewise, Chicago, the city on which Baum based much of *Oz*, “is the city where . . . human life is secondary to making money” (*Chicago: City of the Century*). In his quest for personal profit, the Tin Woodman neglects the basic needs of the rest of the party. In fact, the Tin Woodman, who does not even eat, is the character that objects most to the Lion’s hunting. Furthermore, he makes no effort to supply food for the “flesh” members of their group: the Scarecrow provides nuts for Dorothy and the Lion must fend for himself. In effect, the Tin Woodman “tames” the Lion, the only wild one in the group.

The Tin Woodman tries to blunt the Lion’s instincts again, later, when the four travelers come to a very wide and very deep gulf that proves impassable. The Lion does not use his natural strength to overcome the obstacle as he would have done before meeting Dorothy and the Tin Woodman. Instead, he supports the Scarecrow’s idea that the Tin Woodman chop down a nearby tree in order to build a bridge, referring to it as “a first rate idea” (Baum 94). The Lion even helps the Tin Woodman knock down the tree. In effect, the Lion joins the Tin Woodman in the destruction of an environment that he formerly protected. Yet again, a character’s former environmentalist tendencies are
jeopardized and lost to the Tin Woodman's industrial agenda. In this way, the Tin Woodman is both an object of the industrial age and an advocate for the industrial lifestyle which places economy over ecology and production over reproduction.

The Tin Woodman also becomes an interesting character for eco-feminist critics because he embodies the patriarchal symbolic, [which is] constructed around dualisms, [and] imagines production, culture, the mind, and rationality in terms gendered 'male.' In such a system, women occupy a contradictory middle ground between nature and culture, sharing with men the project of mastering nature, while simultaneously being cast as 'closer to nature' than men are. (Carr 16)

Eco-feminism associates the devaluation of women with the devaluation of the natural world. In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Baum develops these parallel patriarchal undercurrents through the Tin Woodman. Dorothy, a human girl, is closer to nature than the nearly robotic Tin Woodman, yet she supports—and is often the cause of—the Woodman's destructiveness. His industrialization and lost interest in the Munchkin girl subordinates reproduction as it emphasizes the production of his job. As a consequence of this ingrained idea of masculine power, the Tin Woodman's patriarchal relationship with Dorothy subordinates her as both natural and female. Furthermore,
female rulers, in the form of good and bad witches, rule over the agricultural areas in Oz, while the authority figure in the metropolitan Emerald City is a man. Playing into this patriarchal mindset, Dorothy and the people in Oz never openly question his power. The discovery that the Wizard is a phony is a matter of accident. Baum's novel, however, is pulled by opposing views on the matter of sex and submission. All of the characters who actually hold power are female; the Wizard, on the other hand, holds only the power of illusion and, therefore, has only the illusion of power. Ultimately, Dorothy, the female protagonist, is the source of her male companions' success.

Throughout their journey to the city, Dorothy and her companions struggle against the natural world, but the world struggles back. As Dorothy and her friends approach the outskirts of Emerald City, they face yet another natural barrier—a field of poisonous poppies. Baum describes nature's influence over the girl and her anthropomorphized company: "now it is well known that when there are many of these flowers together their odor is so powerful that anyone who breathes it falls asleep, and if the sleeper is not carried away from the scent of the flowers he sleeps on and on forever" (Baum 111). The poisonous smell of the poppies overwhelms Dorothy, and she falls asleep in the middle of the field, but the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman carry the girl out of the field, lay "her gently on the soft grass and wait for the fresh breeze to waken her" (114). Ironically, the natural world hurts Dorothy and then nurses
her back to health; the poisonous smell of the poppies endangers Dorothy’s life, but the soft touch of the wind saves her from actual tragedy.

The Tin Woodman’s contradictory nature surfaces yet again in this scene when he escapes the poppy field and comes across a wildcat in pursuit of a field mouse. Despite his earlier declaration that he could never hurt a living creature, he does not hesitate to “cut the beast’s head clean off from its body” to save the mouse (118). Early in the novel, the Tin Woodman’s heartlessness is a cause for caution when he deals with life and death matters. Now, however, the Tin Woodman uses his heartlessness as an excuse for his violence. He says that he is “‘careful to help all those who need a friend’”—even if it means killing another creature (118). The Tin Woodman realizes that “it was wrong for the wildcat to kill such a pretty, harmless creature,” but he does not realize that it is wrong for a man to kill a wildcat (118). The Tin Woodman’s duality in this situation demonstrates an internalized conflict between man and nature. The Tin Woodman is connected to nature in his humanness, but he subscribes to the masculine industrialist “task of culture [to] transcend or triumph over nature” (Carr 16). In this reversal of a natural hierarchy, the Tin Woodman succumbs to his industrialist urge to control and dominate nature. His industrialist urges prepare the reader for Dorothy’s arrival in the city.

As Dorothy and her friends arrive in the city, parallels between the Emerald City of Oz and the White City of
Chicago’s 1893 World’s Fair became even more apparent. Both are industrialized. During the World’s Fair, electric streetlamps and spotlights in the White City were so powerful that farmers outside of Chicago could see the light in the night sky. Hearn writes that “the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition was famous for being illuminated by electricity and did much to popularize Thomas A. Edison’s marvelous invention. In 1900, electricity was still one of the world’s great untapped wonders. Electric lights are found everywhere in Baum’s fairy tales” (184). Likewise, Dorothy sees the green glow of Emerald City even before she reaches the gates that surround it: “as they walked on, the green glow became brighter and brighter, and it seemed that at last they were nearing the end of their travels” (Baum 137). The emeralds become the beacon of urban life. The intensity of the artificial light in Emerald City seems to affect Dorothy as much as the intensity of the sun’s light in Kansas; however, the glow in Emerald City is beautiful. As they enter the city “at the end of the road of yellow brick,” they see “a big gate, all studded with emeralds that glittered so in the sun that even the painted eyes of the Scarecrow were dazzled by their brilliancy” (137). The light within Emerald City overpowers the land and the people surrounding it.

Emerald City “glitters” against the dark land that Dorothy has encountered so far. As the characters pass from rural Oz to urban Emerald City, the environment stays green, but it changes from an organic green to a geological
green—the city is the color of an emerald, not a cornfield. This change in the source of color indicates a change in the values of the people. Prosperity makes the people blind to nature. When Dorothy and her friends ring the bell outside of the gate, a green man meets them and fastens pairs of spectacles over their eyes, explaining that if they do not “wear spectacles the brightness and glory of the Emerald City would blind [them]” (139). Baum writes that the man has “spectacles of every size and shape,” but “all of them had green glasses” (139). Of course, the people are not blinded by the supposed green color but by the green glasses. The spectacles superimpose an artificial nature over the reality of city life. Hearn suggests that “Baum may be playing with the proverbial phrase ‘to wear rose-colored glasses,’ meaning to view the world as better than it really is” (267). Dorothy and her friends do not seem to mind—or even notice—that their perception of Emerald City is an illusion. Historians note a similar ambivalence among the people who flocked to Chicago at the turn of the century. Historians remember Chicago as “the explosive city of the new industrial age where there were no rules in the battle between capital and labor. They were revolutionaries. They felt that perhaps with a single act of violence, capital would crumble and a new society would take shape. Chicago is the city where people driven by profit were blind to nature” (Chicago: City of the Century). People came to Chicago to find work and, ultimately, prosperity. Many immigrants were blind to the hardships of industrial life: for them, the myth
of an urban utopia was their only hope. Likewise, Dorothy enters Emerald City desperate to find a way home. Her “profit” is a passage back to Kansas. Because she is so focused on her own needs, Dorothy does not notice that the emerald environment is an illusion and that the Wizard may be an illusion, too.

Baum’s description of the Emerald City appears strikingly similar to historical descriptions of Chicago during the World’s Fair. Dorothy and her friends leave the gatekeeper and walk down

the streets [that] were lined with beautiful houses all built of green marble and studded everywhere with sparkling emeralds. They walked over a pavement of the same green marble, and where the blocks were joined together were rows of emeralds, set closely, and glittering in the brightness of the sun. The window panes were of green glass; even the sky above the City had a green tint, and the rays of the sun were green. (Baum 143)

Similarly, Chicago “was a utopian vision: a city with broad streets shaded by trees and lined with fine buildings. Statues glistened and fountains flashed in the late afternoon sun” (Chicago: City of the Century). Emerald City and Chicago are utopias because their economies project images of progress. At the same time, however, their environments are being destroyed in order to promote urban growth. Upon reaching the city, Dorothy’s attention shifts
from the natural to the constructed. Once in the Emerald City, she admires the jewels in the streets just as she admired the trees in the forests. Both are, as Baum writes, "rich." Dorothy realizes that the Wizard must be powerful because he is wealthy. Because of this, she feels confident that he will help her find a way home. In the city, the wealth and power of the urban world challenges the power of a natural world, and it wins. Importantly, Dorothy notices that the two worlds do not coexist: "there seemed to be no horses nor animals of any kind. Everyone seemed happy and contented and prosperous" (Baum 144). In Kansas, Uncle Henry and Aunt Em have a farm with animals, but they are poor. Conversely, in Emerald City, the economy flourishes, but there are no trees and no animals. The city's economy comes at the cost of the environment.

When she leaves Emerald City to find the Wicked Witch of the West, Dorothy discovers that the green glow is an illusion: "Dorothy still wore the pretty silk dress she had put on in the Palace, but now, to her surprise, she found it was no longer green, but pure white" (166). Dorothy sees clearly once she removes the green-glassed spectacles and returns to a rural environment. When Dorothy and the Tin Woodman return to the countryside, they revert back to their instinctive behavior. Dorothy respects the environment, while the Tin Woodman continues to destroy it. The Wicked Witch, who realizes the threat of Dorothy and her companions, sends forty wolves to "tear them to pieces" (167). Faced with this plague, the Woodman is once again
subject to the oppositional forces of his body and his behavior. The Woodman, who weeps so readily and easily after stepping on a beetle, kills these creatures one by one, without pausing to think or feel: “he seized his axe, which he had made very sharp, and as the leader of the wolves came on the Tin Woodman swung his arm and chopped the wolf’s head from its body, so that it immediately died. As soon as he could raise his axe another would come up, and he also fell under the sharp edge of the Tin Woodman’s weapon” (168). The Tin Woodman’s violence in this case is no accident. He intentionally kills the wolves.

The industrialist ideals—as personified in the Tin Woodman—seem to have affected the others as well. The Scarecrow refers to the wolf massacre as “a good fight,” and Dorothy merely thanks the Tin Woodman before eating her breakfast (169). When the Wicked Witch sends another plague of animals the next night, the Scarecrow follows in the footsteps of the Tin Woodman, and turns into the male protector, too. Baum highlights this transformation through the Scarecrow’s superhuman strength: “there were forty crows, and forty times the Scarecrow twisted a neck, until at last all were lying dead beside him. Then he called his companions to arise, and again they went upon their journey” (169). His violence is almost mechanical, like the Tin Woodman. None of the characters objects to the Scarecrow’s violent reaction and utter lack of respect for the wild animals. The reader must decide whether the party becomes an uncaring and unfazed group of destroyers because of the
influence of the industrial Tin Woodman or because of the influence of the industrialized Emerald City.

After killing the Wicked Witch of the West, Dorothy and her companions try to return to the Emerald City to have their requests honored; however, "there was no road—not even a pathway—between the castle of the Wicked Witch and the Emerald City . . . [The four travelers] know, of course, they must go straight east, toward the rising sun" (197). Interestingly, the western part of the Land of Oz—like the western part of the United States—is unmapped and unpaved. The West is a frontier for Dorothy, just like it was a frontier for the farmers of Baum’s time. At first, the four travelers try to use the sun as a source of direction, but eventually, Dorothy must call the Winged Monkeys for help. The Winged Monkeys tell the travelers that that they were captured and colonized by the Wicked Witch. They describe their wild life before domestication; before they were under her control, they “were a free people, living happily in the great forest, flying from tree to tree, eating nuts and fruit, and doing just as [they] pleased without calling anybody master” (204). The Winged Monkeys’ history parallels Oz’s metropolitan development. The Wizard built the Emerald City as a shelter against the Wicked Witches during their struggle for power. As a result of this power struggle, the Winged Monkeys were captured and put under the control of the Witches. In this way, the Winged Monkeys experience colonization and domestication simultaneously.
The Wizard refuses to see Dorothy and her friends when they return to the Emerald City because he cannot grant their wishes. The Wizard finally reveals that his identity, like his city, is an illusion, “[J]ust to amuse myself, and keep the good people busy, I ordered them to build this City, and my palace; and they did it all willingly and well. Then I thought, as the country was so green and beautiful, I would call it the Emerald City. And to make the name fit better I put green spectacles on all the people, so that everything they saw was green” (221). The Wizard takes from the ground precious stones from which he constructs an artificial city. He also creates artificial happiness. In effect, he destroys the natural green environment only to replace it with his own, unnatural green environment. The Wizard names the city in an equally incongruous manner. “Emerald” describes the land, but the land is paved with white marble. Likewise, the architects of the World’s Fair created Chicago from an illusion: “the fair’s buildings were temporary structures coated with plaster. Called the ‘White City,’ it was the businessman’s idea of civic order—white, clean, and safe—everything it was not. It’s an imaging thing. The fair was an imaging thing” (Chicago: City of the Century). Upon her return from the countryside, Dorothy also learns that Emerald City is an “imaging thing.”

The entire endeavor—building a city—seems like entertainment to the Wizard, a circus man from Omaha. His transformation of the land becomes a game. Similarly,
Chicago’s city-builders were risk-takers who “see city-building as a supremely human art, and they see that they have a chance here to turn this prairie bog into a great city” (Chicago: City of the Century). Emerald City becomes a Utopia for the Wizard and, sadly, for the people whom he tricks. Appearances mean everything. The environment looks green and the people look happy. But this utopia is very different from the utopia that Dorothy encounters in the Munchkins’ green fields and farms. Donald L. Miller points out this discrepancy in the American understanding of utopia: “this is an age that still believes in cities. Isn’t it interesting that the utopia is a city? In England Robert Morris is writing at the same time that the utopia is in the countryside” (qtd. in Chicago: City of the Century). The Wizard tells Dorothy that everything appears green to the people because the city is “abounding in jewels and precious metals, and every good thing that is needed to make one happy” (Baum 222). Essentially, the Wizard claims that the people in the city understand survival and success in terms of their economy, not their natural environment. This puzzles Dorothy because life in Kansas has taught her just the opposite.

The Wizard promises to return Dorothy to Kansas in order to redeem himself from his history of deception. But he says, “‘I haven’t the faintest notion which way [Kansas] lies. But the first thing to do is to cross the desert, and then it should be easy to find your way home’” (240). The desert surrounds the Land of Oz and separates it from the
American Midwest. The desert protects Dorothy and the Wizard while they live in Oz, but it also prevents them from returning to Kansas. Eco-feminist critics understand deserts as both maternal and erotic bodies of land (Carr 182). In this context, the desert is the characters’ source of delivery into and out of a foreign country. But the desert is also a barrier. After the Wizard leaves in his balloon without her, Dorothy calls the Winged Monkeys to fly her across the desert. They say, “‘[W]e belong to this country alone, and cannot leave it. There has never been a Winged Monkey in Kansas yet, and I suppose there will never be, for they don’t belong there” (Baum 251). As Dorothy begins to understand the struggle between man and nature, she also begins to learn the laws that govern and separate the two worlds.

Ironically, despite the glorification of the Emerald City as a utopia, the urban atmosphere proves bad for the more natural characters. The Lion says, “‘[C]ity life does not agree with me at all… I have lost much flesh since I’ve lived there’” (258). The Lion’s admission pits rural life against wild life. He seems much happier and much healthier when the group returns to his natural habitat. Upon their return to the forest, however, nature must defend itself from the urbanized trespassers once again: “the Scarecrow, who was in the lead, finally discovered a big tree with such wide spreading branches that there was room for the party to pass underneath. So he walked forward to the tree, but just as he came under the first branches they
bent down and twined around him, and the next minute he was raised from the ground and flung headlong among his fellow travelers” (262). The trees serve as the spokespeople for the forest. They stand at the edge of the woods to prevent human progression. The trees’ automatic response to throw the Scarecrow to the ground parallels the Tin Woodman’s automatic response to chop down trees as a solution to every problem. The Lion understands the trees’ reaction as instinct because he protects the forest, too. He says, “‘[T]he trees seem to have made up their minds to fight us, and stop our journey’” (262). In The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, immobility causes fear. Throughout the story, the Tin Woodman fears that his joints will rust and he will be rendered immobile. Now, the travelers fear that they will be stuck in the outskirts of the forest. The trees are rooted in the ground, but this does not prevent them from fighting against human invaders. Dorothy and her companions become frightened because the trees overcome this immobility and fight while they are still firmly rooted.

Before Dorothy and her companions reach Glinda’s castle in the Land of the Quadlings, they discover the edge of the forest—the China Country. In this porcelain land, Dorothy becomes acutely aware of her effect on the environment: “the little animals and all the people scampered out of their way, fearing the strangers would break them” (Baum 276). While Dorothy recognizes that the characters are fragile, her self-interests prevent her from preserving the China Country. She asks a little china princess if she
can take her home and display her on Aunt Em's mantle shelf. The China Princess begs Dorothy to leave her alone: “You see, here in our own country, we live contentedly, and can talk and move around as we please. But whenever any of us are taken away, our joints at once stiffen and we can only stand straight and look pretty” (275-276). Like the Tin Woodman, the China Princess worries about movement. She fears confinement. The China Princess does not want to be put on display—she does not want to be captured and colonized for the amusement of a human master. Her situation can be understood on a less political, more ecological scale. At the end of the nineteenth century, animal activists struggled against the popularity of zoos. Rahn relates the confinement of animals in zoos to the confinement of people in colonized countries: the intense interest in nature . . . was often bound up with a desire to control it, or even exert dominance over it. Victorian zoos . . . not only provided exotic subjects for scientific study, but served as satisfying emblems both of human domination over nature and Euro-American domination over the ‘uncivilized’ world. Such displays of control and dominance often required the destruction of the natural object itself. (3)

Dorothy plans to take the China Country's princess back to Kansas as a souvenir and place her on Aunt Em's mantle. The princess would live in an unfamiliar, unnatural
environment and feel trapped, like a wild animal in a zoo. Dorothy tries to convince the China Princess that life on display will be fulfilling, but the princess knows better. At the end of her journey through Oz, Dorothy’s self-interest seems to take over again.

When Dorothy finally returns home, she must reconcile her newly-aware, Oz-influenced self with the self from her past life in Kansas. Culver concludes, “‘our hot-house urban life, [Hall] warned, ‘tends to ripen everything before its time,’ and one consequence of this was an American child who passed into and out of adolescence without learning to distinguish organic from mechanical forms” (614). But upon her return home, Dorothy demonstrates her new maturity and understanding when Aunt Em addresses her as a “darling child” and she responds “gravely” (Baum 307). Because she speaks seriously and answers firmly, Dorothy appears more grown-up than Aunt Em’s form of address acknowledges. Dorothy, like the land in Oz, ripens prematurely and unnaturally. During her travels through the plentiful farmlands, lush forests, and rich urban culture of Oz, Dorothy is challenged to reexamine her preconceived classifications. She learns that the lines are often blurred. Still, she tries to distinguish between what is natural and what is not, what is wild and what is not, and, more importantly, what is morally right. Moreover, she must decide whether she should act for herself or act for her environment. As she is influenced by the industrial Tin Woodman, the agricultural Scarecrow, and the wild
and predatory Lion, Dorothy discovers that her own allegiances lie in both places. At the end, Dorothy seems to have matured—she is no longer the innocent child from the gray lands in Kansas. She comes of age in the “utopian” Oz just as Americans come of age in the “utopian” Midwest. Though she has come to a deeper understanding of the industrially- and ecologically-driven mindsets, Dorothy ultimately prefers the real, agrarian Kansas, her beloved “home,” with its clearly defined distinctions between wild and domestic, protector and destroyer, and its strong natural—rather than industrial—forces.
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Redefining *Ars Moriendi* in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*

Heather Harman
*Winthrop University*
*Rock Hill, SC*

In Elizabethan literature, authors and patrons alike hold that one must live a godly life in order to die peacefully. At the moment of death one faces a “moment of truth,” when a person is given a choice either to repent or to deny the mercy of God, and the wrong decision can lead to downfall. According to the concept of *ars moriendi*, “the art of dying well,” one must live a virtuous life in order to die a good death. Indeed, as Nancy Lee Beaty points out, in the traditional sense, death was regarded as “the final touchstone for evaluating the quality of his [a man’s] life” (70). Although the idea of a noble death was familiar even as far back as Ancient Greece, the Elizabethans took the idea to heart, making it an integral part of their literary tradition. One has only to examine Christopher Marlowe’s Dr.
Faustus to understand the role that this tradition plays in
the literature of the Elizabethan period.

Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* is an Elizabethan work that
illustrates a failure to live well, resulting in a death that is
anything but peaceful. Faustus is a man who defies the
power of God and is seduced by the assurance of power
offered by the Evil Angel. Faustus allows himself to be
swayed by the corrupt being and spends the next twenty-
four years living as sinfully as he possibly can. He fails to
listen to those who warn him that he is headed for a painful
death and eternal torment in hell. Nevertheless, Faustus
may still achieve redemption by escaping the evil that grips
him. As he strays ever further into the wickedness wrought
by avarice, unbelief, hatred, and despair, the Good Angel
tells Faustus, "Repent and they [demons] shall never raise
thy skin" (*Dr. Faustus* 5.256). But Faustus is not ready to
listen, nor is he ready to listen when the Old Man tells him,
"Then call for mercy, and avoid despair" (*Dr. Faustus*
12.47). Although God offers Faustus the opportunity to be
saved, he remains wrapped up in sin and despair, refusing
to repent. Faustus fails to live well and thus does not
achieve a peaceful death. In this way, Christopher Marlowe
makes good use of this Elizabethan concept, applying it in
*Dr. Faustus* to set his main character up as the perfect ex-
ample of one who fails to live well and so also fails to die
well.

While even an unconventional writer like Marlowe
makes a fairly straightforward use of the *ars moriendi*, let
us consider the following question: Does the tradition stand the test of time and remain consistent in later writing or does it undergo revision? *The Lord of the Rings* provides an answer. In this monumental trilogy, J.R.R. Tolkien re-visualizes the "art of dying well" through the lens of Anglo-Saxon literature.

Tolkien offers us different views of achieving a virtuous death. Take, for example, the character of Boromir whose confrontation with evil parallels that of Marlowe's Faustus in many ways. The Ring seduces Boromir, a proud man of Gondor and heir to Denethor II, with promises of power in the same way that the Evil Angel seduces Faustus, filling his mind with images of wealth and power. And just as Faustus fails to listen to the warnings he receives about his evil ways, so too Boromir fails to listen to warnings about the Ring's power. Boromir tries to resist the Ring, but he eventually succumbs to the overpowering visions of power and strength that the Ring offers him and tries to take it from Frodo, thus choosing the path of destruction.

At this point, Tolkien introduces a different twist on what it means to die well: atonement. Unlike Faustus, Boromir realizes the error of his ways and tries to make amends. Indeed, as Marion Zimmer Bradley writes, "Boromir weeps in passionate repentance after his attack on Frodo," which further serves to illustrate that he understands the wickedness of his actions (110). For Faustus, the only way to achieve a good death is to repent, to ask for
God’s mercy. Boromir, however, is offered a chance to *atone* for his sins, and rather than refuse his chance at redemption as Faustus does, Boromir accepts the opportunity. By confessing his transgressions and fighting to save Merry and Pippin, Boromir is able to atone for his sins. In the end, Boromir does what Faustus cannot: he confesses his sin, makes atonement, and dies at ease, in peace at last, for as Tolkien writes: “There Boromir lay, restful, peaceful, gliding upon the bosom of the flowing water” (3:7-8). According to Greg Wright, “[f]or Boromir, death is heroic; it is redemptive, gallant and noble” (“Death and the Swift Sunrise”).

The ceremony by which Boromir is laid to rest is strongly tied to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, wherein, as Lawrence C. Chin points out, ship burials were common for the elite and nobility. According to Pat Reynolds, “a ship burial is particularly appropriate for a hero” (“Death and Funerary Practices in Middle-Earth”). By giving Boromir a hero’s ceremony, Tolkien—who was himself an Anglo-Saxon scholar—indicates that Boromir did achieve a noble death. Had Boromir not redeemed himself, he would have been unworthy of the ship burial. As Ruth S. Noel indicates, the peacefulness with which Boromir is carried away, as well as his reappearance to Faramir, “suggests that Boromir’s repentance was accepted by his companions and the Guardians of the World” and thus he was “assured spiritual rest” (78). With Boromir, Tolkien effectively redefines the *ars moriendi*: one can achieve a good
death not only by living a good life but also by atoning for one’s sins.

In modifying this Elizabethan tradition, Tolkien draws from the Anglo-Saxon tradition of dying heroically in battle. One of the clearest examples of Tolkien’s redefinition of the Elizabethan concept of *ars moriendi* is the death of Théoden, King of the Mark. Having lived the life of a warrior, Théoden cannot achieve virtuous death by the traditional standards. But by implementing Anglo-Saxon ideals into his redefinition of the *ars moriendi*, Tolkien enables warriors like Théoden to die well despite their warrior-like ways. Théoden bravely leads his men in battle against the forces of the evil Sauron, well aware that their chances of success are slim. As Katharyn F. Crabbe notes, the inevitability of death is a strong theme throughout Tolkien’s trilogy, but it is Théoden’s willingness to fight in the face of such odds that exemplifies this theme more readily than Boromir’s death does (75). Despite the fact that he recognizes that his death is imminent, Théoden still chooses to charge into battle because he knows that honor demands it. Théoden is the ruler of his people, and, as with the Anglo-Saxons, to be king meant that one had to be willing to fight and even die for one’s people even when the odds of success were slim. While Boromir shows a willingness to fight, his pride in himself as a warrior keeps him from acknowledging the odds against him. Théoden, on the other hand, fully understands that the odds of success are remote when he rides into battle. As Alexandra H.
Olsen and Burton Raffel describe, “people who accepted their destiny with dignity and courage could achieve a good name and fame that outlived them” (xiv), and Théoden certainly shows an acceptance of fate as he charges into battle without any assurances that he will survive.

The bravery and leadership with which Théoden leads the Rohirrim parallel the qualities of Earl Byrhtnoth in the *Battle of Maldon*, an Anglo-Saxon work with which Tolkien would have been familiar. *The Battle of Maldon* recounts a battle in which the Anglo-Saxons were hopelessly outnumbered. In spite of the odds, Byrhtnoth still leads his men bravely against the attacking Vikings without regard for the danger. As the tide of battle shows signs of turning against the warriors of Rohan, Théoden, like Byrhtnoth, rallies his men to him, crying, “To me! To me...Fear no darkness!” (3:113). Even as things look grim, Théoden faces the shadow of darkness with courage and fortitude to inspire his soldiers. In the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, Théoden is mortally wounded, and he dies before the outcome of the battle is clear. The goal of the Anglo-Saxon hero, according to Olsen and Raffel, was to die in such a way as to be remembered and praised, and Théoden achieves this end (xiv). And just as Anglo-Saxon warriors Ælfnæth and Wulfmaer die in service of Bryhtnoth, so too do many of Théoden’s loyal soldiers die in battle. As Kevin Crossley-Holland points out, it is fitting that devoted warriors give “their lives in defense of their lord” (15). While Theoden’s loyal guards are unable to save him, they do not
flee from the Witch-King but stand their ground, refusing to abandon their lord to his fate. In this, Roger Sale writes, they hold to the belief that “brave men die well in defense of their lord and their honor” (80).

Tolkien’s use of the Anglo-Saxon tradition is also apparent in the manner in which Théoden’s death is honored. Upon returning to their homeland, his warriors laid his body to rest and “over him was raised a great mound” (3:275). Such barrows, Shawn Rider points out, were built by Anglo-Saxons to honor their departed elite and nobility; because of his status, Théoden was entitled to such a distinction. As the “dutiful thanes” in Beowulf “mourn him with lays as they circled the barrow” (2792-96), so the men of Rohan circle the mound upon their horses, singing the praises of the fallen Théoden, who died heroically and honorably.

In Tolkien’s writing, the practice of self-sacrifice, as demonstrated with Boromir, becomes both a means of atonement and of a noble death. In this regard, consider the death of Gandalf. When the Fellowship is besieged by the Balrog, a demon of fierce renown, Gandalf urges the others to go onward while he turns to face the demon “Fly! This is a foe beyond all of you. I must hold the narrow way. Fly!” (1:370). While he defeats the Balrog, Gandalf is unable to save himself, for as Tolkien writes, he “staggered and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid in to the abyss,” leaving the sad fellowship to continue their journey without him, their hearts heavy (1:371). Thus,
Crabbe writes, Gandalf “sacrifice[s] much for the greater good,” and his “sacrificial offering of himself is none the less heroic” (79). Gandalf’s subsequent return from the grave in *The Two Towers* in no way detracts from his willingness to die for his friends. The idea of self-sacrifice is not only a Christian ideal but also an Anglo-Saxon one, for as the warrior Dunnere calls out in *The Battle of Maldon*, “He must not waver, who thinks to avenge / His lord among the people, / Nor can he love his own life!” (qtd. in Anderson 93). Among the Anglo-Saxons, warriors were asked to sacrifice themselves for their lords, and the willingness they showed to do so parallels Gandalf’s own willingness to die.

Throughout the trilogy, Tolkien offers examples of less-than-honorable deaths, which in turn serve to emphasize the noble deaths that other characters achieve. Boromir’s father, Denethor, is a character who fails to achieve a good death for his corruption leads him to insanity and eventual suicide. In his insanity, Denethor, instead of sacrificing himself, sacrifices scores of his people, sending them to their deaths in a futile attack on Osgiliath. He fails to lead his people in the fight against their enemies, abandoning them to face Sauron’s army alone and thereby destroying his chance at a noble death. Like Faustus, Denethor was corrupted by his search for a wisdom that was not meant to be his, and, as Noel points out, he refuses to accept the help offered to him (77). Instead, in his despair he lights a funeral pyre, preparing to kill himself and sacrifice his only surviving son, Faramir. Rather than take
Gandalf's advice and attempt to atone for his actions, Denethor is prepared to act as the "heathen kings...slaying themselves in pride and despair, murdering their kin to ease their own death" (Tolkien 3:129). Unlike Théoden, Denethor is unable to face the possibility of impending death at the hands of Sauron's forces, thereby failing to do what the Anglo-Saxon heroes were called upon to do in order to have a commendable death. Through Denethor, Tolkien offers a vision of death that lacks the atonement required for a good death. Set against the manner in which Denethor dies, the honorable deaths of characters such as Boromir and Théoden stand in sharp contrast.

Like Denethor, Gollum, the ancient Ring bearer, ultimately fails to achieve a noble death. Unlike many of Tolkien's characters, he does not perceive his actions in terms of good or evil; and, as a result, Gollum does not attempt to atone for anything he does. Gollum's actions all center on the Ring, with his goal being to regain possession of it at any cost. Without any perception of the evil of his actions, Gollum cannot rightly atone for them; this failure to recognize and atone for his sins cripples Gollum's ability to achieve a good death. Although one might argue that Gollum's destruction of the Ring signals atonement, this action is unintentional, and it does not qualify him for an admirable death. As Richard L. Purtill points out, when given the opportunity to be saved, Gollum, unlike Boromir, "chose not to be saved," thereby sharing the fate of Faustus (60). Gollum failed to achieve a good death in both the
traditional sense and in Tolkien’s definition of a noble death, for he neither repented of nor atoned for his sins.

For the characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, an honorable death can be achieved even by those who have lived sinful lives, and what makes a good death is more than just leading a Christian life. In the traditional *ars moriendi*, the majority of Tolkien’s characters would have failed to achieve a virtuous death because of their militaristic lifestyles. For Tolkien, however, men like Boromir and Théoden are able to die well despite their belligerent ways because both men either atone for past misdeeds or die in such a way that they achieve honor in death. In Tolkien’s definition, then, a good death is still attainable despite a lifetime of sin.
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During a pivotal scene in Virginia Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse*, the protagonist of the story and her husband encounter the constant and dramatic human struggle with language: what is the role of words in our relationships? Mrs. Ramsay enters the study and immediately feels an ambiguity, knowing “she wanted something more, though she did not know, could not think what it was that she wanted” (117). She can tell just by looking at Mr. Ramsay as he reads that he does not want to be bothered, yet she thinks “if only he would speak!” (118). She is desperate for an unnamable connection between herself and her husband, something she cannot exactly define, but she knows it is only accomplished through his words. Mr. Ramsay’s poetic recitation from earlier that night “began washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically, and as
they washed, words, like little shaded lights, one red, one blue, one yellow, lit up the dark of her mind" (119). The reader then may think that words alone will rekindle the intimacy of this relationship. Still, “they had nothing to say, but something seemed, nevertheless, to go from him to her. It was the life, the power of it, it was the tremendous humor, she knew... Don’t interrupt me, he seemed to be saying, don’t say anything” (119). Later, after he finally breaks his silence and speaks to her, it is his turn to be desperate for words from her; he “wanted her to tell him that she loved him” (123). For her part, however, Mrs. Ramsay does not say anything but instead looks at him. “And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course, he knew, that she loved him...she had not said it: yet he knew” (124).

This fabulous scene ends the book’s first part and signals Mrs. Ramsay’s final appearance in the novel. It is in this scene of loving silence that the reader feels the disjointed intimacy that binds this wife and husband. Both characters sense what the other is thinking, most of the time just by looking at each other, but both are also desperate for words, whether of encouragement or disapproval, and their power of reconnection. At first glance, it is the words that make all the difference - yet do they really? Though an intimate connection is established by Mr. Ramsay’s words, Mrs. Ramsay’s silence also serves to communicate. Is it through words alone that we are able to communicate what is important, what is thought, what is
present in our consciousness? Can language itself bring about a change, transfer intimacy, or create a connection? Can even the most deeply considered and honest words establish lasting bonds of love? The characters in To the Lighthouse deal with these issues, confronting the inadequacy of language as a means for encompassing what they think and feel. Words oftentimes seem inadequate to convey what the characters desire whereas a silent dialogue between characters who understand each other seems to illuminate the most vital truths.

The language that Woolf herself uses to create To the Lighthouse gives the reader a sense of the disconnectedness that her characters are experiencing. Woolf writes in lengthily streaming sentences that embody a poetic, often non-linear, flow of consciousness. She leaves questions unanswered. Which character is speaking here? To whom does this pronoun refer? How can Mrs. Ramsay say this on one page and then this on the next? What exactly is this “something” that Lily yearns for? Moreover, what does Woolf want us to think at any given moment? By using an indirect way of showing us a character’s wandering interior monologue, Woolf is able to share the subjectivity of the characters but guarantee that they are never totally understood. As is Woolf’s intent, the readers are constantly a step away from the story and cannot find a way to wrap their minds around the characters. Thus, the author’s own style offers evidence that words are not always enough to help the reader comprehend the full form of a particular
character or moment.

Nevertheless, language is important not only to the author but also to the story’s characters. They appreciate the written word, as evident by the references to Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, George Eliot, Jane Austen, and Tolstoy. Books offer solace, as shown by Mrs. Ramsay’s dramatic encounter with a sonnet which causes her to feel tremendously satisfied. Yet books also offer evidence of the uncertainties of life since “who could tell what was going to last – in literature or indeed in anything else?” (107). The characters themselves are not able to tell. They are not able to see into the future to understand how their words affect their children and visitors; they are not able to foresee the deaths in the family and the eventual trip to the lighthouse.

Without this foreknowledge, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay doubt the longevity and value of their words. Mrs. Ramsay reads her children bedtime stories and soothes them with happy fairy tales from her heart but still wonders, “What have I done with my life?” (82) Mr. Ramsay has written a book but is always reading someone else’s words and quoting someone else’s poetry aloud. The words themselves are strong, no doubt; the poems at the dinner table “sounded as if they were floating like flowers on water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves” (110). The reader can see that there is nothing personal in these words since they are removed from Mr. Ramsay’s own soul and lips.
Besides, Mrs. Ramsay does not often understand what these passages mean. She hears that “all the lives we ever lived and all the lives to be are full of trees and changing leaves” and she senses some desire to connect with it, but she does not process what she wants to connect to or what it means. Early on in the novel, Mrs. Ramsay hears her husband quoting poetry in the yard and she desires that same connection but cannot comprehend his words. “Someone has blundered,” Mr. Ramsay repeats. Mrs. Ramsay thinks “But what had happened? Some one had blundered. But she could not for the life of her think what” (30). Mr. Ramsay appears unable to express himself emotionally without using the words of another, thus creating a gulf between him and the other characters. Teenager Cam feels most rewarded when she is in the study with the old gentleman; she thinks that “one could let whatever one thought expand here like a leaf in water,” getting a greater satisfaction from observing her father’s work and intelligence in relation to her than from reading a stranger’s words on a page (190). As James thinks and as Mrs. Ramsay’s initial situation affirms, all it would take is an actual honest word from Mr. Ramsay to make things better, not an assertion that “someone has blundered” or “perished, each alone.” James and Cam watch their father as he reads a book on the boat, just as Mrs. Ramsay watched him read a book in the study, each waiting for him to say aloud what they want to hear. When he finally praises James on a job well done, the entire atmosphere changes from being tense and desperate to optimistic and fulfilling.
Thus, the reader can see the power of a direct and gratifying word and its ability to bring characters together.

The main reason why the characters have trouble sharing an honest word is that there is a great disconnectedness between what the characters think and what they actually choose to say. From the very start, the reader is able to hear the innermost thoughts of the characters and is then aware of what the characters choose to share vocally with one another. Even if they are “filled with words,” they often say nothing when they wish to say something; and when they speak, they often say everything but what they are thinking (38). Even though Mrs. Ramsay wants to speak, “not for the world would she have spoken” (30); even though Mr. Ramsay wants to speak, “he passed her without a word, though it hurt him that she could look so distant, and he could not reach her” (65). Time and again, despite the deep, overflowing thoughts accessible to the reader, the character chooses not to share them. In the end, many things are left frustratingly unsaid.

One reason why much is thought and little is spoken is because the characters believe that words do not do their thoughts justice. Another reason is that their thoughts and desires are so vague or contradictory that they often do not even know what they are trying to put into words. Many times in To the Lighthouse a character will want to diagnose a feeling or share an emotion but he or she “could not say what it was” (131). Lily is, for example, unable to grasp, with thoughts, words, or paint, what has happened:
"What was the problem then? . . . It evaded her . . . phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful pictures. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything" (193). At the book’s finale, Woolf keeps the reader wondering exactly what is being communicated among the family members about the completion of the trip to the lighthouse. It is revealed only that Mr. Ramsay "sat and looked at the island and he might be thinking, we perished, each alone, or he might be thinking, I have reached it. I have found it; but he said nothing" (207). This moment, though somewhat difficult for an impatient reader, is one that unites the father and his children in the silence. What is happening is that "they all looked. They looked at the island" together, their point of vision focusing on the same object (166). It was "looking together [that] united them" (97).

As noted earlier, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay do understand each other quite well, using small, silent connections during which "one need not speak at all" (192). Some of the most personal, sincere moments of family union occur when nothing has been vocalized. At the dinner table, when the characters are all "looking" at the same thing, "some change at once went through them all, as if this had really happened, and they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against that fluidity out there" (97). When they are conscious of the moment and aware of their silent bond, they are united together. Yet there is a moment in the same
scene when each character manages to be interrelated, but no one is aware of it:

Lily was listening; Mrs. Ramsay was listening; they were all listening. But already bored, Lily felt that something was lacking; Mr. Bankes felt that something was lacking. Pulling her shawl round her, Mrs. Ramsay felt that something was lacking. All of them bending themselves to listen thought, 'Pray heaven that the inside of my mind may not be exposed,' for each thought, 'The others are feeling this. They are outraged and indignant with the government about the fishermen. Whereas, I feel nothing at all.'

During the final scenes of the book, Cam and Lily are also connected, though the distance between the shore and sea shifts their perspectives. To Lily, looking out at the ship on the water, she sees that "it was so calm; it was so quiet" out there, while she fights with how to finish her painting (188). To Cam, looking back at the house, she thinks that "they have no suffering there," while she fights with how to finish the journey with her father (170). Each believes that he or she is the only one who is troubled, empty, struggling, hoping, dreaming, learning, mourning; but if they only became aware that their gazes impacted the same objects, then they would all feel more closely united to each other.

Mr. Carmichael, the strange and silent visitor, sums up quite well Woolf's messages on the duality of language
and the struggle to understand completely its role. According to Lily, Mr. Carmichael believes that "'you' and 'I' and 'she' pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint," thus taking a strong stance in the disagreement on whether or not words have a lasting effect (179). Although the man believes it is words which remain, in the end it is he who makes a connection, though he "had not needed to speak" to Lily. "They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything" (208). This scene creates a finality and intimacy between the two characters, one which would never have been accomplished through words, no matter how changing or unchanging they may be.

Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* itself can be considered a testament to the power of words and to the power of language in the silent space. The rich, complex relationships between the characters only highlight the need for closeness. The awareness of commonalities between spouses and strangers allows the characters also to bond closely in the silence. The characters oscillate between being aware and unaware that "it was not knowledge but unity that [they] desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself" (51). In this regard, Virginia Woolf creates a small moment that captures the final significance of the soul's place in this compelling intimacy, contrasting the strength of the human soul with the spoken and written word. A few of the adult characters sit out on the beach on a very
windy day. Lily gazes at Mrs. Ramsay and reflects that though there is energy in paint and words, "What a power was in the human soul!" (160). To Lily, and similarly to Woolf, the human soul, the essence of life which creates and secures the voiceless understandings of intimacy, possesses the most extraordinary influence of all. Meanwhile, Mrs. Ramsay is composing a letter, symbolically putting the supremacy of words and language to the test. As Lily continues to ponder the complexities of the soul, the wind carries Mrs. Ramsay's letter into the ocean where it is practically destroyed by the ferocity of the vast waters. In this scene, it is Woolf who shows the readers that ultimately the human soul will survive, the power of life will endure, and the written word will only be rescued sopping wet from an ocean of subjectivity and transience.
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The Greater of Two Evils: Distinguishing between Machiavellians and Tyrants in Shakespeare’s “The Rape of Lucrece” and Milton’s Paradise Lost

Mark Crisp
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, BC
Canada

A number of critics wrongly associate the political precepts of Niccolò Machiavelli with a tyrannical government. I strongly disagree with this notion and this paper will respond to such critics by discussing the nature of a tyrant and of a Machiavellian and demonstrating the inconsistency of the two concepts as applied to Tarquin from William Shakespeare’s “The Rape of Lucrece” and Satan from John Milton’s Paradise Lost. Just as Tarquin and Satan are tyrants on different scales, so too are “The Rape of Lucrece” and Paradise Lost on different scales: Milton is attempting to “justify the ways of God to men” (PL bk I, ll. 26) while Shakespeare focuses on the cause of “Tarquin’s everlasting banishment” (ll. 1855), which led to the
formation of a republic in Rome. The two works, however, are united in the following way: though Tarquin and Satan may be *prima facie* Machiavellians, upon closer examination they adhere more closely to the Platonic notion of the tyrant.

To judge whether Tarquin and Satan are tyrants, one has to understand what makes a tyrant. What I found was far more interesting than the explanation provided by a dictionary: "Oppressive or cruel ruler" (*OED* 1409). This lacks many of the details and poetic flavour provided by philosophers. For example, Aquinas writes that the tyrant does not "merely oppress his subjects in corporal things but he also hinders their spiritual good" (qtd. in McGrail 12). McGrail also points out that tyrants were associated with usurpers and that the word "tyrant" was "applied to anyone who had made himself king by force; . . . and it did not necessarily imply cruel or overbearing conduct" (7). However, by the time of the Renaissance the word came to be "strongly associated with evil" (7). Aristotle concurs that the tyrant is evil in that he seeks to benefit himself financially and he makes war on those in a position to challenge his authority (443). As McGrail succinctly puts it, to Aristotle "[t]yranny is monarchy with a view to the advantage of the monarch" (10). Thus, Aristotle sees the tyrant as one who "exercises irresponsible rule over subjects . . . with a view to its own private interest and not in the interest of the persons" ruled (325-327). Ultimately, however, I found these descriptions of tyrants lacking; the authors
illustrate what the tyrant does but they do not adequately address the tyrant’s psychological motivations for his actions.

Plato, however, articulates most fully what a tyrant is; he looks into the tyrant’s soul and what he finds is very illuminating. Plato describes the desires of a tyrant in his waking life as being those of the ordinary man in a dream-like state (245). Plato, as Adeimantus notes in The Republic, “perfectly describes the evolution of a tyrannical man” thusly:

And when the other desires—filled with incense, myrrh, wreaths, wine, and the other pleasures found in their company—buzz around the drone, nurturing it and making it grow as large as possible, they plant the sting of longing in it. Then this leader of the soul adopts madness as its bodyguard and becomes frenzied. If it finds any beliefs or desires in the man that are thought to be good or that still have some shame, it destroys them and throws them out, until it’s purged him of moderation and filled him with imported madness. (243)

The drone referred to in this passage is erotic love, though perhaps erotic lust would be a more fitting label. The soul of the tyrant clearly lacks harmony. Instead, lust and desire rule over reason and moderation. The tyrant’s longings so overwhelm him that they “make him drunk, filled with erotic desire, and mad” (243). To achieve his desire, the
tyrant will steal it “by deceitful means” or failing that “seize it by force” (244). Finally, the tyrant abandons any inclination to do good. Because the tyrant exists solely to benefit himself in ways that likely seem perverse to those he subjugates, he is likely to be hated, and it is for this reason that Plato suggests he needs a large and “loyal bodyguard” (238). Even though the tyrant is hated, I find myself inclined to feel sympathy for him. After all, it is possible for the tyrant to feel repentant or to feel that he should not perform sinful actions. However, he himself is tyrannized by a madness that does not allow him to act upon these thoughts because they are soon purged from him. In a sense, then, the tyrant is a tragic figure in that he himself is just as tyrannized as those he tyrannizes. This Platonic view of tyranny, as opposed to the one provided by the dictionary, ultimately allows for a deeper reading of both “The Rape of Lucrece” and Paradise Lost, providing readers a glimpse into the madness of their respective tyrants.

In Shakespeare’s “The Rape of Lucrece” we are immediately shown the extent to which its tyrant figure, Tarquin, is motivated and controlled by his own lust:

From the besieged Ardea all in post,
Borne by the trustless wings of false desire,
Lust-breathed Tarquin leaves the Roman host
And to Collatium bears the lightless fire,
Which in pale embers hid lurks to aspire
And girdle with embracing flames the waist
Of Collatine’s fair love, Lucrece the chaste. (1-7)
Here we see that Tarquin’s kingly duties do not prevent him from hastily departing from Ardea solely to satisfy his lust for Lucrece. Based on the first stanza, we see that Tarquin adheres to Aristotle’s notion that the tyrant seeks to benefit himself (325) as well as Plato’s notion that the tyrant is tyrannized by his own desire (243). We can further see just how perverse Tarquin’s lust is if we probe why Shakespeare considers Tarquin’s desire as being “false” (2). René Girard argues that Tarquin “never laid eyes on his future victim” (25). This does seem to be true when we consider the following lines:

Now thinks he that her husband’s shallow tongue,
The niggard prodigal that praised her so,
In that high task hath done her beauty wrong…

(78-80)

These lines suggest that Lucrece has made a first impression on Tarquin, something that would be impossible had Tarquin previously seen Lucrece. I do not want to say that having not seen Lucrece prior to his desire to rape her makes Tarquin’s crime less heinous, but it does make it more understandable. If Tarquin had previously seen Lucrece, he could have defended himself by saying that it was love at first sight. However, Shakespeare does not indicate that this meeting has taken place. As a result, Tarquin covets Lucrece because Collatine, Lucrece’s husband, truly loves her. By doing this, Shakespeare explicitly demonstrates that it is not the object of lust that is important; instead, the
action of *lust* itself is Tarquin’s focus.

As Plato suggests, Tarquin is a tyrannical figure because he is “lust-breathed” (“Lucrece” ll. 3), but is Tarquin himself tyrannized by his passions? A. D. Cousins suggests that such is the case, writing that “Tarquin’s soliloquy in his chamber dramatizes the compelling force of his desire in conflict with the constraining powers of his fears” (ll. 47). Here Tarquin recognizes that the ruthless deed he wishes to perform “is so vile, so base, / that it will live engraven in my face” (ll. 201-203). He realizes that his deed will haunt him and yet he cannot convince his lust to abate. His inner turmoil is abruptly interrupted by his “reprobate desire” that madly leads “[t]he Roman lord . . . to Lucrece’ bed” (ll. 300-301). However, once his lust has been satisfied, Tarquin seems to be restored to his senses. With the foul act completed, Tarquin “like a thievish dog creeps sadly thence” and “[h]e runs, and chides his vanished loathed delight” (ll. 736, 742): Tarquin is only momentarily a tyrant. Though I earlier wrote that a tyrant might feel sorrow, it appears that this sorrow is soon purged. Here Tarquin seems to have purged his lust. As McGrail points out, “[t]here is a difference between a tyrant and a character susceptible of tyrannic passions that he or she sustains momentarily” (2). Tarquin finds himself in the unique position of adhering neither to full-blown tyranny nor tyrannical passions; that is, Tarquin is less guilty of tyranny because he was only momentarily susceptible to his passions.
To further prove that Tarquin is less tyrannical, I shall look at Collatine's role in "The Rape of Lucrece." Just as he characterizes Tarquin as lust-driven in the opening stanza, Shakespeare portrays Collatine as unwise in the second stanza:

When Collatine unwisely did not let
To praise the clear unmatched red and white
Which triumphed in that sky of his delight,
Where mortal stars, as bright as heaven's beauties,
With pure aspects did him peculiar duties.

(II. 10-14)

Knowing that Tarquin is a usurper, one who will take what he wants even from family, it is probably not wise for Collatine to praise his wife thusly to him. Cousins effectively summarizes this exchange between Tarquin and Collatine when he writes that Lucrece is the "embodiment of perfect beauty through whom Collatine can vaunt his superiority over Tarquin, but through whom, likewise, Tarquin will assert his tyrannical will, and his tyrannical role, over Collatine" (52). I am not trying to shift the blame from Tarquin to Collatine here; rather, as Girard puts it, both men are "coresponsible authors of a crime" (23). In effect, "[t]he difference between hero and villain is undermined" (23). Finally, Tarquin is a lesser tyrant, especially when compared to Satan: it is one thing to engage in sin but quite another to have introduced it to the world.
Before turning to a discussion of Satan, I would like first to distinguish between a tyrant and a Machiavellian, arguing that the two are not consistent. Armstrong claims that “Machiavellian ideas . . . constitute a positive advocacy of the theory and practice of tyranny” (“Seneca and Machiavelli” 25). However, Armstrong fails to clarify which of Machiavelli’s works he is discussing, though it is likely The Prince because he goes on to mention that “[e]xpediency, not a Christian or Stoic ideal, was the basis of Machiavelli’s theory of kingship” (25). The principal problem with considering Machiavelli an advocate of tyranny in The Prince lies in the emotions that drive the tyrant. A Machiavellian prince is often seen as a cool and collected individual. Machiavelli writes that a ruler “should make every effort to ensure that whatever he does it gains him a reputation as a great man, a person who excels” (68). Furthermore, rulers are “admired when they know how to be true allies and genuine enemies” (68). A prince who obeys his every whim lacks this solidness of character. A tyrant is not concerned with appearing great; rather, he is concerned with satisfying his great appetite. A tyrant will change friends and enemies depending on whether they satisfy his lust. Furthermore, as I have discussed, a tyrant will naturally be hated by at least some of his tyrannized citizens. In The Prince, Machiavelli devotes a chapter on ways to avoid hatred and contempt. He also writes that it is better to be feared than loved but a ruler “must take care to avoid being hated” (53). Barbara Riebling writes that
based on his work *The Discourses*. "Machiavelli was a sincere republican" (574). Furthermore, republics "are superior to all principalities . . . because they can employ the collective virtù of their citizenry" (580). Because a tyrant rules alone, it makes it unlikely that he would be a republican. It becomes clear that a Machiavellian could not be conceived of as a true tyrant.

Similarly, Satan does not adhere to the teachings of *The Discourses* or *The Prince*. Worden remarks that it is "no news that in *Paradise Lost* the devil has the best lines; but is it realized how republican those lines are?" (235). I agree in part with Worden. That is, Satan’s words do have a republican tinge about them, but the spirit and motivation behind the words are false. Satan seems to be shunning heaven and its ruler God, making God out to be a tyrant of sorts. By indicting God thusly, Satan attempts to claim the title of a noble, republican leader in order to bolster support for himself. Satan believes that God is wrong in declaring:

My only son, and on this holy hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand: your head I him appoint;
And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
All knees in heav’n, and shall confess him Lord.
(Book V. ll. 604-608)

But, are God’s words tyrannical? Satan contends that God is something of a tyrant when he asks the other angels:
"Who can in reason then or right assume
Monarchy over such as live by right
His equals, if in power and splendor less
In freedom equal?" (Book V, ll. 794-797)

It may be true that equals should not rule equals in heaven, but Satan cannot assume that he is equal to God’s only son. Furthermore, Satan’s argument becomes even more suspect because “the reader has already seen the ‘government’ that he has created in Hell, where he reigns . . . as an absolute monarch, a tyrant” (Riebling 583). In addition, Satan claims that God “[s]ole reigning holds the tyranny of heav’n” (Book I, ll. 124). This, however, seems to be untrue when we consider that “Milton takes pains to make it clear that any angel had the opportunity to be man’s redeemer” (Riebling 584). God asks:

Say heav’nly Powers, where shall we find such love,
Which of ye will be mortal to redeem
Man’s mortal crime, and just th’unjust to save,
Dwells in all heaven charity so dear? (Book III, ll. 213-216)

Here we see that God is allowing his followers equal power: he is not a tyrant. Obviously, saving a doomed race is a great responsibility that would yield much respect and acclamation. In a similar situation, we see that Satan does almost the opposite. Satan discusses the long road that “out of hell leads up to light” (Book II, ll. 433). The fallen angel that can make his way out of hell and may end
up in an “unknown region” full of “unknown dangers and
as hard escape” will be a brave hero (Book II, ll. 443-444)
who may save his fellows from abject hell. In a republic,
in which all of the ruling members are of about equal "virtù,
any would be a potential candidate for such a task. This is
not so in hell, where Satan assumes “[t]hese royalties” and
he refuses to accept as great a share
Of hazard as of honor, due alike
To him who reigns, and so much to him due
Of hazard more, as he above the rest
High honoured sits. (Book II, ll. 452-466)
As Riebling puts it, Satan’s determination not to share his
undertaking, “neither its risks nor its glories, is one more
indication that Hell’s "virtù is contained within a single in-
dividual” (592). Instead, Satan leaves the other fallen
angels, his near equals, with the chore of tidying up hell,
making it “[m]ore tolerable” (Book II, ll. 460). Satan ei-
ther has no faith in his followers or he wants to be the sole
possessor of glory: neither case is indicative of a republi-
can.

However, it certainly seems that Satan is an adher-
ent of the teachings of Machiavelli’s The Prince. In fact,
more critics see Satan as a Machiavellian prince than a
republican. For example, Hart writes that “[t]he relation-
ship in the poem between Eden and its destroyer might
well be compared with the relationship between traditional
society and the new man of the seventeenth century . . . This new man . . . is reflected in many of the villains and hero-villains of Elizabethan drama, such as . . . the Machiavellian overreachers" (580). His speeches are certainly powerful and expose his great rhetorical skill:

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome? (Book I, II. 105-109)

This certainly seems to be Machiavellian virtù. That is, Satan appears to be strong, manly, courageous, and resolute. And if being a Machiavellian prince were solely about being a man of virtù, then, certainly, critics such as Hart would be right. However, this is not the case. In The Prince, there is a chapter on fortune wherein Machiavelli gives what I take to be his most important advice: "a ruler will flourish if he adjusts his policies as the character of the times changes; and similarly, a ruler will fail if he follows policies that do not correspond to the needs of the times" (75). Satan clearly does not change his approach. Based on his speech, we can assume that Satan will continue hating for eternity. He does not even feel that he has been bested. That is, he feels that his methods have actually worked. A good Machiavellian will be able continuously to adapt. Even if a strategy worked in the past, he knows that it will not always work for fortune is fickle. Furthermore, Satan is a
slave to his passions, not a calm Machiavellian.\textsuperscript{17} He is constantly vacillating between decisiveness and regret. For instance, he is described as grieving thusly: “but first from inward grief/His bursting passion into plaints thus poured” (Book IX, ll. 97-98). Clearly, therefore, Satan is not a Machiavellian prince.

If he is not a republican and if he is not a Machiavellian prince, just what is Satan? It is reasonable to conclude that Satan is a tyrant. I have already demonstrated the Platonic notion that he is tyrannized by his emotions.\textsuperscript{18} Further, as Aristotle suggests, Satan is solely interested in benefiting himself. He wishes to “out of good still . . . find means of evil” for his own amusement (Book I, ll. 105). He also decides to destroy another society, to usher in the fall of man, to get back at God. In addition, Satan also attempted to usurp. And even though he has failed in wresting the throne of heaven from God, he succeeds in ruling in hell, owing to his rhetorical abilities.\textsuperscript{19} Satan is able to retain his tyranny over the fallen angels “by means of his rhetorically effective, but false, reasoning about liberty” (Bennett 452). It is, then, for good reason that Milton’s Satan is frequently referred to as the ultimate tyrant.

Because Satan so fervently seeks to “do ill” (Book I, ll. 160), he may be disappointed that the fall of man that he partially orchestrates results in a world ultimately “purged and refined, . . . / [t]ounded in righteousness and peace of love, / [t]o bring forth fruits joy and eternal bliss” (Book XII, ll. 548-551). Satan achieves the opposite of what he
intended. Some may argue, however, that much blood will be shed before this can happen. The archangel Michael himself prophesies some of this bloodshed and sin in Books XI and XII. I still believe that Satan has been foiled because though blood will be shed, this need not be the case. After all, this is not heaven or hell that Adam and Eve, "hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow," walk into (Book XII, II. 648). This is Earth, a place that resides both spatially and morally somewhere between glorious heaven and ignoble hell. On Earth, things are contingent, "neither saved nor lost, where they carry within themselves the potential for paradise" (Riebling 595-596). Similarly, Tarquin, in attempting to satisfy his tyrannical passions by raping Lucrece, achieves something else entirely; "whereas such acts were generally expected to lead to the production of an heir, Tarquin's rape lead[s] to the birth of a new political system" (Hadfield 118). By tyrannically attempting to benefit himself by listening to his lust, Tarquin ushers in a political system which ostensibly will not allow one ruler to emerge in a position whereby he can bend others to his will.20 That Satan and Tarquin usher in, though inadvertently, new political systems also contributes to the fact that they are not Machiavellians. As Leo Strauss puts it, Machiavelli does not expect his readers "to be or to become an originator: he advises his reader to become an imitator or to follow the beaten track... This is not surprising: an originator would not need Machiavelli's instruction" (71).
It is exceedingly difficult to evaluate the intentions of Shakespeare and Milton in their respective works. Worden correctly asserts that this is “in one sense a bar to” a work’s “timeliness” (241). But, as Armstrong points out, some dramatic works “accomplished what even Plato failed to do, namely, to convert a tyrant into a just king” (“Elizabethan Conception” 105). It is important, then, at least to attempt to discern what may have motivated the authors. Both were writing in tumultuous political times. In a time when an aging Elizabeth continued to construct the cult of the Virgin Queen, Shakespeare includes a prominent rape scene in his poem; in a time when kings were being executed, Milton includes a character that employs republican rhetoric. By featuring tyrants in their works, Shakespeare and Milton, though perhaps inadvertently, demonstrate that Plato’s evolution of the tyrant is incomplete: just as the democrat gives birth to the tyrant, so too will the tyrant give birth (243). But to what will the tyrant give birth? In both instances, the tyrant gives birth to a better, more hopeful political system. By ending on hopeful notes, both works function to comfort their readers in uncertain political times, demonstrating that things have been bad before but that they will get better, and as the archangel Michael foretells, may one day result in “eternal bliss” (Book XII, ll. 551).
Notes

1 For example, see W.A. Armstrong's "The Elizabethan Conception of the Tyrant" and "The Influence of Seneca and Machiavelli on the Elizabethan Tyrant."

2 Italics are used in the original.

3 Though I discuss *The Republic* as if it were Plato talking, many of Plato's ideas are presented through Socrates. In fact, Plato is not a character in *The Republic*. Instead, Plato uses Socrates as a mouthpiece to voice his own opinions.

4 See *The Republic* book IV for Plato's discussion of the correctly functioning soul.

5 Even before his poem starts, in "The Argument," Shakespeare points out that Tarquin, after he had caused his own father-in-law . . . to be cruelly murdered . . . had possessed himself of the kingdom" (1-5). As Armstrong puts it, "[i]t is noteworthy that the worst . . . tyrants are always presented as usurpers" ("Elizabethan Conception" 170).

6 Here Shakespeare diverges from his source. In Livy's treatment, Tarquin does previously meet Lucrece. By excluding this meeting in his poem, Shakespeare renders Tarquin more depraved and controlled by lust.

7 We will find no such undermining in Milton's Satan, who is a complete tyrant.

8 See Book II lines 746-814 for a description of Satan's progeny Sin and Death.

9 That is, one is not able to be both a Machiavellian and a tyrant at the same time. I am, however, *not* claiming that the two are dichotomous. That is, if one is not a tyrant, it does not make him a Machiavellian.

10 Chapter 19

11 This word is not equivalent to virtue. This word, often used by Machiavelli, has been translated in a number of ways, or left in the Italian as in Wootton's excellent translation of *The Prince*. Though the word can refer to a number of different qualities: manliness, strength, greatness, resourcefulness, Skinner argues
that Machiavelli uses the term with "complete consistency . . .
he treats it as that quality which enables a prince to withstand
the blows of Fortune . . . and to rise in consequence to the heights
of princely fame" (40).

12 Riebling also points out that the war in heaven is the most ex-
tended "exploration of angelic autonomy" in which "God's re-
straint is military nonsense but political wisdom" (585).

13 Interestingly, just before Satan makes this speech, he is de-
scribed as being "raised / Above his fellows, with monarchal
pride / Conscious of highest worth" (Book II. II. 427-429).

14 Earlier, hell is described as being "bottomless perdition," com-
plete with "adamantine chains and penal fire" (Book I. II. 47-
48). This is unpleasant, to say the least.

15 This is further emphasized when upon Satan's return, he sees
that the other angels, instead of completing their task have been
crowded "about the walls / Of Pandemonium" watching and
waiting for Satan to return (Book X. II. 423-426).

16 As Riebling puts it, "[o]nce defeated, Satan's refusal to acknow-
ledge God's demonstrated omnipotence is more than imprudent,
it is wilfully blind" (577).

17 Satan does not even seem to be a crude "Machiavel," a charac-
ter based on the ill-informed precept that Machiavelli was a
preacher of evil. Instead, "Satan's embrace of evil is not Ma-
chiavellian because it is not pragmatic; it is instead an absolute,
reflexive reaction against God" (Riebling 579).

18 For more examples, see Book I, lines 604-605; Book 4, lines
23-24, 39-41, 75-78, 848-849; Book 5, lines 661-662; Book 6,
lines 341-3; Book 9, lines 97-98, 119-123, 129-130.

19 Bennett correctly writes that a "successful tyrant must there-
fore, Milton knew, be a master of rhetoric; for rhetoric is the
tool he can employ against the reason of law to disguise his
crime" (451).

20 In "The Rape of Lucrece," the rape acts as a good metaphor and
is indicative of tyranny.

21 In Shakespeare and Milton's time, this claim of eternal bliss
would not have been responded to with the scepticism of our age.
Works Cited


The Essential but Forgotten Woman: A Feminist Reading of Chaim Potok’s *My Name is Asher Lev*

Kerry Brooks  
*Messiah College*  
*Grantham, PA*

In 1972, Chaim Potok liberated the Jewish artist in his novel *My Name is Asher Lev*. He questioned the inerrancy of Jewish tradition, shaking but not destroying the solidity of Jewish orthodoxy with one man’s assertion of individuality and artistic expression. Potok’s own definition of the text as a novel “about a conflict of aesthetics” (Forbes 17) coupled with “the bias” of Asher’s narrative voice (Del Fattore 56) guides most readers and critics to focus on the novel as a cultural conflict between the Judaism of a father and the artistry of a son. But this angle sees only part of the text, focusing on a male power struggle and setting woman aside, ultimately making her the backdrop for a male-driven plot and an arena for the analysis of a male battle. Asher’s early narrative defines the book as
“a long session in demythology” (Potok 9), but even as the myth of the Jewish artist crumbles and dissolves, the myth of the woman remains; Asher Lev moves to a place of his own vision and action, but Rivkeh Lev stagnates in a place as object, subject to a vision and action imposed by men. The “demythology” is only a partial one without the insight of a feminist critique: a vision “to reconstruct the female experience, ‘the buried and neglected female past,’ to fill in the blank pages and make the silences speak” (Greene 13). A feminist reading will expose and critique the place assigned to Rivkeh Lev, completing the task of “myth decipherer” as it draws woman into the foreground and considers the role of the female sufferer within Potok’s construction of male conflict (Greene 5).

Feminist criticism uses Bakhtin’s idea of heteroglossia, adding another voice – the female voice – to the possibilities of literary interpretation. As one feminist critic points out, “[a]lternative foci of critical attentiveness will render alternative readings or interpretations of the same [text]” (Kolodny 250). In *My Name is Asher Lev*, a readjustment of critical focus away from the differences between father and son opens up the novel as a story about the discrepancy between male and female.

While Potok does place a wall of differences between Asher and Aryeh Lev – Judaism versus art, tradition versus individuality, and morality versus aesthetics – the father and son connect at significant points of similarity. Potok introduces this complexity in the very beginning of
the novel. Asher rattles off a list of accusations against himself—“I am a traitor, an apostate, a self-hater, an inflic­tor of shame upon my family, my friends, my people” (Potok 9) – and immediately acknowledges both their truth and falsity: “I am none of those things... I am indeed, in some way, all of those things” (Potok 9). Asher identifies himself both as a follower and dissenter of Jewish tradition and, as such, both a follower and dissenter of his father. Thus, the incompatibility of father and son can be read, not necessarily as core differences but as different expressions of the same basic feature: their maleness. Though they battle each other on almost everything, father and son are joined at the core as men fulfilling their uniquely male roles as followers of tradition, cultural creators, and Jewish leaders.

Both Asher and Aryeh become dedicated students of tradition. Their choice of tradition places them in different camps of thought, but their commitment to tradition creates the same absolute surrender, which William Purcell labels compulsivity: “[Aryeh] is driven by a compulsive need to travel – no less compulsive than Asher’s need to draw – building yeshivas and working to spread his par­ticular brand of Hasidism” (78). Tradition seeps into their being, defining their lives and filling them with a need to follow the men who have gone before. Aryeh returns to Russia, embracing the lineage of his father and grandfa­ther by fulfilling his destiny “to bring the Master of the Universe into the world” (Potok 11). Asher returns to the
museum again and again, entering into the lineage of great artists—“Chagall . . . Picasso . . . Asher Lev” (Potok 35)—as part of “a tradition . . . [with] every important artist who ever lived” (Potok 289). Each man understands himself as part of something larger, using tradition to embody his own image of the ideal man. To modify Sanford Pinsker’s critique, “the claims of [manhood on their] talent” commit Asher and Aryeh to the paths defined by men before them (42).

Tradition makes up the framework in which Asher and Aryeh cultivate their talents; and in their unique work, both men emerge as profound cultural creators; Asher’s art pervades the novel as the obvious aesthetic, and more abstrusely Aryeh’s “commitment to saving people [emerges] as [his own] form of aesthetics. . . . ‘saving people’ being equivalent to an appreciation of the beautiful” (Abramson 77). Though it might be tempting to differentiate between Asher as the real artistic creator and Aryeh as only a Jewish sustainer, Purcell notes the “creative force” of each: “Asher Lev, in turn by becoming a part of the established tradition of Western art while remaining committed to his Hasidic faith, takes up the challenge of becoming for Jewish art the type of creative force that his father and forefathers have been in the propagation of Hasidic learning” (79). As creators, Aryeh continues the cultivation of Jewish thought and saves Jewish lives while Asher develops a whole new expression of Jewish thought and life; they both engage their unique capabilities to fulfill the male role of cultural creator.

Finally, father and son project their similarities most
tellingly through their identification as important Jewish leaders. Aryeh is a renowned and beloved leader not only within his Brooklyn community but also within the worldwide Jewish community, as a man who has saved hundreds of Jewish lives in his call “to find people in need and to comfort and help them” (Potok 10). Although he experiences rejection and disconnection from his Jewish community, Asher understands the same call on his life and infuses his art with the same purpose adopted by his father: to “bring life to all the wide and tired world” (Potok 39). Both feel their duty to renew life, but as Asher explains, “My father worked for Torah. I worked for . . . a truth I did not know how to put into words” (Potok 264); his father’s leadership is understood and accepted while his is misinterpreted and rejected, developing only as his own self-definition. However, as Ellen Serlen Uffen writes, “It is in the very process of becoming an established part of the alien tradition of art that we see [Asher] becoming at last his father’s son and the inheritor of Jewish tradition” (174). Aryeh accepts Jewish orthodoxy and Asher redefines Jewish orthodoxy, but both assume male authority in their faith.

Clearly, male commitment connects Asher and Aryeh, and together they embody distinctly male roles; through acceptance or dissension, tradition or novelty, Potok’s men thrive in their purpose, controlling the action and direction of the novel. Against this background of male dominance and success, Rivkeh Lev emerges as the
female sufferer. She aligns herself with her own unique system of tradition and novelty, carving out her own strengths but submitting them to the male structure and becoming the novel’s image of sacrifice, the essential character who powerfully affects the individual successes of both her husband and son but at the same time never realizes a life of her own. Not a fundamentally weak individual by any means, Rivkheh offers intellectual, religious, and emotional strength, but the text limits this strength, restricting her as the female canvas on which to draw this male conflict. An understanding of her place reflects the novel’s disparity between male and female, subject and object, power and the reflection of power.

The novel confines Rivkheh Lev to the place of sister, wife, and mother, defining her in relationship to men and developing her primarily in the context of such relationships. In the happy, uncomplicated years, Asher playfully describes Rivkheh as “a gentle big sister” (Potok 12), but with the sudden death of her brother, she loses her playfulness and gentility, becoming a “skeletal” figure with “eyes [like] dark dead pools” (Potok 21). For weeks she wallows in her brother’s death, taking on his suffering and literally feeling it through her own physical and mental decay; she lingers in a kind of living death until one conviction brings her fully back to life: “I want to finish my brother’s work” (Potok 49). She chooses to take her brother’s place and enter the academy, but rather than an act of female self-assertion in a male-dominated world, her
choice is simply a reflection of her brother. She survives her profound suffering by taking on her brother’s identity, sustaining his life and saving her own by completing his work. Although Rivkeh uses her brother’s work to reaffirm and direct her life away from a literal death, one can argue that she embraces a kind of figurative death by suppressing her needs to complete her brother’s objective.

This sisterly sacrifice also extends to her roles as wife and mother. Both Asher and Aryeh survive on Rivkeh’s sacrifice, forcing her to choose between the two; Aryeh regains his strength in Europe only when Rivkeh leaves her son to join him, and likewise Asher thrives as an artist largely through his mother’s commitment to the purchase of materials and trips to the museum, despite her husband’s warnings. They can fulfill their male roles only through her commitment to what they see as irreconcilable work but what is actually the same work: male work. Uffen writes, “[Rivkeh’s] special dilemma . . . is her understanding of the needs of both her husband and son and her sympathy with both” (175), but this description glosses over the real dilemma: understanding herself in the context of her sympathy for them.

Rivkeh’s commitment to the success of male work defines her character, limiting her development to the conflict she experiences between husband and son. Joan Del Fattore suggests a glimmer of Rivkeh as an active character when she writes, “Once Rivkeh begins her academic career, her work is . . . entirely in accord with her
principles. Her scholarship thus becomes her own” (55). But her devotion to academic work seems to affirm her restricted ambitions rather than reveal her self-directed career; Asher’s narrative describes Rivkeh’s work as an extension or at best a part of the more predominant male pursuits:

My mother had begun the preparations for her journey. She purchased clothes. She shipped part of her library to an address in Vienna. She rented our apartment to a family that had recently arrived from Russia. She attended meetings with the Rebbe’s staff. She defended her dissertation and received her doctorate. She seemed filled with a new energy. She did everything quickly, radiantly. Sometimes I would hear her singing to herself. She seemed fulfilled. (Potok 234-35)

By Asher’s own connections, Rivkeh’s academic fulfillment does not come inherently with her studies but with her chance to apply those studies to her husband’s work.

Asher does acknowledge and even lament the trap he has helped construct around his mother:

She had kept the gift alive during the dead years; and she had kept herself alive by picking up her dead brother’s work and had kept my father alive by enabling him to resume his journeys. Trapped between two realms of meaning, she had straddled both realms, quietly
But the irony of Asher’s epiphany is unavoidable; he both acknowledges her essential part in his and his father’s success and denies her an identity of her own. He images her as a kind of puppet in a system of male dominance, balancing between men but never achieving her own place. His words imply that she exists devoid of her own meaning—a third meaning—and lives only by “feeding and nourishing them.” The whole Lev family undoubtedly suffers, but Rivkeh is the chosen sacrifice; she is the one left “waiting endlessly” in submission to a male-governed world that moves on and develops without her (Potok 309).

Asher and Aryeh both exercise their active freedom, purposefully moving through the novel, but while Asher progresses in his journey as an artist and Aryeh projects Jewish influence in the world, Rivkeh stays in her place as the dutiful supporter of her men. What Asher’s narrative praises as her dependability, dedication, and nourishment can be read, perhaps more fully, as her trapped identity; she is stuck playing the part of the objectified wife and mother, “woman-as-sign” (Kolodny 250). The men act while the woman is acted upon; they are creator-artists while she is a created image, a profound symbol in Asher’s art.

It is important to consider Asher’s understanding of his mother because, as the narrative voice, his view of Rivkeh tends to mold the reader’s view of Rivkeh. After
the early playful years, his relationship with his mother is defined predominantly by how he uses her image in his art. Asher’s first reference to his mother describes her as a drawing, a tangible still frame of her life juxtaposed against his own movement: “I remember drawing my mother . . . I remember my first drawings of my mother’s face” (Potok 12). He remembers her, first and foremost, as a subject for his pictures, a part of his artistic progression, an image he has studied with an artist’s eye. As his artistry develops, embracing his street, the Hasidic community, and beyond, Asher returns on several occasions to the image of his mother in his art. At times, he stares at her gazing out the living room window, but he glosses over her identity as his mother, preferring to define her as artistic subject matter: “I looked at her, holding the picture of her in my mind. I closed my eyes and, starting with the top of her forehead, began to draw her from memory inside my head . . . I had the lines of her face and body fixed in my mind . . .” (Potok 140). His mother’s form follows him when he travels to Europe, and he finds himself superimposing her face upon other drawings of an elderly woman and the Pietà: “The next day on the swiftly moving train to Rome, I drew the Pietà from memory, and discovered that the woman supporting the twisted arm of the crucified Jesus bore a faint resemblance to my mother” (Potok 299). This progression climaxes in the *Brooklyn Crucifixion*, Asher’s greatest artistic creation in the novel. He uses the whole family in this painting, but while Asher and Aryeh appear to retain
their individual identities, Rivkeh becomes largely the embodiment of human suffering. While he recognizes his obligation to and affection for his mother, Asher cannot seem to separate her life from his art. He sees her best through his art.

The motif of sight – the disparate vision of the characters – reinforces their roles. Asher and Aryeh employ vision as a vital component in their lives; what they see and how they see determines their work and eventual success. Father and son each despise the other’s vision, dismissing the other’s kind of sight or referring to it in negative terms:

‘I respect you, Papa. But I can’t respect your aesthetic blindness.’
‘Aesthetic blindness? Do you hear, Rivkeh? Aesthetic blindness.’ My mother looked slowly from my father to me, then back to my father.
‘An interesting concept. Aesthetic blindness. And what about moral blindness, Asher?’
(Potok 289-90)

But at least in one sense, their profound disagreement can be read as different surface expressions of the same understanding: “To touch a person’s heart, you must see a person’s face” (Potok 113). These words from Aryeh justify the moral vision fueling his work with Judaism, but they also justify Asher’s work as an artist. Asher’s vision to “see a person’s face” brings him fully into the world of art: “[S]omething was happening to my eyes. I looked at
my father and saw lines and planes I had never seen before. I could feel with my eyes” (Potok 105). These men both have active vision that determines their interaction with the world, but Rivkeh’s eyes are stripped bare of this sight.

In a short essay about female filmmakers, Viviane Forrester writes:

We don’t know what women’s vision is. What do women’s eyes see? How do they carve, invent, decipher the world? . . . I only know what men’s eyes see . . . Women’s vision is what is lacking and this lack not only creates a vacuum but it perverts, alters, annuls every statement. (56-57)

These words and questions describe the textual contrast between male sight and Rivkeh’s role as reflector. While Asher and Aryeh have fixed their gaze on the world, Rivkeh’s eyes wander between father and son, clinging to them. She does not participate in their philosophical debate over the superiority of aesthetic sight or moral sight because her vision focuses only on these men. Just as her work does not go beyond her men, her sight does not go beyond them. She spends hours staring out the front window, waiting anxiously for her husband, her son, and even her deceased brother to return home; there she becomes a still, lifeless form, putting her life on hold to wait for one glimpse of the men returning home. They have the power to return, but she has the power only to wait. When Asher
returns home late one night, Rivkeh puts her emotion into words: “What are you doing to me, Asher? . . . I don’t understand. What did I do to you? Tell me, what did I do to you? . . . Didn’t you realize someone was at home waiting? Didn’t it occur to you what it means to wait?” (Potok 83). She recognizes the injustice and the gap between their movement and her fixedness, their sight and hers, but her movement towards justice stops short, ending in “silence” and allowing both her husband and son to ignore the gap (Potok 83). She cannot “carve, invent, decipher the world” beyond what the male culture has set aside for her, so she stays at the window, waiting for her men.

In the final analysis, it is not simply a matter of male strength and female weakness. Rivkeh does exert her own strength in the text; she is allotted unique entrance into male scholarship and becomes a talented contributor to the work of both her husband and son. What is more important is the direction and movement of the characters’ strengths. As narrator, Asher falls into the controlling pattern of the literary tradition with its focus on male power and development, but a consideration of this limiting perspective and a shift towards a “woman-centered analysis” (Greene 14) can break this pattern and expose the woman hidden within the text. As Annette Kolodny writes, readers need to focus on two essential critical traits:

an acute and impassioned attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed (or encoded) within our
literary inheritance; the consequences of that encoding for women – as characters, as readers, and as writers; and with that, a shared analytic concern for the implications of that encoding not only for a better understanding of the past, but also for an improved reordering of the present and future as well. (252)

Only when critics expose this unconsidered disparity between women and men and challenge literary perpetuation of gender roles as natural, can the movement towards “a better understanding” and “improved reordering” begin.
Works Cited


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Submit three paper copies of each manuscript and a 3 ½ inch computer floppy disk containing the finished version of the submission in Microsoft Word.

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Tom Mack, Ph. D.
Department of English
University of South Carolina Aiken
471 University Parkway
Aiken, SC 29801

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